

6. Statement by the Minister for Transport and Technical Services regarding town flooding

6.1 Connétable M.K. Jackson of St. Brelade (The Minister for Transport and Technical Services):

Members will be aware of the severe flooding incident that occurred on 26th August 2010 which caused flooding to a number of areas around the Island and in particular the West Centre area of St. Helier. The reasons why the flooding was particularly severe in this area have now been identified as being a result of the lack of the capacity in the combined foul sewers in the West Centre/Beresford Street area of town during the heavy rainfall events such as occurred on that day and therefore a subsequent risk of flooding. It was intended that this lack of capacity would be addressed as part of the St. Helier surface water link and cavern project that was completed in the late 1990s by the construction of a 20 metre shaft at West Centre that would in turn connect to the cavern facility under Fort Regent. This connection would have provided an outlet for excess flows in the area and along with the cavern and other sewer upgrade schemes carried out in St. Helier over the last 10 years would have provided St. Helier with protection against flooding for rainfall events up to one in 10 years. However, due to difficulties at the time of reaching agreement with landowners at West Centre, who will be aware of the situation, and concerns of the final cost of the project, the construction of this shaft was never carried out. As a result, the current level of protection against flooding for St. Helier, particularly in the West Centre of St. Helier, is somewhat less than one in 10 years. Since the completion of the remainder of the cavern project in 1998 an alternative location for a connection shaft has been identified in the Phillips Street/Providence Street area that addresses the disruption and land ownership issues associated with West Centre while still providing the connection facility to the cavern that will reduce surcharging of the sewers in this part of St. Helier. This option now has more appeal since the demolition of the Ann Court housing site as the construction of a shaft on this site would further minimise disruption to the surrounding area during the construction phase and significantly reduce the risk to surrounding properties as a result of the shaft subsiding, as alternative shaft-sinking and tunnel-driving methods could be used. If the future risk of flooding to properties in West Centre during heavy rainfall events is to be minimised and the design flood protection level of one in 10 years provided by the cavern is to be achieved, then capital monies will be required so that the final part of the St. Helier surface water link and cavern project can be completed. In summary, it is only when the surcharging in the combined foul sewers in the West Centre area during heavy rainfall events is addressed by making the connection to the surface water link tunnel and the cavern at Phillips Street/Providence Street that the design flood protection for the town provided by the tunnel and cavern complex can be realised, and the combined sewer overflow spills to the surface water system minimised. I regret the inconvenience caused to residents and businesses in the area and thank all the Transport and Technical Services staff, emergency staff personnel, and Honorary Police for their tremendous service during this difficult period. Thank you.

6.1.1 Deputy P.V.F. Le Claire:

Having witnessed floods in the media in the United States and other places where sewerage combines with the floodwaters and concerns about health are aired, what risk, if any, occurred during this period with combinations of sewerage among this water and what steps are given to keep people away from that water because certainly within the *Jersey Evening Post* there were pictures of people wading through it?

The Connétable of St. Brelade:

Clearly, with the amount of rainfall at the time which was about an inch in 3 hours which is quite unprecedented, there was enormous dilution involved but my department is concerned this situation does not get repeated and hence the work as outlined in my statement is being considered.

6.1.2 Deputy M.R. Higgins:

As the Minister is talking about the effect of flooding and the heavy rainfall, can he confirm if the new incinerator was damaged through heavy rain ingress into the building caused by the roof of the building not being finished and there has been internal damage? Can he confirm or deny that that was the case?

The Connétable of St. Brelade:

I am not aware of that but I certainly know that during the visit I was on down there I saw rain coming into the refuse pit which is not of great concern. I am not aware of that but certainly will investigate and advise the Deputy if that were to be the case.

6.1.3 The Deputy of St. John:

Historically, I am aware that plans, *et cetera*, for extending the North of Town sewerage system were in place. Can the Minister confirm that those plans have been updated, are kept updated regularly and whether or not money has been requested on a capital vote for these works and, if not, is he putting in an application for a capital vote on extending the North of Town sewerage system?

The Connétable of St. Brelade:

Yes, we have current plans which, after discussions this morning, would take a very short time to update. Yes, I can confirm that the department is seeking capital for the project.

6.1.4 The Deputy of St. Mary:

Can the Minister give us any indication of what the costs of the flooding to the community were maybe by some kind of notion of the insurance claims, particularly in the light of Deputy Le Claire's question about whether there might have been sewerage mixed in, albeit in dilution? Following on from that, will the necessary investment for sorting out this problem come out of the contingency fund or will it come out of the capital fund?

The Connétable of St. Brelade:

To answer the second part first, I would expect any capital required to come out of the capital fund. Sorry, could I just ask the Deputy to repeat the first part?

The Deputy of St. Mary:

I asked about whether there was any estimate or any intention indeed of estimating the cost of the flooding, as it is likely to recur.

