

3.10 Connétable A.S. Crowcroft of St. Helier of the Minister for Transport and Technical Services regarding the inclusion of skateboarding facilities in the Millennium Town Park:

Will the Minister indicate what he proposes to do in respect of recent calls for the inclusion of skateboarding facilities in the Millennium Town Park?

Deputy K.C. Lewis of St. Saviour (The Minister for Transport and Technical Services):

I am sure Members will agree there have been a lack of facilities for young people and it has been highlighted that the Millennium Town Park has become a place for skateboarders to congregate. Unfortunately, this has led to complaints about antisocial behaviour. Officers from T.T.S. (Transport and Technical Services) have been actively working with the police, Youth Service, Freedom Church and park users to try and find a solution to these issues. A dedicated skateboarding facility within the park has been discussed which would enable skateboarders to have a place to be out of the way of other park users. They could enjoy their sport using dedicated equipment fit for purpose.

3.10.1 The Connétable of St. Helier:

Is the Minister aware that there is considerable opposition to the replacement of the current ball court from surrounding businesses, residents and also the results of a survey carried out by the Millennium Town Park group, and would he agree, instead of looking at the removal of that very well used facility, investigate again the possibility of facilities at the far end of the park where there is space that could be converted to skateboarding use?

Deputy K.C. Lewis:

Other suggestions have been put forward, however they are not practical. One of these being to change an area of the park that has been paved and planted with an array of beautiful shrubs and plants that borders the Gas Place site. This area is currently well established and a beautiful part of the park. It is up against the boundary park or the wall and is suitable for housing in future, I believe. The existing plants and structural features, irrigation pipes, pathways, and I believe there is also the shaft there which feeds down to the Phillips Street shaft, so that area would not be suitable.

3.10.2 Deputy M. Tadier:

Does the Minister think we have to be careful when using terms as “antisocial” when all the skateboarders I have seen down there are being the opposite of antisocial, they are being social; that sitting at home with a PlayStation or an adult sitting in a pub could be considered antisocial, and that with this we need to find a way, considering that we made the Town Park in such a way that it was perfect for skateboarders, it would attract skateboarders and any reasonable town planner would have known that from the outset, we need to find a way to accommodate skateboarders but not at the expense of other facilities. Does the Minister agree with that last point?

Deputy K.C. Lewis:

Providing facilities is exactly the thing that I am trying to do, but we do not have the funds, which would cost many tens of thousands, to put in a new facility. However, using a ball park which is little used at present, plus it would be lockable in the evening, thus reducing any noise to nearby residents. So unless we hear anything to the contrary, that would be the plan.

3.10.3 Deputy M. Tadier:

Supplementary. The ball park is very well used. Every time you walk past there you cannot get on there, if you wanted to play basketball, because there is only one basketball hoop and people are playing football. Does the Minister accept that this short-sighted approach may lead to footballers and basketballers now playing football on the street where the skateboarders are skateboarding, kicking footballs into the street, across the road. We will be back in exactly the same place because the Ministers involved have not taken a proactive approach and a long-term approach to solve both of the issues?

Deputy K.C. Lewis:

We are trying to solve all of the issues. There is organised football in the park with inflatable equipment, I think it is on a Friday evening, that comes down, and that is the very thing that we are trying to provide. Nothing is set in stone yet so we are open to suggestions, but we do not have an unlimited budget.

3.10.4 Deputy J.A. Hilton:

I believe that the St. Helier Youth Committee in conjunction with the Youth Service have come up with a solution to this problem. It was agreed to fund a temporary put-up/put-down skateboarding facility last week, and I understand there has been extensive consultation by the Youth Service with the young people who need this facility. What I want to hear from the Minister is that he will do everything in his power to facilitate this going ahead sooner rather than later. Thank you.

Deputy K.C. Lewis:

Yes, I would like to expedite this as soon as possible but we need all the plans in place to do it. As I said we do not have unlimited funding. We are open to suggestions but they must be practical suggestions. The Millennium Town Park is our central park in town and we will do our best to facilitate all users.

3.10.5 Deputy J.A. Hilton:

My understanding is that the St. Helier Youth Committee is going to fund this project in its entirety. It is a facility that can be dismantled and put up in any position, and this has been done in conjunction with the skateboarders at the Millennium Town Park, so it would seem to me that the overriding objection of not having enough funds available falls away. So I would really like to see this project happening within the next few weeks.

Deputy K.C. Lewis:

The equipment can be put in place very quickly but it would ... if it is in a caged area this could be locked at night to prevent nearby residents being disturbed late in the evening. But if it was out in the open then it would be used at all hours.

3.10.6 Deputy J.H. Young:

Would the Minister not accept that young people really need the facilities of both dedicated? Would he not accept that, and if he does he has pleaded no funding and he invites suggestions? Is he not talking to our Minister for Education, Sports and Culture? They have got Springfield, they have got spaces in public land and places. Is this not something that he should give priority to?

Deputy K. C. Lewis:

We are giving a lot of priority to all the reports that have already been commissioned as well as the park users groups. The police report states there have been lots of calls regarding

antisocial behaviour; we have to react to that. We try to keep everybody happy; we are trying to keep the residents happy and all the park users.

3.10.7 The Connétable of St. Helier:

The Minister says he is open to suggestions but he has already ruled out the possibility of putting a facility at the end of the park because he is concerned about losing some of the shrubbery. I do not think there was ever any intention to affect the paving or the fountains. I would urge him to look again at that possibility because it would, as Deputy Young suggests, mean that the States would not, once again, be digging up something they have already done or taking away a use from one group of people to give it to another. Would the Minister further agree with me that all this would have been avoided if T.T.S had worked with the skateboarders when the park was being designed who were fully on board and expected facilities to be included in the park from the off?

[10:45]

Deputy K. C. Lewis:

As I say, we are open to all suggestions but I was not Minister at the time. So we will work with the Parish, with the community to get the best facilities possible for the Town Park.