

21.11.02

8 Connétable M.K. Jackson of St. Brelade of the Minister for the Environment regarding Sand extraction (OQ.226/2021)

Given reports that there is, potentially, sand available for extraction at Simon Sand in St. Peter for some 10 to 15 years, will the Minister explain what indications have been given to the landowner regarding the long-term strategy for the site and, if none, will the Minister explain why that is the case?

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

I think in a complex matter I would ask the Connétable to distinguish between perhaps the sand reserves that it already has and which is available within the area that already has got planning permission, and the information I have is the operator considers that that is 3 years' supply but also, I think, which is probably the gist of the Connétable's question, areas of land outside the approved site where reserves might exist but there is no permission. I think the indication to be given to the owner of these are of the current States-approved policies of mineral expansion, which is in the current Island Plan. The policy's advice to the owner are those in the current Island Plan. Of course the one that we are proposing to go forward has not changed and that is that extraction of sand, which was originally due to cease in 2018 and a historic restoration of the site be completed and planning permission was extended until 2023 to enable that, with a condition requiring restoration and that is where we stand. I know that the owners of Simon Sand, as well as closing their site, have made representations to the contrary, which is going to go to the planning inspector, where all of the arguments that were put forward in the responses will be considered.

4.8.1 The Connétable of St. Brelade:

Given that the department has not been proactive in assisting the landowner in evaluating the eventual outcome of the site, would the Minister agree that in order to progress this it will be better to give some guidance to the family so that they are enabled to progress this, the redevelopment after the ceasing of operations, and they can redevelop to the satisfaction of all parties? Bearing in mind it is a private property and it has to be an income stream, and it has to be satisfactory for members of the public and, of course, an ability to deal with the P.F.A.S. (perfluoroalkyl substances) situation?

Deputy J.H. Young:

I am sure the Connétable knows, as everybody else does, that we have got a huge area of open water there now and the site is in the Coastal National Park and the site is riddled with major environmental issues and risks. It overlies the St. Ouen's Bay aquifer, which is a really important fresh water resource, which underlines the whole of the bay, which is of relatively low-nitrogen water. At the moment Jersey Water cannot extract water from that area sufficiently. They are able to take a small amount but hardly any and in the future we need to have that source exploited. Going further to extend an area of sand would bring in major risks that would need to be assessed environmentally; that work has not been done. We have commissioned, as Members know, a study and so it should be out now. What I would like to clear up is the Connétable has suggested that the officers have not helped the team; they have. They have helped them and advised them on the original restoration plan; I have got the details here. But what we have had is we have had a new one, a new restoration plan. My understanding that this goes much farther and would require a new planning application, and it will also require a waste management licence because it would bring in 1.5 million tonnes to 2.5 million tonnes of solid waste into the Coastal National Park. Therefore,

these things are environmental aspects that we have to get investigated. This should be no surprise that the policy is about ending that site's extraction; it has been known for decades.

4.8.2 Connétable J.E. Le Maistre of Grouville:

Could I ask a point of clarification? I do not think the Minister intended to but he sort of implied almost that the environmental problems down there were perhaps the making of the landowner, when I think he was referring to the P.F.A.S. and other pollutants down there and not the landowner.

The Deputy Bailiff:

A question for you, Minister.

Deputy J.H. Young:

I think he is quite right and if I suggested that it is the landowner's fault that we are in that situation it is wrong and I withdraw that implication; of course it is not their fault. They have, if you like, suffered from the problems of P.F.A.S. contamination originally from the airport situation, which has migrated and there is, therefore, a risk of that P.F.A.S. migrating into that area and the greater area. If you have open water the more likely you are to run the risk. It is not the only risk, there are lots of others. There is the issue about restoration of the area, there is the issue of the risk of bird strikes because of the prevalence of water birds in that large open area; all of those things need to be studied environmentally. That is where the officers have given advice and that is what we are seeking to do for the owner but it is not the owner's fault that these situations happened.

The Connétable of Grouville:

Thank you, Sir, it was really a point of clarification but I do have a question as well.

4.8.3 The Connétable of Grouville:

Would the Minister accept that the landowner will need to get other material to fill in the large area of water? They have had 110 years of the extraction of sand. If that hole was to be filled in, material will have to be brought in.

Deputy J.H. Young:

As I said, we have now had an update, a new restoration plan submitted by the owner, and what that does is it sets out a completely changed landscape within the quarry or more or less seek to restore it to a dune landscape, if you like and, as I said, the importation of tonnes of material. What we have said, that needs a new planning application and that also would need a waste management licence. That is the advice given to the applicant and at the moment we do not have that application but that is a possible thing for the owner to do. The current policies of the Island Plan say that sanding should end and the restoration should be a more modest restoration, as was approved in 2004. I have got the details of that and I think that there is, clearly, again another major choice here for the Island. In the meantime, sand is being imported satisfactorily.

4.8.4 The Deputy of St. Martin:

I am really pleased that the landowner submitted a restoration plan but would the Minister agree with me that had plans come forward sometime since 2004, like they were supposed to do, that we would not be in this situation?

Deputy J.H. Young:

Yes, very much so.

4.8.5 Deputy I. Gardiner:

I would like to ask the Minister if he can see a way forward to maintain on-Island sand supply for the construction industry and at the same time to address our ambitions around climate change where we would like to have carbon neutrality and reduce our impact through exporting.

Deputy J.H. Young:

Yes, the Deputy makes an absolutely correct point, that importation of sand involves carbon consumption. What I am pleased about is that I am informed by the officers that private sector suppliers have stepped into the breach and there is a plant under construction - it is not yet commissioned - to be able to recycle material, increase recycling of these building materials to create an equivalent material which can be used, maybe not for every single sand application but for a very great number of them. That is what I am told is in progress and I think that is a good example of private industry responding to what is a crisis. As I said, the current sand operator, they closed the quarry at short notice and there is still an approved area still left but, nonetheless, it has been closed.

4.8.6 Deputy I. Gardiner:

Would the Minister check if the quality and ... first of all, I welcome recycling and I think we need to go forward with the recycling and to create different types of sand. Is the Minister aware if this will be a substitute to the sand provided by the quarry and if a way forward can be found to have a smoother transition, not from today until tomorrow, over the years, which will probably require balance and steps from both sides to get it forward?

Deputy J.H. Young:

I am not a technical expert and I will arrange to get that information and circulate it to Members. But of course we have been lucky; the dune sand of course is a windblown sand, which means it is fine-grained, whereas obviously other sources may be different. Sand is not just sand, it varies and I will get a technical report for the Deputy.

4.8.7 The Connétable of St. Brelade:

Would the Minister agree that much of the area was a solid-waste dump until soon after the war and part of the owner's plan to remediate was to remediate some of those areas? They have, I understand, submitted an updated strategy but the department have not made it clear why it cannot be accepted. Given that the remediation of that site will take many years to accomplish, would he agree that his department needs to work more closely with the present owners so that the Minister's goals, as well the owner's, can be achieved in a short time?

Deputy J.H. Young:

There is obviously a case for dialogue but I do not accept the premise that that has not been the case. There are choices here and the landowner wants to go in a certain direction, and I think the landowner is fully entitled to pursue that by putting in a planning application because it is new, putting in a waste management licence and the processes will deal with it. It can either go the way of the approved route or seek to do something bigger and different. On that choice I do not think the landowner has made it yet; that is where we are.

The Deputy Bailiff:

Thank you. We have got through half of the questions now but about two-thirds of the time, so Members may wish to bear that in mind when considering the length of their questions and answers.