The Connétable of St. Brelade:

Well, no, I cannot possibly give that at the moment because that will be a matter for insurance companies to collate and whether we will be advised of that in the fullness of time I do not know, but I am happy to pass it on if I do receive the information.

6.1.5 The Deputy of St. Mary:

May I ask a supplementary? Does the Minister in the light of saying that the necessary investment would have to come out of the capital fund, does he not agree that this shoots rather a hole in the world view of people who say that we can have £50 million cuts tomorrow and £80 million the day after that?

The Connétable of St. Brelade:

Well, indeed, it does but, quite frankly, there is not the money in the contingency fund either. It really is a juggling act where the funding comes from, but I have made this statement because I want Members to be aware of the rather dire situation in that part of town which has shown itself by the results of the rainfall in August.

6.1.6 Connétable D.W. Mezbourian of St. Lawrence:

Members will recall photographs in the *J.E.P.* earlier this year when residents at Tesson in the Tesson Mill area were flooded. When I addressed the issue with the Chief Officer of T.T.S. I was told that although they know how to resolve the problem, there are no capital funds available to undertake the work. I would like to know from the Minister why or how he prioritises the spending of capital funds in this instance. Is it because we are looking at private business, commercial enterprise, how does he distinguish between householders being flooded out and commercial business and will he please explain the prioritising matters that he deals with?

The Connétable of St. Brelade:

It is all a question of risk assessment and taking all the factors into account and weighing them up. I would be happy for the Constable to attend at the department and the officers can go through with her how they do it.

The Connétable of St. Lawrence:

Thank you, I will accept that invitation.

6.1.7 Deputy D.J. De Sousa:

Twice in the Minister's speech he mentioned one in 10 years and the risk of flooding. He intimated that it is somewhat less than one in 10 years in this area of town. What is the exact ratio?

The Connétable of St. Brelade:

I do not have that because it is an imprecise estimation but it is based on previous occurrences and, once again, I am happy to discuss that with the Deputy and quantify it a later date.

6.1.8 The Deputy of St. John:

Given stimulus funding can be found for a somewhat grandiose scheme on Victoria Avenue when really all we needed at that time was a resurfacing and a bit of drain work, had the Minister given serious thought to asking for stimulus money for this particular work?

The Connétable of St. Brelade:

Yes, indeed, we had but regrettably the type of work is such that the expertise to do it is not present on-Island so it will involve bringing in contractors to do the work from the U.K. so it would not have fitted within the economic stimulus requirement.

6.1.9 The Deputy of St. John:

If I could follow that up: given that contractors were brought in from the U.K. for doing the work on Victoria Avenue (yes, they were; you can nod your head) your argument does not hold water surely? **[Laughter]**

The Deputy Bailiff:

There are a number of procedural objections to that. **[Laughter]**

The Connétable of St. Brelade:

The Victoria Avenue project did not involve the importation of English contractors.

[17:30]

The Deputy Bailiff:

That is a substantive objection. Very well. The Deputy of St. Mary, it is the last question.

6.1.10 The Deputy of St. Mary:

In answering the Constable for St. Lawrence, the Minister suggested that there was a process of prioritisation. Could he explain how that can function without him knowing what the costs of the damage in that particular location of that flooding and costs of damage elsewhere are?

The Connétable of St. Brelade:

I cannot give a precise answer to a little bit of an imprecise question. No one will know what the costs of the damage will be until they are quantified by the insurance companies. I would be happy to know that and it certainly would influence my decision but I have suspicions the cost will be significant and I suspect that information will drive a prioritisation of this tunnel. In my own mind I have to say that it is highly prioritised.

The Deputy Bailiff:

That brings an end to the questions to Ministers without notice.

6.1.11 The Deputy of St. John:

I think there could be a point of order, if I may? The reply I had from the Minister in relation to the company that carried out the work on Victoria Avenue being an English company, given that the majority of the machines and the like all had English registration numbers at the start of the contract - and I see Senator Cohen nodding his head - therefore, is the company not registered in the U.K. rather than Jersey? If it is Jersey it was off-Island for many years and it has come back.

The Deputy Bailiff:

I am pleased to note that it is not a point of order. As there is no ruling required from the Chair on it, Minister if you wish to answer ...

The Connétable of St. Brelade:

I am happy to answer that. Yes, the work was carried by Jayen (Jersey) Limited. They bought a significant number of second-hand vehicles in the U.K. to do the job and they were re-registered when they came to the Island.

The Deputy Bailiff:

We may never know why Senator Cohen was nodding his head. **[Laughter]**

Deputy E.J. Noel:

I would just like to make a point of correction. The work was not carried out by Jayen (Jersey) Limited; it was carried out by Trant.

The Connétable of St. Brelade:

I apologise, that was my error.