



Economic Affairs Scrutiny Panel

Retail Policy

Public Meeting with the Minister for Planning and Environment

MONDAY, 24th MARCH 2014

Panel:

Deputy S.G. Luce of St. Martin (Chairman)
Connétable M.J. Paddock of St. Ouen
Connétable J.E. Le Maistre of Grouville

Witnesses:

The Minister for Planning and Environment
The Principal Planner, Planning and Environment

[13:03]

Deputy S.G. Luce of St. Martin (Chairman):

Minister, welcome and thank you for coming today. We are not going to keep you very long but we do have a couple of subjects we want to speak about. Before we get into that, if we could just go around the table for the benefit of the tape. My name is Deputy Steve Luce, Chairman of the Economic Affairs Scrutiny Panel.

Connétable M.J. Paddock of St. Ouen:

Connétable Michael Paddock, Connétable of St. Ouen.

Connétable J.E. Le Maistre of Grouville:

Connétable John Le Maistre, Constable of Grouville.

The Minister for Planning and Environment:

Rob Duhamel, Minister for Planning and Environment.

Principal Planner, Planning and Environment:

Tony Gottard, Principal Planner, Planning and Environment.

The Deputy of St. Martin:

Okay, as I said, thank you for coming, Minister. We have 2 subjects, really, that we would like to speak about. The first one is the high level, master planning, overarching policies and then to get in later some much lower level stuff about change of use and historic and that type of thing. I think we would just like to know ... we have the North of Town Masterplans, we have design guides for St. Helier, and we have also got the Island Plan as well. Can you just tell us where we are with those 3, how they are interlinked and which ones are still in use? I mean, for example, the North of Town Masterplan is 2 and a half years old now and one of the major parts of it, at Le Masurier's Bath Street site does not appear to be going ahead. Is this Masterplan still in operation?

The Minister for Planning and Environment:

Yes, it is but I think with all these things, master planning is for the longer term and you mentioned Le Masurier's and what I am hearing through the grapevine is that where they were before is not necessarily where they are going to be in the short to medium future.

The Deputy of St. Martin:

So are you hopeful that they will be coming back to Planning quite soon?

The Minister for Planning and Environment:

Yes, I mean, at the end of the day, we were giving them as much encouragement as we needed to give them, albeit the usual thing happened with the media in suggesting that permissions were not forthcoming but they had not got to the position of making an application. But all the donkey work, if you like, was undertaken with officers to determine what support might be able to be given were they to have come forward with the plan that they may still come forward with.

The Deputy of St. Martin:

Is it the be all and end all for the North of Town Masterplan, that big Le Masurier's site in the middle of it, or could we carry on?

The Minister for Planning and Environment:

Not as a retail centre. The original plans that were being mooted were, if I remember rightly, for a large supermarket but that kind of fell by the wayside and I think the company involved determined that it would be better if they had an element of retail mix in order to provide extra amenities for that particular part of town but the major part of the plan was to provide in-town living accommodation and it was mainly residential. So with regard to the retail plan, if you like, there is always going to be a tension between people wanting to kind of move out into the sticks, or whatever, because the land prices perhaps may be cheaper, as opposed to kind of working in the centre of town, which is where we really want everybody to be. So a lot of these businesses rely on heavy footfall. It goes without saying that putting things on the outskirts of town ... and there are specific policies within the Island Plan to discourage the practice as has happened in other places to kind of reduce the amount of out of town traffic. So there is always going to be a conflict between the 2 but it is a conflict that I think is easily resolved and it is down to the investors to decide where they want to put the money.

The Deputy of St. Martin:

How far north do you see the retail area staying or do you see it coming back? Do you see West Centre being as far north as we go or Minden Place or do you go up to the park?

The Minister for Planning and Environment:

Well, no. We have never really kind of suggested that. The retail centre is primarily King Street, Queen Street, that is the centre. We have a secondary trading area that goes into Burrard Street and Union Street and whatever. Thereafter, you start to get into localised neighbourhoods, which have to have an element of retail experiences for people, but not to the extent of putting kind of out of town supermarkets or hypermarkets or furniture warehouses and that type of thing that you see, pretty much, if you go to America, which I have not been, or to the U.K. (United Kingdom), in some parts, and particularly in France. So the out of town shopping experience is something that Planning does not really encourage.

