

4.8 The Connétable of St. John of the Minister for Treasury and Resources regarding main drains extensions into the countryside over the next 2 years:

Following his answer to an oral question on 16th April 2013 in which he expressed support for increased infrastructure spending and in particular main drains extensions into the countryside, would the Minister give an indication of the total amount that will be invested in these works over the next 2 years?

Senator P.F.C. Ozouf (The Minister for Treasury and Resources):

In relation to the answer that I gave a few moments ago, I have had confirmation from J.T. that the individual was Welsh in Jersey; it was not a Welshman in Wales. If the Connétable wants to argue with me, I have had that from the highest levels within J.T. who have checked their facts, so I cannot be clearer than that.

Deputy R.G. Le Hérisssier:

There has been a leak. [Laughter]

Senator P.F.C. Ozouf:

I am not the plumber; I answer the plumber's questions probably but I cannot say more than that.

4.8.1 The Connétable of St. John:

Since the Minister is contradicting what I have said, I made the phone call; I asked a lady, not a chap, on the other end where she was and she told me she was in Wales. She told me she was at a call centre and therefore the Minister, whoever he is speaking to, is not aware who I spoke to at the other end of the phone. Simple as that and therefore his facts are wrong.

The Bailiff:

Minister and Connétable, I am sure this can be better sorted out outside the Chamber.

Senator P.F.C. Ozouf:

Yes, I am sure that is right; I will get on to drains. In my answer to the oral question on 16th April 2013, I stressed that the extension of the mains drains network was going to be challenging and had to be undertaken within the Liquid Waste Strategy which was being developed. It is against this scenario that T.T.S. (Transport and Technical Services) prioritised their planned investment. For the next 2 years T.T.S. have identified £5 million funding per annum relating to drainage projects and maintenance. In addition, a £6 million flood alleviation scheme in St. Helier is underway at Phillips Street, which will also provide for future surface water separation schemes in the north of town. The Minister for Transport and Technical Services is continuing to develop the Liquid Waste Strategy with the intention of completing that by the end of Q4 of this year. The aim of the strategy is to address drainage issues in the Island for the next 20 years. In doing so, the strategy not only has to take account of those properties not connected to the foul sewer network, but also consider and address current problems and its use with the existing sewerage network as a whole.

4.8.2 The Connétable of St. John:

It is all well and good for the Minister to give us the same reply as he has over many years and his predecessors before him; Phillips Street is a water separation scheme which has been in the frame since my days on public services. Will the Minister, if he can, find £19 million to add to the fibre optic network for Jersey Telecom, put a similar type of funding in place to help finish the £70 million that is required to finish the last 9 per cent of this Island on main drains? I was given promises in the late 1990s, at the turn of the century, by former presidents of committees that we would have our main drains finished by 2013. That is 19 years into my term of office and we still have another 9 per cent to finish. Will the Minister give a date when things will be completed?

Senator P.F.C. Ozouf:

I know that this Assembly finds the Connétable's questions on drainage sometimes amusing and indeed it is a refrain that the Connétable continues to make. But I must remind him, we were both on previous public services committees and he will recall that the extension to the more hard-to-reach properties that have not been connected to the Island are very expensive. The last schemes that were approved in 2003 and 2004 came at a cost per property in the region of then £40,000 to £42,000 per property. I think that we need to manage expectations. It is not also true to say that there has not been any new connections to the foul sewer network. All new properties have to be connected to the foul sewer network. Communities, and there will be some in St. John and other rural Parishes, groups of Islanders will get together to find their own solutions for either dealing with their liquid waste or connecting to the public sewer in other ways, for example, pumping stations through private land, *et cetera*. So it is simply not realistic for me or anybody past, present or future to say that the whole Island will be connected to the public sewer. I repeat to the Connétable there is a strategy underway, work is going on in relation to that, and the extension issue has to be set aside to the also important issue of ensuring that the Victorian sewers which we have are properly maintained and advanced like Phillips Street is doing.

