

7.8 Deputy J.H. Young of the Minister for Education, Sport and Culture regarding sites under consideration for the new Les Quennevais School:

Will the Minister for Education, Sport and Culture disclose the sites that are being considered for the new Les Quennevais School and set out the proposed timetable for the project, including its consideration by the planning system as required by the Island Plan?

The Deputy of St. John (The Minister for Education, Sport and Culture):

I think, firstly, I would like to thank the Deputy and other Deputies for their interest in a new Les Quennevais School. We are all working towards the best possible solution for our secondary students in the west of the Island. Unfortunately, I am not in a position at this time to name any of the sites under consideration. Discussions need to take place with all interested parties and I am sure that the Deputy understands that this would neither be appropriate or in the public interest. I can assure Members that work to progress the project, however, is taking place behind the scenes intensively. This includes discussions with the Planning Department and I can confirm that we will be making a representation as part of the current Island Plan consultation so that it takes account of the requirement for a major new school in the west of the Island. My understanding is that the Island Plan process will culminate in a States of Jersey debate next March. As far as the timetable is concerned, currently the funding is not available in the current Medium-Term Financial or Capital Plan, but £7.5 million is currently earmarked for 2016. The next M.T.F.P. will require States approval and the rest of the money will also have to be found and approved by the States Assembly at that time. Assuming that the necessary funding is made available by the States, then we are aiming to commence building a new school in 2016.

7.8.1 Deputy J.H. Young:

The Minister for Education, Sport and Culture referred to behind-the-scenes discussion with the Planning Department and informed us in his answer that he is going to be making representations to the Island Plan consultation, which I am sure the Minister knows closes tomorrow. Can he tell us how right and transparent he thinks it is that he is able to make those representations to the Island Plan process, and yet members of the public, who are being invited to do the same thing by the Minister, for all issues on use of sites in St. Brelade are denied the opportunity to know what is being said about the choice of those sites in that area? Is that a right and proper process, the way that goes? Is it not time that the behind-the-scenes things become open and transparent?

The Deputy of St. John:

I think that the Deputy is under a little misconception here. We are not at this stage having consultation with the Planning Department about individual sites. We are simply making a representation as part of the current consultation on the Island Plan so that the Planning Department takes account of the requirement for a major new school in the west of the Island. The detail will follow later and it will only follow when the department is in a position to settle on their preferred option. We cannot rush this process. I do understand the frustration, particularly of Deputies in the west of the Island, but this is a really important issue. I must just once again ask the Deputy and other representatives in the west of the Island, as I did 2 weeks ago, to remain patient. However, I would add one thing and that is this. My department does not have a monopoly on good ideas. I will shortly be asking all of those people in the west of the Island, representatives and others, to come to a meeting in case there are things that we have missed and there are other better ideas. I will just repeat myself. As far as the planning process is concerned, it is extremely generic at this point. It has to be. We are just lodging the fact with the Island Plan consultation that there is going to be the requirement for a major new secondary school somewhere in the west of the Island. That is sufficient at the moment. That will reserve our position with the Planning Department. I hope that is clear.

7.8.2 Deputy J.A. Hilton:

In the Minister's previous answer, he said that £7.5 million had been set aside for 2016 but there is no other funding available at the moment. I think it is totally unacceptable that a school like Les Quennevais, which is built for 400 pupils, is currently at 800 pupils attending it. The Education, Sport and Culture Department must have known this for a very, very long time. What pressure is the Minister bringing his Ministerial colleagues under to deliver this project in the next year or 2?

The Deputy of St. John:

I completely agree with the Deputy and that is all I can say. When the Education, Sport and Culture Department, with myself at the helm, first became aware of all of the issues at Les Quennevais School, I immediately said that this was just not acceptable that we were looking to refurbish the school on its existing site. I have already explained 2 weeks ago that my view is that that is unacceptable and that we need a new Les Quennevais School on a new site. That does take time to process and to follow the necessary processes required for that. I am putting a lot of pressure on my States colleagues and within the Council of Ministers and, I have to say, with some success. I am quite hopeful and confident that we will be in a position within the terms of the next Medium-Term Financial Plan to provide a new Les Quennevais School. I cannot say more than that because it will need to come back to the States and I will need, or whoever the new Minister for Education, Sport and Culture is in the next term, the support of the States Assembly as a whole in order to allocate the necessary funds.

7.8.3 Deputy J.A. Hilton:

I am slightly surprised at that answer because the Deputy has been Minister for Education, Sport and Culture for 2 years now and we do not appear to have moved on at all in 2 years. What I would like to hear from the Council of Ministers and from the Minister for Education, Sport and Culture is that when the capital programme comes forward in the next month or 2 that money is set aside for next year so that this school can be delivered in a timely fashion.

The Deputy of St. John:

The planning processes, the various things that there are, feasibility studies that we have been carrying out over the last year - I understand the frustration - but I would like to remind the Deputy that we would still be in a position where we were moving ahead with a refurbishment, with £7.5 million in the longer-term capital plan allocated for 2016. I have to say I find it a little bit surprising that the Deputy is accusing the department of not moving fast enough. In fact, this department is moving extremely fast.

Deputy J.A. Hilton:

Excuse me, I am not accusing the department of moving fast enough, I am accusing the Minister for Education, Sport and Culture and his fellow Ministers on the Council of Ministers.

The Deputy of St. John:

I have to say that that is totally unfair and I completely reject that.