The Deputy of St. Martin:

No, well I think we might well agree with that. On the North of Town Masterplan, Minister, there is what was known as key intervention sites.

The Minister for Planning and Environment:

Yes.

The Deputy of St. Martin:

We have just been discussing one. Another one is Minden Place car park, I mean, how close are we to losing Minden Place car park to this proposal?

The Minister for Planning and Environment:

That is tied into the T.T.S. (Transport and Technical Services) strategy on traffic. From my point of view, I think there is still a bit of life left in the Minden Place car park. I do not think necessarily what was being suggested for it is the best way forward perhaps in terms of knocking it down and relocating the parking somewhere else. Within our overall plan for the North of Town Masterplan and the town as a whole though, it has been suggested and agreed that perhaps it is better if you are attracting people who come from the countryside areas of the Island to the town to park their cars on the periphery and to take walk-able routes into the more central town areas. So in that respect, I think you have probably got 2 conflicting policies. The Minden Place car park is, as you know, kind of one of the prime car parks, if not the prime car park for the retail offerings of our historic market. To remove the ability of, in particular, disabled shoppers from the proximity of the market is something that has been resisted by the town centre operator, the Constable and others. So I think in the longer term that Minden Place, although we have earmarked it, when it comes to the end of its tether, there may be other plans for it. I think those plans might well be reconsidered. There is nothing to stop people being a little bit more creative when it comes to car parking and certainly one of the things that I have been trying to encourage is a consideration of a dual or triple use of a car park. It seems to be somewhat odd that with land prices being what they are that we go for single use style buildings and we park our cars and that is it and then we allow people to walk to other areas. It might well be that these car parking areas could be used for hiring cars, so you do not need to own your own car in town or, alternatively, there may be opportunities to put some retail offerings or other offerings in terms of service and amenities with the car park on other floors. So there is a whole stack of things ...

The Deputy of St. Martin:

A bit like the Co-op at Grand Marché then.

The Minister for Planning and Environment:

Well, that is right. I have been and taken other civil servants and our States Members on some of our planning trips and we have seen exactly that being offered in quite a few places in the U.K. where you will get perhaps a car park on the ground floor and there may be a hotel there. There is no reason why you cannot have a car park and a supermarket, a car park and whatever.

The Deputy of St. Martin:

I am trying to think back, in Ann Court now there is not going to be any parking provision for the general public?

The Minister for Planning and Environment:

No, I think there still is but it has been cut back a bit.

The Deputy of St. Martin:

There still is?

The Minister for Planning and Environment:

Yes.

The Deputy of St. Martin:

All right. When we get eventually to develop the Jersey Gas site, is there going to be any public parking requirements on that site as well? Or is that too far away?

The Minister for Planning and Environment:

No, no, no. The Gas Works site is quite a good site in terms of being close to the periphery road and in a site where, if T.T.S. were to be still in the business, which they might well not be in the future, of providing car parking facilities. Edge of town car parking facilities are quite good. But just to, as I say, move towards discouraging applicants to put car parking facilities exclusively on the edge of town, on our best sites, again, you have to take a more balanced view and if you can get 2 or 3 uses, then you are better off trying to plan for that.

The Deputy of St. Martin:

I see that the Ann Street Brewery site is down here as a private development. Do we have an inkling of what they might be looking to do there?

The Minister for Planning and Environment:

They were looking at a supermarket offering and parking.

The Deputy of St. Martin:

Another supermarket, but at least parking.

The Minister for Planning and Environment:

Yes. You say “another supermarket”, but again, if you take the bigger picture into account, and we do not always do that in our various departments, it has been stated for a long time that food prices are more expensive than they are in other U.K. cities and towns and perhaps if there were to be a move to provide another supermarket into the chain of supermarkets, then perhaps that would be something that could bring food prices down. Personally, I do not think that would happen if we had another large supermarket offering in the centre of town because, as you all know, the goods have to get here somehow. They generally come by boat and not by plane, so you do get handling charges to deliver those goods to the stores if they are inland. So the best place, I would moot, if we were going to be going down the line of having some very large supermarket operator, would be to have a supermarket closer to the port facilities so you could drive your wagons off directly into the shop and minimise the transportation costs.

