

22.04.25

13 Deputy M. Tadier of the Minister for Economic Development, Tourism, Sport and Culture regarding repair work on the Opera House (OQ.65/2022)

Will the Minister update the Assembly on the repair work needed by the Jersey Opera House, including the level of funding required, whether such funding will be made available and, if so, when; and when the anticipated work will be able to start and finish?

Senator L.J. Farnham (The Minister for Economic Development, Tourism, Sport and Culture):

Deputy Morel will take this question.

Deputy K.F. Morel (Assistant Minister for Economic Development, Tourism, Sport and Culture - rapporteur):

I thank Deputy Tadier for his question. The Government is working already and has been for the past year with the Opera House Board to review the full scope of work that is needed to reopen the Opera House, which is, I think, in every Islander's mind, an important historic building. That scope of work has been agreed upon and it is necessary to bring the Opera House back into safe and sustainable use. The scope of work is expected to cost in the region of £5 million; £2.2 million has already been secured for the project and that was the original £2.2 million that initially came from fiscal stimulus but then due to the ongoing length of the project has now been sourced from other funds from Treasury. We are in discussions with Treasury about the balance, which is approximately £2.6 million. There is considerable support across Government for the Opera House and we fully anticipate the funding will be forthcoming. I am utterly committed to delivering an improved Opera House to be open next summer. The first phase of work will start next month with a target date for completion, as I just mentioned, in the summer of 2023.

3.13.1 Deputy M. Tadier:

First of all, I thank the Assistant Minister for that helpful answer. Does the Assistant Minister agree with me that there seems to be a perennial problem with the Opera House? We see headlines every few years saying that there is an issue with maintenance, with funding, that it might have to close down and that no doubt lessons have been learned. I would hope that he can confirm in future that on the one hand a sustainable funding mechanism can be put in place so that when maintenance issues like this arise, which I believe is an issue for Property Holdings - they are the landlord - that we should not have to scramble around for money to repair such a beautiful and cultural building. But can he also confirm whether or not there is new thinking going on about how the Opera House might be managed in the future so that it can be fully utilised and perhaps in conjunction with the other arts offerings in the island?

Deputy K.F. Morel:

There is a simple and a quick way to answer this. There is no question in my mind that funding for maintenance of the Opera House over the past 20 years has been insufficient. It is quite clear that previous Governments have not invested in the Opera House and indeed you can see that, not just the Opera House but in many buildings around the Island that the States own. The work I have been doing with officers has been focused precisely on the matters that Deputy Tadier raised. How do you find a sustainable solution for funding the maintenance of the Opera House so that we are not left in this cycle where nothing is invested for 20 years, then suddenly you need millions of pounds to bring it up to basic standards? These are health and safety standards we are attempting to meet

here with this £5 million; it is not much further than that. Yes, we are trying to find a sustainable funding solution and, with regard to the use of the Opera House, I have been reviewing exactly how it could be used as we move forward. There are 2 plus sides to this break in the use of the Opera House in the sense that it has been closed from 2020 due to COVID initially, it has been closed longer because we need to bring it up to standards - health and safety standards - and that work is ongoing; so it is one plus side, it is being brought up to standard. But the other plus side is that this gives us a break and an opportunity to understand how best to use the Opera House going forward. It is a balance between attracting international standard artists to the Island, as well as making it available for community use, and those are the 2 items that I have asked officers to look at and those are the things that we are examining, as to how best to match those 2 things, community use and high-class, world-class acts coming to the Island.