

7.6 Deputy M. Tadier of the Minister for Treasury and Resources regarding plans to improve access to Fort Regent:

Can I just ask as a point of order, seeing as the Minister for Treasury and Resources is not here and I have not been informed of his absence, how the question will be answered?

The Deputy Bailiff:

By the Assistant Minister for Treasury and Resources. You mean by whom it will be answered? I cannot say how it is going to be answered. As a point of order, it will be answered by the Assistant Minister for Treasury and Resources.

Deputy M. Tadier:

Thank you, I understand. Not wanting to be pedantic, but the questioner has the right to have the question answered by the Minister, him or herself, but again on this occasion I am happy for the Assistant Minister to ...

The Deputy Bailiff:

You must give notice of that if you wish the Minister to answer.

Deputy M. Tadier:

I have given Standing Notice, but anyway, let us get on to the question. It is a very short question. Will the Assistant Minister for Treasury and Resources say what plans, if any, he has to improve access to Fort Regent?

Deputy E.J. Noel (Assistant Minister for Treasury and Resources - rapporteur):

As the Assembly will know, this comes under my remit in any event so Senator Ozouf would have probably wanted me to answer it even if he was here. The Fort Regent Steering Group is working with the States of Jersey Development Company and representatives of the Association of Jersey Architects to develop proposals for the future of the fort.

[12:15]

At the Jersey Architecture Week at the end of June it was made clear that access to the Fort, along with funding and design, were the 3 key requirements to a successful regeneration. The steering group is fully supportive of this position and will ensure that good quality access to the Fort is given a high priority in the development proposals. The next meeting of the steering group is next week on 3rd October, after which I will update States Members on the current state of the proposals and a timetable for the next steps. In the interim, Property Holdings and Education, Sport and Culture in conjunction with the back-to-work team at Social Security are progressing the replacement of handrails and repairs to the ramparts to improve access to the external spaces at the fort.

7.6.1 Deputy M. Tadier:

The question is we all seem to be united and the Scrutiny Panel in 2009 gave a recommendation that it was key that access was improved to the Fort, preferably from Snow Hill, and also that something be done about the old swimming pool site. I know from previous comments of the Minister for Treasury and Resources in 2011 that he is also supportive of that. Can I ask the Assistant Minister for Treasury and Resources where the urgency is here? We have known for over a decade and we have had various reports, independent and in-house, saying that something needs to be done about access to Fort Regent, and yet we have seen no action in the last 15 years. When will this be materialising?

Deputy E.J. Noel:

I cannot comment on colleagues that have gone before me in this matter over the past 15 years, but what I can give the assurance to Deputy Tadier and to other Members is that with the

anniversary of the Fort, with its 40th year being next year in 2014, we intend to make significant progress in coming up with solutions for the way forward in 2014. Hopefully, we will have work in place on whatever that is in time for the Island Games in 2015.

7.6.2 Deputy T.M. Pitman:

When I successfully, I am pleased to say, moved that there be a proposition back in Scrutiny to make this an issue again, and indeed while I was on the original Steering Group, we had reached the stage where moves were being made to create access through Hill Street. Can the Assistant Minister for Treasury and Resources tell us if that is still in the pipeline because it did seem a very viable process to follow?

Deputy E.J. Noel:

Currently, the States of Jersey own part of the ramparts site to the north of the Fort. We are in the process of formulating a Ministerial Decision to transfer that land from Property Holdings to the Housing Department. We have had a feasibility study done where we can create some 50 to 60 additional social rented homes on that site. That will allow us at some point in the future to consider connecting that development to the fort itself. However, the final piece of the jigsaw is access from that site through into Hill Street and currently the States of Jersey does not own any of that land. It would require a willing seller of a suitable property and the States of Jersey as a willing buyer.

7.6.3 Senator L.J. Farnham:

I do not like to criticise Deputy Noel, who is doing a very good job at the helm of Property Holdings, but I am going to. Will he not agree that the neglect of Fort Regent and the failure to do anything has now become a major embarrassment for the Island? This question has been asked before and we have had the same answer before that is: "We are thinking about it." How much longer are we going to think about doing something with this tremendous asset we have? Can the Deputy please assure the Assembly that when he does a presentation to us we are going to get something exciting and worthwhile?

Deputy E.J. Noel:

I concur with the earlier remarks of Senator Farnham. I agree that this is something that is a particular problem of the States. It has been kicked down the road, so to speak; the tin can has been kicked down the road for far too long. I hope that after the proposals have been through the Regeneration Steering Group this Friday and the Steering Group meeting on 3rd October I will be able to delight the Senator with what we are anticipating is an exciting opportunity to regenerate one of our iconic buildings and an iconic facility for all Islanders.

7.6.4 Deputy M.R. Higgins:

Can the Assistant Minister for Treasury and Resources tell Members whether he is currently negotiating with Aquasplash to vary the contract to enable a swimming pool to be back at Fort Regent?

Deputy E.J. Noel:

We have looked at the contractual obligations and the Education, Sport and Culture Department has negotiated a break-clause with Serco, the operator of the pool. Whether or not this forms part of our deliberations for Fort Regent in the future, Members, I am afraid, will have to wait until the latter part of October.

7.6.5 Deputy M.R. Higgins:

Can the Assistant Minister for Treasury and Resources tell us what the cost of the breaking-clause is going to be?

Deputy E.J. Noel:

I do not have that detail and if and when it comes to fruition that we may wish to exercise such a break I will obviously inform the House of any financial cost at that time, if there is any.

7.6.6 Deputy J.H. Young:

The break-clause that the Assistant Minister for Treasury and Resources has just referred to, can he confirm that also includes the ongoing commitment to revenue subsidy that the States has to provide under that agreement?

Deputy E.J. Noel:

I do not have the details of that to hand. It is a break-clause that has been negotiated by the Education, Sport and Culture Department and not by Property Holdings. I will endeavour to find that information and if I can pass it on to the Deputy I will.

7.6.7 Deputy M. Tadier:

The Assistant Minister for Treasury and Resources spoke about the difficulty of certain areas which may not be owned by the States of Jersey. Can he confirm that the ownership of the Snow Hill rock face, which was identified in earlier plans as the ideal site for glass elevator-type access from Snow Hill, is within the ownership of the States of Jersey and so ownership is not an issue? It is rather the political will and the financing to make that decision?

Deputy E.J. Noel:

I can confirm that that rock face is in States ownership. However, that particular access is an access-area to nowhere currently with the current configuration of the facilities within Fort Regent. Having an access-point at that juncture takes you further away from a lot of the facilities than possible other alternatives.