

5.17 Deputy M. Tadier of the Minister for Education, Sport and Culture regarding sites for a possible rebuild of Les Quennevais School:

Will the Minister advise what sites, if any, have been identified for a possible rebuild of Les Quennevais School, whether a rebuild is the preferred option, and what the timetable is for action?

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

A rebuild would be the preferred option because it is always difficult to renovate a school and operate it at the same time. Originally some 2 years ago it was felt that a redevelopment of the existing school would be an option. When I came into office I decided and felt that that just was not good enough, bearing in mind the fact that the footprint of the school was originally designed for 450 pupils and we have something in excess of 800 at the moment. Also, as I said, because of the difficulty of renovating a school and operating it at the same time. However, we are still exploring options and we are not yet in a position to name any sites until we have discussed proposals with interested parties and in answer to the timetable, as part of the question, assuming that the funding is made available, and I am still talking as hard as I can to the Council of Ministers and the Minister for Treasury and Resources to see what might be possible in the next Medium-Term Financial Plan, but assuming that the funds are available, we are aiming to commence building in 2016.

5.17.1 Deputy M. Tadier:

I thank the Minister for those answers. A question was asked in July 2012, and we were also told then that no sites had been identified and that the timetable was then 2017.

[11:45]

So while the timetable might have been brought forward, can the Minister explain what he has been doing in those 14 months when he should have been engaging with stakeholders, he should have been coming forward with viable sites and we would hopefully be going into the next year before the new States Assembly with a firm and concrete plan to put to Members, especially residents of the area who are concerned about what is going to happen to their estate and the school that is currently on it?

The Deputy of St. John:

I did not say that we had not identified sites, I said we are still exploring options. We are talking here about several tens of millions of pounds worth of public money. It would be counterproductive to go public and set hares running prematurely. We have to be careful in the process of this. We do intend to involve direct stakeholders, particularly politicians and the public in the St. Brelade's area in due course and I hope that is not too far away. But I would ask the Deputy to please bear in mind that a large part of this process is not under the control of the Education Department, it is under the control of Property Services and they have to, in themselves, be careful with what they do.

5.17.2 Deputy J.H. Young:

I wonder if the Minister could tell us - if he cannot tell us the name of these sites that he has been looking at for at least the 12 months - whether those options do include rebuilding or redeveloping on the existing site? Also, can he suggest what we might say to the constituents of St. Brelade who for many years have had to tolerate very, very overcrowded conditions, which are completely unacceptable, and can he promise this Assembly he will give this priority?

The Deputy of St. John:

There are about 4 questions there so I will try and remember them. Rebuilding on the existing site is an option but it is not my preferred option for the reasons that I have already stated. I can tell you that. In answer to other sites, I can only repeat what I said a minute ago. We are talking

about a lot of public money, it would be counterproductive to set hares running prematurely and speculatively at this stage. I think that answers certainly 2 or 3 of the questions, perhaps the Deputy would like to just remind me of the other one.

The Bailiff:

Do you wish a supplementary, Deputy?

5.17.3 Deputy J.H. Young:

Yes, Sir. I can understand the Minister's reply that he cannot identify those new sites in public but can he at least confirm he is working with the Minister for Planning and Environment on ensuring that the feasibility of those sites for this use is properly examined and in short order?

The Deputy of St. John:

Yes.

5.17.4 Connétable S.W. Pallett of St. Brelade:

As the Minister knows, Les Quennevais is a very heavily built-up area, Les Quennevais School sits in the middle of 2 very large estates. Moving the school to another area in St. Brelade may result in the same sort of problems. Has he considered any sites outside of St. Brelade for a possible rebuild?

The Deputy of St. John:

No.

5.17.5 Deputy M. Tadier:

I am fascinated by the methods that are being employed by the Minister. It seems that if we ask sufficient questions we can narrow him down. Now we know it is no sites outside of St. Brelade are being considered, which is remarkable given that the school serves the whole west of the Island in its catchment area. Will it be still in Les Quennevais, will it be along Quennevais Road?

The Deputy of St. John:

It will be in the west of the Island.

5.17.6 Deputy M. Tadier:

That is because St. Brelade is in the west of the Island [**Laughter**] and the Minister has confirmed that it will necessarily be in St. Brelade so it seems that a certain amount of options have already been excluded. So the real question is, at what point will the political representatives for this area, who quite rightly have an interest in this key strategic area and piece of infrastructure, and the residents themselves, at what point will they be brought in because if so much work is done without the support of those individuals, and especially the residents, it is potentially going to be a non-starter. Will the Minister promise action in short order? Can we sit around a table with Property Holdings, with the Minister, with Environment and thrash out some sites for that, obviously with confidentiality and the requisite care that is required with that?

The Bailiff:

Can we have a shorter question, please?

Deputy M. Tadier:

I think it is too late for that.

The Bailiff:

I lost the question, I must say.

The Deputy of St. John:

In the interests of single word answers, I am tempted to say “soon” but I am going to expand on that ever so slightly. I would just like to remind the Deputy and other States Members, and the public at large, that it is only because I felt that rebuilding the existing school on the existing site was not good enough, that we are in a position where I am talking to Property Holdings, feasibility study on other sites for a major ... probably what will be the biggest secondary school investment that this Island has made in several decades, will take place, in my view, in the not too distant future. It is only because I have dug my heels in on that and said that rebuilding was not an option on the existing site that we are in the position that we are. I understand the great interest that there is in the west of the Island, particularly the Deputies and the Senators that are involved, and the other people. I understand the great interest and the wish to become involved in the process. I will and fully intend to involve those major stakeholders politically at the earliest opportunity but I cannot do that on the basis of speculation. I have to be sure of my ground and there is more work that needs to take place, both by the Education Department and by Property Services. But he has my assurance that as soon as I am able to involve the political community in the St. Brelade area, west of Island then I will do so and I hope that it will be very soon.

The Bailiff:

Very well, that brings Questions on notice to an end. Before we move to Questions without notice can I inform Members that Deputy Le Hérissier has lodged Projet 109, Law Officer’s Department Revised Disciplinary Process. We come to Questions without notice, the first period is to the Minister for Social Security. Deputy Pitman.