

2018.06.26

The Connétable of St. Helier of the Minister for the Environment regarding the prospective relocation of the Planning and Building Section: [OQ.77/2018]

Is it the Minister's policy that the Planning and Building Section of his department should be relocated in order to release the site it occupies at South Hill for housing and, if so, what is the timescale to achieve this?

Deputy J.H. Young (The Minister for the Environment):

The States-owned site at South Hill is managed by the Department for Infrastructure through Property Holdings. It is in the built-up area and has long been identified as suitable for alternative use, and housing development being the preferred use. This site will be included as an opportunity site within the draft new South-West St. Helier Development Framework, which will be shortly published by a public consultation I think in September. The South Hill offices are presently occupied by 3 departments: Planning and Building, Met Office, and some of the D.f.I. (Department for Infrastructure) team. I support their relocation, subject to suitable premises being identified, particularly ensuring public access to Planning and Building offices in future. Property Holdings, D.f.I., informed my department yesterday that there is no plan currently in place, but they are in the process of considering possible interim options for relocation, which would allow early redevelopment opportunities of South Hill to be taken.

10.11.1 The Connétable of St. Helier:

I am just intrigued by the reference to the South-West St. Helier Development Framework. Is this the new planning which has been so far organised on States days so that a lot of Members, certainly elected Members for St. Helier, have not been able to attend? If it is being published in September, will he make sure that his officers do consult with the elected Members for St. Helier and indeed their elected Roads Committee so they can have some input into this important framework?

Deputy J.H. Young:

The Constable makes some excellent points. I find myself in a position being a participant in this process and, funnily, finding myself with my hat on being responsible for it, and so the detailed arrangements they would have made. But it is the intention that this new South-West St. Helier Planning Framework will be published for public consultation, and that includes all the things that the Constable proposed. It is the intention if that is accepted it will in fact replace the current Esplanade Quarter Masterplan which has been issued by the former Minister. I will certainly undertake to look at the details. It is certainly, as far as I am concerned, public consultation, full involvement, absolutely essential if this plan is to be robust, and that is a basic principle of urban planning. One cannot achieve a good plan without that.

10.11.2 Deputy M. Tadier:

I have heard it said, and I do not know if it was officially, or a private remark, that the South Hill site was too good for social housing, the implication being that it should be put to private development, possibly luxury flats. Is that a sentiment with which this Minister agrees and, if not, would he explain?

Deputy J.H. Young:

This has long been an issue. The South Hill site has got spectacular views, some of the finest in the Island. Having lived there in my civil servant days for 13 years I can confirm it is a super place to be. But I think the reality is, is that we have got one joined-up government now and I think the role of

the Minister for the Environment will be to produce a development brief for that site, setting out the design options for it. There are parts of the site which have magnificent views; there are parts of the site which face the rockface. Therefore, I think my own thoughts are, having heard the views that the Deputy has spoken of, they are still current, they are pretty well current on every site that comes up, my preference is to have a mix: to have some open-market housing and some affordable housing so that the development works as a whole. But that is my personal view, it will be up to the joined-up Government and the new Minister for Housing and his team to make those decisions.

10.11.3 Deputy M. Tadier:

I hope that I do not read incorrectly in between the lines suggesting that the mixed development would have sea views for private residents and that any social tenants would be facing a sheer rockface. [Laughter]

Deputy J.H. Young:

The Deputy is absolutely right. I was simplifying the issue so you can see that not everybody will get the same facilities on the site. This is what design is all about. I think the principle of mixed-use is right. How it is divvied up, I think that would be a question for the procurement process which is well downstream. At the moment we are: new planning framework; we will go to consultation. When there is a development brief that will also be public consultation, there will be plenty of opportunity for these decisions downstream. All I have done in my answer is give you an immediate heads-up on the issues that exist on the site.

10.11.4 The Connétable of St. Helier:

I am in danger of straying a bit off the question but the Minister did talk about replacing the Esplanade Quarter Masterplan with this new South-West St. Helier Development Framework. Can I remind the Minister, and ask him his reassurance really, that the Esplanade Quarter Masterplan which was extensively debated by this Assembly, extensively amended by Members, is not simply going to be ...

The Bailiff:

That is out of order, Connétable.

The Connétable of St. Helier:

It is moving out of order?

The Bailiff:

It does not relate to this question.

The Connétable of St. Helier:

Fair enough. Well I am just going to take it back, if I may, slightly concerned that the consultation the Minister is proposing for this South-West St. Helier Development Framework is going to pick us all up, the elected Members I referred to, the Roads Committee and the elected Deputies and Constable of St. Helier, as part of a consultation exercise. Can I urge him to meet with us in early course to make sure that we can give our backing to this development framework before he goes out to consultation?

Deputy J.H. Young:

I am in some difficulty because, from my recollection, this process was started by the previous Minister some long months ago. I think I will need to look at the details of that but my officers say to

me at the moment they believe we will be ready for publication in September. I will look at the need for a meeting because I think the Constable is right, that we have to make sure the Constables go. But a consultation document is still inviting comments and responses; it is not a final document