The Deputy of St. Martin:

The last site on the plan here that we would like to talk about; Belmont Gardens. Do you have any inkling when there might be something coming forward in the way of a proposition for Belmont Gardens? To turn that into another small park and also the idea with the accessibility straight from that to the new park as well.

[13:15]

The Minister for Planning and Environment:

An element of that work was only to be undertaken once the Constable of St. Helier had managed to do his deals to assist the Gas Works company in relocating some of their pipe work and also to provide another opening at Belmont Road through to the Town Park area.

The Deputy of St. Martin:

But I think St. Helier bought one not so long ago ...

The Minister for Planning and Environment:

Yes, that was the one but I am not sure where we are with the deals at the moment. The 2 were trying to be worked together.

The Deputy of St. Martin:

If we could move, Minister now ... unless anybody has anything else on the master planning? We can always come back to it.

Principal Planner, Planning and Environment:

Deputy, if I could just confirm the status of the North of Town Masterplan. I think it is one of your first questions. The 2011 Island Plan identified it as an action area. The North of Town Masterplan was subsequently approved by the States immediately after ...

The Deputy of St. Martin:

Yes, the same date almost.

Principal Planner, Planning and Environment:

Certainly with regard to Le Masurier's, the Minister, after lengthy negotiation, agreed supplementary guidance for that site, which provides quite a broad range of opportunities in terms of retail but predominantly for residential. The company came back to us to suggest that the small retail units that were originally envisaged in the North of Town Masterplan were not appropriate for what they wanted to achieve on the site. The Minister then allowed larger floor plates to be approved. So if they were to come through with an application at any stage in the future, then we have a supplementary guidance which will hopefully assist them.

The Deputy of St. Martin:

Right. Were they receptive to that? Obviously if they put it forward, they must have been reasonably happy that they ...

Principal Planner, Planning and Environment:

Unfortunately, the plans have not come forward. I would hope they would be amenable to it.

The Deputy of St. Martin:

There are a couple of ... the original plan they had was to put a new road through to just in front of Wesley Grove, in fact 2 new roads. One of which is marked down here as a key route and one would hope that that might still be moving forward.

Principal Planner, Planning and Environment:

Within the supplementary planning guidance, that was one of the planning gains that the Minister was seeking, was this new pedestrian route that would connect the park through past the Odeon into Wesley Church and that would still be a requirement in any future negotiations.

The Minister for Planning and Environment:

Yes, in order to take into account the traffic congestion that is caused by generally having too many schools in one parish and all the access routes converging on the Wellington Road area, it was mooted a long while ago that anything we could do to encourage the school kids to walk to school or to drop off at the library to do a bit of work before they caught a bus on their way to the

bus station was to be encouraged. So we put forward that as part of the planning gain. There would be an opportunity to have an identified route where the kids would feel safe and the parents feel safe to allow their kids to walk on their way through to the library and then further down to get their bus connections.

The Deputy of St. Martin:

Certainly a lot of children you see walking down Wellington Road and they cross straight over and cut through to the front ...

The Minister for Planning and Environment:

The retail offering that that would offer would be the café style type things to capture the school kids' interest or whatever on the route. So it was that type of shop offering that we were specifically looking forward to and anything that could be seen to be missing from the overall residential areas. When we design residential areas, we do not do it just to accommodate people for sleeping or whatever. They need to be part of the area and the areas have to work in their own right up to a point in terms of popping out to the corner shop for a can of cat food or whatever you do.

Principal Planner, Planning and Environment:

One of the main thrusts of the North of Town Masterplan, particularly for large developments, is to seek some form of public gain and seek improvements to the public realm. So on each of the sites, Ann Court, Le Masurier's and also Jersey Gas, we have been negotiating with them to improve that public realm, which is the area immediately around ... so rather than development just landing there from out of space and not having any benefit to the surrounding environment, we are looking for significant improvements.

The Deputy of St. Martin:

The indication on the Gas Works site, for example, that we have here would be different now if they were to put something forward. You would be looking for more public gain.

Principal Planner, Planning and Environment:

We are looking for public gain; we are looking for pedestrian opportunities through the site, say pedestrian routes, cycle routes ...

