

2024.09.10

2.6 Deputy H.M. Miles of St. Brelade of the Minister for the Environment regarding an update on the status of the West of Island Planning Framework as set out in Strategic Proposal 4 of the Bridging Island Plan (OQ 155/2024):

Further to the announcement by Lloyds Bank that it is to close its St. Brelade branch and the level of empty commercial properties in Les Quennevais Precinct and Parade, will the Minister provide an update on the status of the West of Island Planning Framework as set out in Strategic Proposal 4 of the Bridging Island Plan?

Deputy S.G. Luce of Grouville and St. Martin (The Minister for the Environment):

The development of the West of Island Planning Framework is one of 40 proposals in the Bridging Island Plan and has yet to commence.

[10:15]

Previous Island Plans have sought to focus much of the Island's development needs on St. Helier, but the purpose of developing a master plan for the west of the Island is to explore whether there is current or increased potential for the west of the Island, which of course includes Les Quennevais, to provide new development opportunities for homes, business and community facilities. I can tell the Deputy that of the 40 Bridging Island Plan proposals, 7 have been completed, 22 are in progress and 11 have yet to commence.

2.6.1 Deputy H.M. Miles:

I thank the Minister for the answer. Given that a quarter of the population of the Island live out west - this is not just a St. Brelade issue - does the Minister agree that maintaining services in the west of the Island is critical to reducing traffic congestion in town, and therefore consistent with reducing our carbon footprint? If so, will he consider allocating funds to accelerate the development of the West of Island Plan?

Deputy S.G. Luce:

Certainly. The facts that the Deputy posed, a lot of people live in the west of the Island, there is a centre there already and the Bridging Island Plan seeks to maintain and enhance the viability and the vitality of these areas. But it is a challenge. The internet has changed the way people shop, but the current Bridging Island Plan seeks to retain retail development in these areas, but it also provides flexibility to allow other forms of development to be used under a series of tests. The answer is yes. Obviously, there is a future for Les Quennevais, an important future for the retail area of Les Quennevais. It is a difficult balance to try to protect it when it is not used. We do not want to give it away through change of use to other uses but, at the same time, we need to provide the facilities there for the residents. So I say to the Deputy, as soon as I have the money I will do this work. Obviously, there are 11 pieces of work still to be commenced. That work will have to be done before the next Island Plan debate.

2.6.2 Deputy M. Tadier of St. Brelade:

This question ultimately is about Lloyds Bank, and the closure of the branch at Red Houses. Can the Minister advise whether or not such change of use or closure of key facilities in what has been billed as Jersey's second urban centre is what was envisaged under the Bridging Island Plan?

Deputy S.G. Luce:

I am not sure that I completely understand the question here. I do not think there is an expectation in the Bridging Island Plan that any bank was going to close. Obviously there is a massive challenge to banks with people moving from visiting banks on a weekly basis to then sitting at home in front of a P.C. (personal computer) to now people pay their bills while they are waiting for the bus or paying cheques while they are having a cup of coffee with friends. Banking is challenging. Maintaining all these old traditional branches is a challenge. I think the Deputy's question about change of use would

be an interesting one, but I would imagine that banking would come under retail, so another retail outlet in that building would be allowed.

2.6.3 Deputy M. Tadier:

That does not provide much comfort, I do not think, just saying another retail, because, for example, if it were pharmacy, there are lots of pharmacies already in St. Brelade but banks seem to be moving out. I will ask specifically, the Island Plan on page 67 says that the Island's second urban centre is Les Quennevais and it will be a key community focus for the provision of homes. Therefore the Island Plan is saying there will be more homes built around Les Quennevais over the next few years, but if there are fewer facilities, such as banking, in those areas is that not going to throw out the balance that is seeking to be struck in the Bridging Island Plan? Does that concern the Minister?

Deputy S.G. Luce:

Obviously, planning is a particularly challenging thing, and the Deputy throws up a challenge here. On one hand we want to protect the retail structures, if you like, in Les Quennevais in the Precinct and in the Parade. We could, I guess, convert them through change of use to housing and we create more housing with less retail. The plan at the moment will protect those retail shops, those retail buildings, if you like, for further retail until such a point as a change of use application comes in and an alternative use/better use is found. But at the moment, what we need to do is to protect those parts of Les Quennevais and parts of the west of the Island which are already in retail, so that when we build more houses, yes, those facilities are there for residents to use. What I would not want to see happen is the few, or maybe a few more than a few, retail outlets that are closed at the moment get the benefit of a change of use to housing, and then be lost for ever for retail. There has got to be a really good reason to have a change of use approved for these structures.

2.6.4 Deputy J. Renouf of St. Brelade:

The Minister says that there were 40-odd action points in the Island Plan but there were only half a dozen or so strategic priorities and this West of Island Planning Framework was a strategic priority. I therefore would push the Minister on this point. My Ministerial Plan, before I left office, included the West of Island Planning Framework in the workstream for 2025. Will he commit to continue that work in 2025?

