

22.02.08

6 Senator S.Y. Mézec of the Minister for Children and Education regarding plans to develop homes in town (OQ.24/2022):

Given the current plans to develop around 1,000 homes in the south-west of town and a further 1,000 homes in the vicinity of the Millennium Town Park, what plans, if any, does the Minister have to ensure there are adequate school places for the children who will live there, including the provision of safe walking travel routes to their schools?

Deputy S.M. Wickenden of St. Saviour (The Minister for Children and Education):

I thank the Senator for his question. Through the town schools' site review, I am planning to ensure that there are adequate schools places, and this work includes analysis of walking routes and distance, as well as demographic projections placed on large developments. Officers are currently working up the latest options following feedback from last week and I expect these to go to the Regeneration Steering Group for review.

3.6.1 Senator S.Y. Mézec:

Is it not the case that it is very inconvenient to not have this information available to us in advance of the Island Plan debate and advance of the deadlines for amendments to the Island Plan? What assurance can he give us that when these proposals are revealed that we can have confidence that they will meet the aspirations of the people who live in these communities and we are not simply going to see more and more children put in homes in this area where they do not have easy access to their schools?

Deputy S.M. Wickenden:

Along these lines of working we will need to make sure that we involve stakeholders so that we are not surprising anyone with these kind of plans coming out. I know the Senator says it is unfortunate for the Island Plan review, that there are amendments in there. I have been speaking to the Minister for the Environment. We have plans that will meet hopefully the demographics, make sure that we have got walking distances. I wish I could have done all of this a lot quicker but making evidence-based decisions on the best site for schools that will last decades is not something we want to rush in any way. We have been looking at a range of sites for new builds, extensions, suitability of 2 or 3-form entry, demographic projections and walking distance and identification of stakeholders so we can engage with them. It is a complex piece of work and I am determined to get it right. If it takes a little more time I would rather it takes more time and get it right than it is rushed and it is wrong.

3.6.2 Deputy R.J. Ward:

When will the school sites review be available and has it addressed the development of the waterfront within it?

Deputy S.M. Wickenden:

I have been through many iterations to review. I wanted to get it to the Regeneration Steering Group but there are other people who wanted to get involved in talking about some and looking at different sites before that happened. I am hoping now that we have got the final draft so it can go to the Regeneration Steering Group and, yes, it takes into consideration the demographics of the waterfront, which, I think, contains ... out of the 1,000 there are 531 one-bedrooms, 374 2-bedroom properties and 195 3-bedroom in the outlining applications, so a total of 569 possible sites that

could have children in there for being over one bedroom. It is in consideration based on the information we have.

3.6.3 Deputy R.J. Ward:

I wonder if before I ask that I could just ask for the part of the original question of when to be answered, it was very specific, a timeframe. I assume that inferred a timeframe.

The Bailiff:

Were you asking, effectively, for a ruling as to whether that part of the question was answered?

Deputy R.J. Ward:

Yes, I suppose I was.

The Bailiff:

No, I think it would be possible to answer that question with greater clarity on that particular aspect, Minister.

Deputy S.M. Wickenden:

The next step, now that the plans have been reviewed and are being worked up, is to go to the Regeneration Steering Group. I have asked for it to be at the next Regeneration Steering Group, which I believe is next week. Once that has been through there, and if it is approved, then it will be made public; that is about the best timeline I can get. I do not control the Regeneration Steering Group or what is on its agenda, I can only request that it is put forward.

3.6.4 Deputy R.J. Ward:

Does the Minister believe there may be a risk that the bridging Island Plan - because we are in the middle of that and all the amendments have gone through - could be contradictory or one might say incongruent with what comes out of the school sites review, given that the 2 have not been brought together?

Deputy S.M. Wickenden:

No, I do not think there is a risk because we are looking at building within the built-up area of that and in town because that is where the best sites for the demographics and walking sector is. I am not worried that the bridging Island Plan would in any way stop any of the work that is being undertaken.

3.6.5 Deputy M.R. Higgins:

Following up on the idea of timescales, can the Minister tell me whether he will be bringing the results of all this research to the States for debate in the States, bearing in mind the limited time that is available before the next election? Will the States have the opportunity to debate what his proposals will be before the election?

Deputy S.M. Wickenden:

I do not work on election cycles, I work on trying to get best outcomes for the Island. Any work I have done since I have been the Minister for Children and Education has been about what is the long-term benefit to the Island. I can say that if I do get these plans together I will bring them to the States for debate. If they are not in a place ready for that it will be up to the next Minister because this is about getting it right for the children of the Island, not about an election.

3.6.6 Deputy M.R. Higgins:

Do I take it then that the Minister is kicking this down the road because he would not make a decision on it and does not want to be held accountable for it? Is that not the case, Minister?

Deputy S.M. Wickenden:

I believe I said nothing of the sort there. I said that I am looking to make sure that we have best outcomes. If it happens that we can get this before the Assembly before the elections I will. It is about what is good for the Island, it is not about what is kicking down the road.

3.6.7 Deputy I. Gardiner:

The Minister indicated about built-up areas. As a Deputy of the south of St. Helier, did he include in the 500 children number of the waterfront development, children who would be in Horizon, currently in Castle Quay, at South Hill and the Lime House development? What is the total number of the south of St. Helier new build expected?

Deputy S.M. Wickenden:

My officers in C.Y.P.E.S. (Children, Young People, Education and Skills) are pretty well-versed in planning and projecting for each year of the education cycle and they have been looking, along with Property Holdings, at all developments to make sure that we get it. I do not know what the figures are off the top of my head but I can guarantee the Deputy that the officers at C.Y.P.E.S. are fully aware, along with Jersey Property Holdings, when planning this about the number of possible children that would live in the area based on projections we have used for years.

3.6.8 Deputy I. Gardiner:

As the Minister indicated in his first previous answer that he is working with the Minister for the Environment around the bridging Island Plan, would we see any amendments related to the education estate in the bridging Island Plan?

Deputy S.M. Wickenden:

I have not lodged any amendments in the bridging Island Plan and the date and timeline for lodging amendments is over now. I can clearly say to the Deputy that, no, there will be no amendment to the bridging Island Plan from my department for education facilities.

3.6.9 Deputy G.P. Southern:

As a fellow representative of St. Helier, I am particularly concerned to know whether the sites under consideration are expansions of current schools or are they new builds?

Deputy S.M. Wickenden:

Everything has been taken into consideration within looking at what is available and what is correct and what the demographics will look like. I am not going to pre-empt the answer to what is being tapped by mentioning either but all aspects were taken into consideration.

3.6.10 Deputy G.P. Southern:

Did that "all aspects" include the room for expansion of present sites of education?

Deputy S.M. Wickenden:

All options for future demand and demographics have been taken into consideration.

[10:45]

3.6.11 Senator S.Y. Mézec:

If I ask the Minister what he exactly is taking to the Regeneration Steering Group I suspect he will not tell us but could instead I ask him if what he is taking to the Regeneration Steering Group is something which is in line already with the bridging Island Plan or is it something that would require amendment to the bridging Island Plan to allow it to go ahead?

Deputy S.M. Wickenden:

I do not believe it would require an amendment with it. It is very exciting plans if we can get it through the Regeneration Steering Group. But I do not believe that it will require an amendment.