The Deputy of St. Martin:

Okay. Can I change the subject, Minister, and come very much more specifically to retail now? In the design guidance for St. Helier, when it comes to town centre in character area 8, there are 2 bullet points that start off where one is to: "Animate streets and public spaces" and the other one is

to: "Accommodate changing pressures for business and residential space." Something that we have had levelled at us during the course of this review so far has been a subject that you touch on in the first page of your submission to us, which is building bye-laws and the challenges that arise when retail premises are fitted out. I am thinking specifically here, and I am going to speak generally, but I would like your confirmation that if a shop or a premises applies for a change of use, somebody goes in and says that we then have to apply bye-laws, which in the case of a retail outlet would also involve a disabled toilet. Is that correct?

Principal Planner, Planning and Environment:

If I can just clarify the situation? There are 2 elements: there is the planning side of things and the building bye-laws. They are 2 different laws. Under the Planning law, generally, there is no change of use. If one retailer, say a furniture shop, wants to start trading as a clothes shop, there is no change of use. Change of use, there are some exceptions, normally to do with hot food/takeaway shops, but generally, if one trader ceases and another one takes over, there is no change of use. The other elements that come in though, is if they want to change signage and that is a planning matter and that is dealt with by a planning application and normally dealt with in a pretty quick time period. That enables the Minister to put on certain conditions in terms of the design of the sign and also the period of time that it might be up. With regard then to fitting out, this comes under the Building Bye-Laws (Jersey) 2007 law and this then deals with all the aspects of fire protection, access, structure, heating, lighting and also disabled access; things of that nature.

The Deputy of St. Martin:

I think I should have phrased my question a bit more generally. I think it is fair to say we are concerned about the potential for very small retail outlets to struggle during the change of use process, which gets to the point where the struggle is so great that they find they cannot achieve the change of use and the potential for a number of small retail outlets to basically stop trading because either they cannot get the planning approval or cannot meet the bye-laws. One issue that I particularly wanted to hone in on was the disabled toilets. Is there a situation where Planning would say: "Well, we recognise in this street here that the units are so small, fitting disabled toilets inside them is almost impractical", that the Government, T.T.S. or whoever, should be looking to provide public disabled toilets in the street?

The Minister for Planning and Environment:

I think we do that anyway generally and I think it is mainly anecdotal at the moment. There is a suggestion that there is a whole host of small shop owners struggling to fit a large number of disabled toilets into their primary reason for their trading and a lot of these things are ... it is a rule of thumb that is applied by the building regulations and I think the disabled toilets are more a

function of cafés and restaurants where people are sitting down and being served over a longer period of time. There are not that many shops at the moment that would be treated in the same way. If you are clothes shop and you have people just coming in and making a quick purchase and you are not on the premises for very long, then I think the extent to which you have to have a full range of types of toilet is considered differently.

The Deputy of St. Martin:

So you are generally happy that the requirements for toilet facilities, not only disabled but for toilet facilities in cafés, hot food and coffee shops ...

The Minister for Planning and Environment:

I think the laws at the moment are fairly generous, in particular into their interpretation. I have already heard that there is a local café - we could probably see it if we looked through the window at the moment - that was complaining the other day and somebody was suggesting that it was wrong that the toilet facilities were part of the residential accommodation up the stairs and they had to go up the stairs to go to the toilet. But that is an issue with a flourishing café that is providing a service and I think the 2 have to be played together and interpreted. If people are staying for a duration of time that means that the toilet experience, if I can put it that way, becomes a more important part of the experience of whatever they are there for, then monies will obviously be expended on upgrading that element of the service. So I think there is a scale of interventions as well as the hard and fast suggestions in there ...

The Deputy of St. Martin:

That particular one was not the one I was thinking about at all but seeing as we have mentioned it, if that small café at the moment was a clothes shop, for example, and somebody wanted to turn it into what it is now, they would be made to put disabled toilets on the ground floor?

The Minister for Planning and Environment:

No, they probably would not be asked to put disabled toilets on the ground floor, they might be asked to put a normal toilet in. There is a difference in facilities but the counterargument would be, well, with the parish of St. Helier spending £1 million on their new toilet block just around the corner in Conway Street, it might well be able to be argued by the applicant that disabled facilities to that extent are better provided by the parish through that Conway Street facility than for them to do the same thing.

The Deputy of St. Martin:

I might be asking the wrong Ministry but are we aware that there is a requirement for disabled public toilets within certain distances of each other or is that something that T.T.S. would know?