7.8.4 The Connétable of St. Brelade:

I am pleased that the Minister for Education, Sport and Culture thinks that a new school is important. It is. What I have to say as well, though, is that whatever happens in St. Brelade in terms of either refurbishing or moving the school, and certainly if it is moving the school, it is going to have a major impact on St. Brelade. In his earlier reply, although he thanked the Deputies, he again made no reference to the Parish or the Constable in regards to his reply. When will the Minister for Education, Sport and Culture begin engagement with some key stakeholders, including the Parish, in regards to ensuring that a new school at Les Quennevais provides the facilities that will allow the excellence that the current Head spoke about at her open

evening last week, again which no member of the Education, Sport and Culture Department attended?

The Deputy of St. John:

I think the question, other than the statements there, again is unfair from the Constable. He knows that I will involve the Parish Deputies and himself included and the Parish absolutely as soon as I can and it is not and would not be detrimental to the public interest to set hares running speculatively on where the sites may be. It is simply not in the public interest for me to do anything else, and I am sure the Constable understands that. I would just say to him once again I understand the frustration and I am equally frustrated, but I am not and my department is not the only department involved here. There is also Property Holdings that are probably more involved at this stage with assessing the feasibility of the various sites than the Education, Sport and Culture Department is. There is a joint approach between Property Holdings and the Education, Sport and Culture Department. We are absolutely moving. I cannot do more. I have brought things to the Council of Ministers. I have been very, very strident in making the case for a new Les Quennevais School. I would ask all of the political members of St. Brelade to accept that that is the case. I will bring it to them for much more detailed discussion absolutely as soon as I can, but without prejudicing the interests, particularly the financial interests, of the general public.

The Connétable of St. Brelade:

Frustrated is not the word I would use. It is disappointed. I am just merely disappointed that apparently the Constable of the Parish that all this work potentially could go on with is not trusted to be in-the-loop when some of these decisions are made. That is merely the point I am making.

The Deputy Bailiff:

This is question time. I understand the statements being made but it is question time. Deputy Tadier.

7.8.5 Deputy M. Tadier:

Whether it is frustration or otherwise, the representatives, I think all of us and certainly those in the area, want to help the Minister. We need to know what we can do to help him. Would he acknowledge that bringing forward the build date from a proposed 2016, notwithstanding the fact we know delays do happen - let us look at the Lesquende site - would be killing 2 birds with one stone? We know we have a school which needs to be rebuilt. It is too small and they do very good work under difficult circumstances. We have a construction industry locally which needs some input. Would the best way not be to allocate funding as soon as possible for the new build to get some spades in the ground but also to bring it forward because it is a win/win for all involved? Does the Minister agree and what can we be doing to help him?

[12:45]

The Deputy of St. John:

If it were at all possible to bring it forward from 2016 then I feel sure that that would be a good thing to do. My advice is that the design process, the various other processes that there are, the tendering process for such a major public expenditure, all of these things do take a certain amount of time. I cannot really make any comment on that, but my advice is that the earliest possible date that we could start, realistically, would be in 2016. Even then there are various things like the Assembly having to agree that the funds should be allocated; the Treasury and Resources Department needs to consider that, as does the Council of Ministers. There is quite a lot of way to go yet to start putting a spade in the ground and I am told it is 2016.

The Deputy Bailiff:

Minister, can I please ask you to keep your answers as crisp as possible and can the Members making questions put the questions as quickly as possible? I am going to allow 2 more questions ...

The Deputy of St. John:

Well, Sir, I agree with you and if the questions were simple I would give simple answers. But people seem to be asking the same questions over and over again.

7.8.6 Deputy S.G. Luce of St. Martin:

The Minister for Planning and Environment has been quite clear with Members that only certain specific subjects will be considered during the Island Plan review. Has the Minister for Education, Sport and Culture had an assurance from the Planning Department that he will be able to discuss the issue of the relocation of Les Quennevais School during this review?

The Deputy of St. John:

We have had some informal discussion with the Planning Department around this area and I can, I think, confirm that that would be the case, yes.

7.8.7 The Connétable of St. Mary:

Just very briefly, there is much talk of location, rebuild, whatever, but my concern is simply for the education of the children who are part of my constituency. I would just like the Minister for Education, Sport and Culture to take on board that it is not simply the locality of Les Quennevais which is important; there are representatives who are very, very interested in this across the west of the Island. Will he involve us all?

The Deputy of St. John:

Absolutely, yes.

7.8.8 Deputy J.H. Young:

In the previous session we found out that the site was going to be in the west and then we found out it was in St. Brelade, but disappointingly the Minister for Education, Sport and Culture has not taken this forward. Would the Minister for Education, Sport and Culture not accept that the planning process that he is following, this behind-the-scenes process, is far more convoluted than it needs to be? Would he not accept that in reality this means that he is going to be putting the project off until well into the next States, 2015 and 2016? Because I cannot see how he can put forward a generic position without sites into the Island Plan review and why he is able to follow this secret process where everybody is told we can only comment on the proposals on the table. If there are no proposals on the table, how can the Island Plan Review deal with it? Will he ...

The Deputy Bailiff:

Can you do it before 2016, Minister?

The Deputy of St. John:

If it is at all possible, yes, but I do not believe that it will be.

LUNCHEON ADJOURNMENT PROPOSED

The Deputy Bailiff:

Thank you. The States will now stand adjourned until 2.15 p.m.

[12:48]

LUNCHEON ADJOURNMENT