[10:45]

4.8.3 Deputy G.C.L. Baudains:

I fully appreciate that the more outlying a property is the more expensive it is going to be to connect to the drains and those are the ones that are waiting to be done. Does the Minister, however, have any views on the possible problems of using approved contractors, because in some cases they have been acting almost as a cartel? Some of the prices quoted for drainage, in my view, are 3 or 4-fold what they should be.

Senator P.F.C. Ozouf:

The Deputy, if he has concerns about that, and that is certainly the first time I have heard of that issue, then those issues are perhaps best addressed by the J.C.R.A. (Jersey Competition Regulatory Authority). I have no evidence of a cartel in relation to drainage contracts, but where there is a set of companies working together and colluding on price, that would now be illegal unlike it was a number of years ago. I am happy, as I am sure the Minister for Economic Development would be, to take up any complaints and help him in dealing with that issue. Clearly, drainage connections through private land are important to connect properties that are on top of foul sewer to do so and the market should be working well.

4.8.4 The Deputy of St. Ouen:

Could the Minister confirm what involvement, if any, does he have in the development of the Liquid Waste Strategy and, if so, in what capacity?

Senator P.F.C. Ozouf:

The Council of Ministers is shortly to set up a formal ministerial oversight group in order to progress these matters. That is going to be a matter for the Minister for Transport and Technical Services, and the Treasury is going to give the Minister for Transport and Technical Services all the support that we can in dealing with the financial side. Clearly, T.T.S. are responsible for the operational side of this issue, but there is a big financial issue in relation to securing the necessary funding for the investment in the infrastructure and indeed the replacement of the infrastructure and the issue that the Connétable of St. John raises, which is the extension strategy and so therefore Treasury will provide the financial assistance. Where there is a potential issue of putting the liquid network on a standalone, almost trading agency basis, that would be something that the Treasury would also assist, as we have done with other departments: Housing, Ports, *et cetera*.

4.8.5 The Deputy of St. Ouen:

Does the Minister see his direct involvement with regards Jersey Water as a conflict or a benefit to any involvement he may have in the development of a Liquid Waste Strategy?

Senator P.F.C. Ozouf:

I think that is a very good question. I think it is complimentary clearly, and a number of investigations over a period of years have been made and considerations to a number of possible joint ventures with Jersey Water. The Deputy will be aware that in many countries a freshwater system is run alongside, not in the same pipe obviously, the actual sewerage treatment company's. That is a standard model in a number of countries. Indeed, engagement with the expertise that Jersey Water clearly have in running an infrastructure is something, while not ruling anything in or out, that is being considered as part of, I understand, the officers within T.T.S. and the Minister's own consideration of the strategy. But clearly a lot of progress is going to be made over the next few months in this issue.

4.8.6 The Connétable of St. John:

The Minister has made a lot of play about private sewerage systems, *et cetera*, crossing people's land. Is the Minister aware that in some cases people are paying between £15,000 and £20,000 to cross land to get to the mains sewer? That being the case, and we have one in St. John where 16 households are prevented from crossing the land, as each household are expected to pay £15,000 to get to the main sewer, would the Minister put in place a law that gives a right of way or a way leave for people to cross land at a greater reduced rate, thereby people would be able to benefit?

Senator P.F.C. Ozouf:

I think the Connétable raises an important issue, and if I may congratulate him on trying to seek to move this debate on. We need to move away from the debate simply that public funding can find the solution for putting extensions in roads for the whole of the hard-to-reach Islanders. It is the positive engagement of innovative solutions which is going to solve the issues and I welcome his suggestion. Clearly, he raises an important point. A number of utility companies do have the ability to enter private land and to use private land for infrastructure investment. Of course, the public does not have that in relation to the foul sewer network and I am certainly willing to discuss with colleagues, and of course on legal advice, as to whether or not that is a possible option. I wish not to put it any more strongly than that because where there is clearly an option of putting a small pipe deep under say, for example, agricultural land, that is a way of connecting properties in the longer term. That is exactly the kind of innovative solution which we are going to have to consider and, yes, I am happy to engage with the Connétable with the Minister on that issue.