The Minister for Planning and Environment:

It is something that we have struggled with at Planning to try and stem the tide.

The Deputy of St. Martin:

Toilets being converted into coffee shops?

The Minister for Planning and Environment:

That is right and these days, you know, it is ...

The Deputy of St. Martin:

So there is no requirement on government to provide facilities ...

The Minister for Planning and Environment:

I think there is a general one and you are probably straining the area in terms of what is the extent of the Minister for Planning and Environment's powers ...

The Deputy of St. Martin:

Yes, I know ...

The Minister for Planning and Environment:

... in order to strategically plan districts. I think there are things I can do and things I cannot do and the overlap in this particular instance is through the building bye-laws.

The Connétable of Grouville:

You said you do not need a change of use for different types of retail, talking about furniture to clothing. Do you need a change of use to go to food, a coffee shop or ...?

Principal Planner, Planning and Environment:

A coffee shop would be dealt with under a different use class, so if it is a restaurant or a coffee shop, that would be ...

The Connétable of Grouville:

That is different to retail?

Principal Planner, Planning and Environment:

Would have a different use class, yes. There is an exemption, if you have a restaurant/coffee shop and you wish to then trade as a clothes shop and there is an automatic exemption under the general development order. So you could move from a restaurant, to a clothes shop ...

The Connétable of Grouville:

Back to retail but you cannot go the other way.

Principal Planner, Planning and Environment:

Yes, you cannot go the other way. You probably could but you would have to make an application.

The Minister for Planning and Environment:

I was a member of the Public Services Committee a number of years ago when we were having cutbacks and public conveniences was an area that was cut back, possibly too far. A common criticism at the moment, particularly by mothers with young children, is not enough potential toilet facilities in town generally. But they are the public convenience type, rather than the private shop owner convenience type.

The Deputy of St. Martin:

Well, we have the Minister for Transport and Technical Services in half an hour, so I am sure we will be asking him the same question. Although I am not sure if it his responsibility or the Constable's responsibility.

The Minister for Planning and Environment:

I think it is his responsibility.

The Deputy of St. Martin:

Okay. Our final, specific subject that we wanted to talk about, Minister, was historic buildings and I think in particular, we may as well ... the historic building we have particularly got in mind is the Central Market and the need to try to attract people from the King Street, Queen Street junction down towards the Central Market and then to enhance the retail experience in Beresford Street, the Fish Market, West Centre and we would really much like to see more flags and more ways that are making Halkett Place attractive for people to wander down towards.

[13:30]

We are aware that there might be some issues with the attaching of anything in the way of flags to historic buildings. Is that a policy that we should revisit?

The Minister for Planning and Environment:

It is a policy that is being revisited at the moment because I have had a number of similar suggestions that perhaps we are a little bit too precious with the hanging of signs or flags or whatever off the historic building fabric. That said, you could not have failed to notice that there are quite a number of more enterprising business people at the moment who are finding other ways to attach their signage to buildings in a way that would not cause a problem. I am fairly relaxed providing the historic fabric is not damaged but I would not go as far as saying: "Right, if you tap a nail in or put in a screw, that is damaging the building to the extent that would warrant not giving permission for a sign", but officers might feel differently.

The Deputy of St. Martin:

But from a Planning Department perspective, it is certainly a policy that is being looked at and one that we ...

The Minister for Planning and Environment:

It is being looked at, mainly because I think some people have pointed out, quite rightly, that there appear to be discrepancies with some of the larger businesses operating from larger historic buildings being treated perhaps differently to the smaller ones.

The Deputy of St. Martin:

It would have been that some of these large buildings would have had flags there historically anyway though.

The Minister for Planning and Environment:

Yes, but I mean they are not flags that say: "Come and get your cup of coffee at 10.00 a.m. and we will give you £1 off."

The Deputy of St. Martin:

No.

The Connétable of St. Ouen:

Can I just ask a question about the market, Minister? It has been suggested to us that possibly the inside of the market could do with a complete revamp. Do you foresee any problems from the planning point of view to alter the inside of the market?

