

22.11.01

**5 Deputy M. Tadier of the Minister for Economic Development, Tourism, Sport and Culture regarding the Opera House (OQ.111/2022):**

Will the Minister confirm how long he expects the Opera House to remain closed and will he undertake to bring forward the completion of the necessary works to ensure reopening by January 2024?

**Deputy K.F. Morel of St. John, St. Lawrence and Trinity (The Minister for Economic Development, Tourism, Sport and Culture):**

I thank the Deputy for his question. I would like to see the Opera House opened as soon as possible and I will be pushing for it to reopen to events obviously in 2024. It is important to note that the revised opening date in the proposed Government Plan reflects a significantly expanded programme of works which has been enabled by the allocation of a budget sufficient to deliver the full schedule of works required by this unique building. We plan on tackling all of the more serious long-term structural issues with the Opera House. If we do not do that, these things will only come back to bite us later, as we know, and as the Deputy referred to earlier in this session. This is a much bigger project than the one proposed prior to the Government Plan and the timeline reflects the extent of the work we are now able to undertake.

**4.5.1 Deputy M. Tadier:**

The list of works that the Minister has provided in answer to my colleague Deputy Feltham is, I admit, quite extensive. It does include some very big projects work but also some minutiae I could not help noticing, like the doorbell on the front needs to be fixed. Is it possible that any of this work at all could be brought forward so that some or all of the Opera House could be used during the next 2 years where it is due to remain shut, I believe, until quarter 4, we are told under the current plans of 2024.

**Deputy K.F. Morel:**

I will be maintaining pressure on the project team to ensure they work as efficiently as possible. Where there are opportunities to bring forward the opening date, we will take them, but it is an extensive list of work that is to be undertaken. Much of it is structural, not all of it is very small. In fact, through the work that we have done already we have seen problems with concrete in various areas of the building that needs to be rectified; that takes time. I think to underestimate the possibility that more discoveries are made during the course of the next 2 years would be to underestimate the difficulties of dealing with heritage buildings in this way. So I will maintain pressure on the team but I can make no promises about opening it early.

**4.5.2 Deputy R.J. Ward:**

When does the Minister envisage the staff at the Opera House being able to book acts for the future as many of them were booked a year or so in advance, particularly the sort of acts or performances, one might say, that we want to attract to Jersey.

**Deputy K.F. Morel:**

With the aim to reopen at the end of 2024, then that will be when performances begin again at the Opera House. But what I will say is, in the interim it is the intention - it is my intention - that the Opera House, the company element of the Opera House as opposed to the actual building of the Opera House, will put on a programme around the Island using the many venues that the Island has.

So there is no reason why the Opera House cannot be putting on performances and delivering a programme for Islanders in the intervening 2 years.

#### **4.5.3 Deputy R.J. Ward:**

Does the Minister accept that a certainty on when acts can perform is one of the key points to booking, particularly the perhaps, one might say, bigger names to Jersey so we become a centre of performance and that certainty of date is the key factor?

#### **Deputy K.F. Morel:**

The Deputy is absolutely right. He is also right in the earlier part of his question where he mentioned that sometimes acts need to be booked a year in advance; that is absolutely correct. So providing the certainty to the new leadership of the Opera House will be very important and we will be doing that. But as I said, in the interim, I will also expect that leadership to be providing a programme of events that the Island can enjoy.

[10:30]

#### **4.5.4 Connétable A.S. Crowcroft of St. Helier:**

How confident is the Minister that the sum allocated in the Government Plan for this work will be sufficient to see it through? Can he reassure the Assembly and the public that we will not see the same disappointing end to a very prestigious project and opening as happened last time round?

#### **Deputy K.F. Morel:**

I am not entirely sure what the Constable is referring to when he says ... the last part of his question where he talked about the prestigious opening not happening. I do not quite understand that.

#### **The Connétable of St. Helier:**

Could I clarify?

#### **Deputy K.F. Morel:**

If he does not mind, that would be helpful.

#### **The Bailiff:**

Well, all right, untypically.

#### **The Connétable of St. Helier:**

Yes, I apologise to the Minister for not being clear. I was one of many Islanders who were thrilled at the investment by the States the last time the Opera House was refurbished and opened to great acclaim, and so many of us have been disappointed that that was not sustainable. So can he reassure us that this is not going to happen this time around and that the new Opera House with all the investment will continue to flourish for years to come?

#### **Deputy K.F. Morel:**

Thank you for the clarification, Connétable. Yes, I can assure the Constable that that is the case. It has been my stated intention from the beginning of this project, even when I was Assistant Minister in the last Assembly, that we cannot have a situation where the Opera House does not have the funding to maintain itself over the years. We are in this situation precisely because consecutive governments have failed to provide the necessary funding to allow the Opera House Board to maintain the building itself. That cannot be the case going forward, and I have made it clear to

officers that I expect the future plans of the Opera House to include a funding mechanism which allows for suitable maintenance over time so we do not end up in this situation again.

**4.5.5 Deputy M. Tadier:**

I thank the Minister and Members for their interest as well. It seems to Minister for the Environment that this is in a theme of what we have already been speaking about. Does the Minister agree that in fact we should be putting money aside every year in the budget for buildings like the Opera House to deal with depreciation? So even though money has been allocated now, and it seems like a lot of money, but that is very little when we look at it year on year as to what should have been invested. So does he agree that in order to not find ourselves in this situation again we should be putting aside money and a fund specifically for the maintenance of our buildings, whether that comes through Property Holdings or not?

**Deputy K.F. Morel:**

That is certainly what I will be doing with the Opera House. On the face of it, without being the Minister for Infrastructure - I am not the Minister for Infrastructure, neither am I the Minister for Treasury and Resources - but on the face of it everything that the Deputy just suggested seems to Minister for the Environment to make common sense.