Deputy S.G. Luce:

I cannot give the Deputy that commitment today. Master-planning or development of guidance, there are a number of these proposals, including the St. Brelade's Bay improvement plan, and I have spoken to Deputy Scott about this, development of Five Oaks master plan. They are there to inform the next Island Plan. None of them have commenced and even the St. Brelade's Bay one, which had an actual timeframe on it of 2025, I had to explain to the Deputy that is not possible. I need to work on priorities. There is planning reform, water, P.F.A.S. (per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances), Marine Spatial Plan, supporting agriculture and fisheries and offshore wind. There is just a very short list of really important things I have to do, on top of which my Government has ... well the Government I am part of, have committed to reduce expenditure, committed to reduce the use of consultants. We have a number of priorities that we are trying to fit in here. I say to the Deputy, yes, this work will be done but I cannot commit to doing it in 2025 because my priorities for next year are already set.

2.6.5 Deputy J. Renouf:

I think Deputy Tadier raised some of the important issues here, that this is about conflicts and those are precisely the sorts of things that a master plan is designed to help resolve. There was widespread cynicism, I think, in St. Brelade when Les Quennevais was announced as the second urban centre and the West of Island Planning Framework was supposed to put the flesh on the bones. Can I therefore ask if the West of Island Planning Framework has been removed from the Ministerial work plan, why that decision was made ... the work plan for next year, why that decision was made and what was put in its place because it was clearly possible when I left office?

Deputy S.G. Luce:

One of the reasons that it is possible to delay certain pieces of work, and in this case the west of Island, is the current planning policy of the Bridging Island Plan seeks to maintain and enhance the retail viability of the defined area of Les Quennevais. It includes the bank, it includes the Parade and the Precinct, and it does this by supporting protection and maintenance of those retail uses. However, it does also provide flexibility, as I have said, to allow other forms of development. If change of use application comes in there are a number of tests the application would have to be subject to and if it passes, then, yes, change of use will be allowed but this is a challenge. We do need to maintain retail centres for these areas, especially Les Quennevais and the west of the Island, and we do that through the current plan. So while a new strategy, a new plan for the west of Island, would be great it does not mean there is not protection, there are not plans in place, there are not policies in place in the current Bridging Island Plan to allow change and work to happen.

Deputy J. Renouf:

Point of order if I may.

The Bailiff:

Point of order?

Deputy J. Renouf:

Well, can I ask you to rule whether that answered the question? Because I did ask why the work had been removed from the work stream?

The Bailiff:

My understanding of the answer was because there were a number of balancing priorities and therefore, I infer, that that was the reason that the Minister was giving. If I am wrong about that, Minister?

Deputy S.G. Luce:

I am happy to clarify the 2 reasons. One you have already mentioned, there are a number of other priorities, but also the fact that there is currently, in the Bridging Island Plan, a policy that works for Les Quennevais at the moment. It is not as if there are no plans, there is no policy in the plan for that area currently.

2.6.6 Deputy A.F. Curtis of St. Clement:

The Minister has now touched on this but given he has confirmed the delaying of work on a West of Island Planning Framework, will he commit to ensuring that his department and planned decision makers do give full effect to the guidance around the protection of employment land and the tests he references, specifically with regard to the 2012 *Protection of Employment Land: Supplementary Planning Guidance*, and work with his department on a more robust process for consistent determination against this to retain the viability of units in the west of the Island until such a framework is delivered?

Deputy S.G. Luce:

Yes, and it would be my hope, my ambition, that everybody in the department, whether that is from a junior planning officer that has just arrived in the department 6 months ago, all the way through senior planning officers, Planning Committee, inspectors and myself, would all take a consistent view of policies within the Island Plan. But the point I would make to the Deputy is that developing new guidance, if you like, in the same way that we develop supplementary planning guidance, cannot move away from the policies which are in the current Island Plan without coming back to this Assembly to change those policies. So while new guidance is really helpful and it puts more flesh on the bone, more detail for applicants and developers to come forward with their plans, the really important thing is that policies in the Island Plan, which are debated in this Assembly, cannot change. Guidance, whether it is supplementary or otherwise, can only put detail in. It cannot change policy.

2.6.7 Deputy A.F. Curtis:

I completely agree, and I was not suggesting new guidance that deviates from the B.I.P. (Bridging Island Plan) policies. I would ask the Minister, again, if he would consider improving the processes around the documentation and recording of the tests of redundancy and the policy tests to ensure more consistent tests and to greater protect employment sites in the west of the Island?

Deputy S.G. Luce:

I will do my best to do that. As the Deputy well knows, I really like consistency. I like the same rules to be applied to everybody at all times.

2.6.8 Deputy H.M. Miles:

I thank the Minister for all of his answers. It strikes me that there may well be policies in place to protect and develop retail in the west but they are clearly not working. We have at least 7 empty properties, commercial units, in the Les Quennevais Precinct and Parade, and certainly there seems to be more units that are closing than opening. My question really is, all of his answers lead to the conclusion that a master plan is absolutely critical to community development in the west of the Island. He had already said that he needed to work on other priorities. I cannot speak for the western Connétables and the other western Deputies, but for my part we would consider this to be an absolute priority. Because this is a priority, would the Minister agree to consider at least moving the Western Planning Framework up his priority list?

Deputy S.G. Luce:

I am very happy to consider moving the planning framework up the priority list. I will take the points the Deputy and others have made on board and go away and discuss it with officers.