The Minister for Planning and Environment:

I think with historic buildings we have an issue and, depending on a person's preferences, we all tend to hone in on a particular period of a building's existence where we think it is the bee's knees and nothing must be done to change it. So yes, I mean, a better example might be with windows. You could put forward a very, very strong case to say is it right that the only treatment of windows in converted Jersey farmhouses are the Georgian type sash window, when, if you look at the history of the building, they probably, if you go back far enough, did not have glass. You had wood and kind of mud in and probably wooden shutters outside. Now, as far as I am concerned, from a historic perspective, my taste is probably closer to the original intention of the building but only on the basis that the building continues to be used in that fashion. Obviously, in a lot of instances, that is likely to be deemed to be impractical and if the Minister for Planning and Environment was encouraging people to take out their Georgian sash windows and just have open spaces and curtains or whatever, then that would be seen to be irrational. But it is a historic perspective that chimes with me. Others prefer the more modern up-to-date thing with the double glazing or whatever. When we look at the markets, we have an issue. I can remember trading down there with my father a number of years ago, many, many years ago, when the market aspects of the market were more of a market. Since then, it has annoyed me - although I have not told anybody - over a number of years we have had a drift out of the, in essence, prime reason for having the covered market structure, which was to have open markets, into the shops and then the shops, although we have had restrictions being placed on what could be sold - it had to be in the meat trade or the veg trade or the flower trade or whatever - have moved into selling boots and selling ... there is one place that even sells windows, I think. We have had a whole host of things. The essence of the building has changed. The building structure has not too much. What we have put inside it has. So when people start getting all rose-tinted glasses and saying: "Okay, we should be protecting the essence of the market" I think it is absolutely vital that people define exactly what it is that ticks their box before we all agree that that is what we are going to do. Deputy Luce suggested that perhaps we should be doing more at Planning to have the roads lined with flags. Well, when do you line roads with flags? Buckingham Palace when the Queen is doing her bit, that is one thing, but is it an acceptable practice that goes back into the mists of time that defines the Jersey essence that we are trying to encourage in order to put back this unique kind of experience? I am not sure it is.

The Deputy of St. Martin:

I am glad you raised the internal layout of the market, Minister, because I think I would probably agree with you that I do not know that the stores laid out as they are at the moment were the original way they were done.

The Minister for Planning and Environment:

No, they are not.

The Deputy of St. Martin:

Certainly, I think the Constable's suggesting ... we are obviously not looking to change the infrastructure of the roof or the walls, but if the market itself needs ...

The Minister for Planning and Environment:

No, but it is even down to the fountain. If you go back, in some years we have had fish in that and that even extended to a bit of pond weed, and then other years we are down to coins. In other years it has been empty because it is being cleaned. So, what is it we are trying to do?

The Deputy of St. Martin:

Well, I think that is one of the ... certainly, the central market is going to be a large section of our review that we come up with because I think we, along with a lot of other people, see the central market as an important part of St. Helier and it needs to maintain it. So we need to find ways to attract more people there.

The Minister for Planning and Environment:

Yes, and some of the traders, if you want to go down to the lower level, have realised that and continued to trade in the same way as we used to trade there. One proprietor, for example, has moved into ethnic-style vegetables or whatever so you do not have to go and buy your curry ingredients or whatever from the supermarket in a dried form. You can go and buy them in the vegetable form and grind your own. I think that is absolutely right. But it is not quite the same as going to Chinatown or whatever, to their vegetable stores, or going down to Billingsgate or Covent Garden, which has changed as well.

The Deputy of St. Martin:

If the theme of the central market changed slightly so it became a centre for people to meet more often and it had an area for entertainment and other things like that, would that be a planning issue?

The Minister for Planning and Environment:

It would be a planning issue and you might need a change of use if you were going to turn it into a bandstand, which it would probably be closer to, or an entertainment centre like a covered café. But then again, we have allowed a lot of the florists to move out of the central section, which was protected at one stage by the market organising committee to ensure that you had your core trades, bearing in mind that you did have shops around the outer periphery, to continue to offer the flowers and the meat and the vegetables.

The Deputy of St. Martin:

I do not know that we have been aware of any suggestions at all that have said that they want the core trades to disappear. I think everybody would expect the markets ...

The Minister for Planning and Environment:

But we have allowed it to happen already up to a point.

The Deputy of St. Martin:

Well, I would suggest it may be a combination of allowing it to happen, but also you have to take in mind that there are not as many ... I am not sure that if there had been a lot of market traders wanting to take it on whether we would have managed to keep the market full of traders.

The Minister for Planning and Environment:

Yes, but it is interesting, I have spoken to the market traders and the organisers over a number of years and there is even a reluctance to allow the States to expend monies on renewing the flooring. A number of traders were saying that you go to some of the more upper class pubs or offerings or whatever in the U.K. where you have sawdust on the floor and they are the real McCoy in terms of pub offerings that you would have expected to have seen perhaps in the 1600s and 1700s. In the same vein, a number of the market traders were saying that in order to go towards changing all of the flooring into some polished marble or whatever, in doing that we would be changing the very essence of the market, which is not in that particular direction. So it is all down to subjective judgments as to what we all expect out of the market and the time period that we are all nostalgically harking back to.

The Connétable of St. Ouen:

When you say you have spoken to the traders, have you spoken to them as individuals or as a ...?

The Minister for Planning and Environment:

I have spoken to them as individuals.

The Connétable of St. Ouen:

Yes, but it is just that there appears to be difficulty in finding a body of people to speak to. I was interested in who you have spoken to.

The Minister for Planning and Environment:

Well, this is the problem. We all have our own different interpretations and if you give it to one or 2 of those individuals, they would perhaps turn the clocks back right to day one for that style of market trading, which may well tick all the boxes, whereas some of the newcomers to the market

who are selling boots or shoes or whatever or repairing clocks and watches may be wanting to go in a different direction. So it is probably like planning, it is somewhere in the middle.

Principal Planner, Planning and Environment:

Could I just say from my point of view, from a planning point of view, I think the market is such a special place that it almost warrants a co-ordinating group to take it forward? I know Property Holdings are responsible for it, but because of its historic nature and because of all the market traders' involvement, it is the sort of project that needs to be handled quite specially, I think. The thing that comes to mind is several years ago when the fountain was refurbished. There was a very special fountain in the middle there and there was no co-ordination and the fountain was refurbished. We have ended up with something which lost that sort of historic integrity of the fountain. We have quite a nice dressed granite fountain now but certainly not as good as it was, and I remember that caused some problems. In many respects, I think a co-ordinated approach to designing the interior and getting it right would probably be helpful.

The Deputy of St. Martin:

One final, final issue that I have scribbled down here which I failed to mention: there is some talk, Minister, of the retail heart of St. Helier shrinking, and that may well be the case, we do not know. But if it does, there will become areas on the periphery which were historically retail which may become empty and would require a change of use. Is your Ministry going to be sympathetic towards areas of old retail changing into accommodation? It would seem an obvious move to take retail areas which are closed or shops in particular and convert them into accommodation.

The Minister for Planning and Environment:

I think we have been doing that for a while. Although there is a secondary trading area and we do allow a whole range of things to happen in that secondary trading area, there have been a number of proprietors in town who have moved office type functions into what were old Georgian shop frontages. That has caused a few problems with not having particularly any goods to display because it is a service they are providing, but we have allowed that. I think generally it is an ebb and flow type of situation. What we have to guard against in the long term is allowing things to happen in a way that is inflexible and does not allow further change should the requirement be there. Generally, the point you make about the loss or the shrinkage of the retail area is a good one, in particular in relation to internet shopping. We were discussing this at a Council of Ministers fairly recently in terms of whether or not we should be encouraging a trial for a 2-year period to see whether or not Sunday trading should be allowed in order to get more people coming into town to spread the goodwill of the shopping experience or for whatever reason you are doing it. The key thing in planning terms about the retail experience is that in a lot of instances they only take place if you have a particular size of footfall. It is the same thing with people running bars and cafes or

whatever. If you do not have enough people, you are not going to stay open for 24 hours a day in order to attract one or 2 customers. Likewise, when people go to town, particularly if we look back to our parents or our grandparents, because they lived in countryside areas that trip to town was always something extra special. It is not something that you did every day. The type of retail shopping experiences that have come to take their place have been ones that are fairly utilitarian. So you go to a supermarket; you go to buy a packet of this or a drink of that ...

The Deputy of St. Martin:

Because our standard of living is much better than it was a generation ago.

The Minister for Planning and Environment:

Because the standard of living is better. I think the standard of living may be better, but the quality of life is the bit that we are all hankering back after.

[13:45]

So if we are going to have a general drift, as I think we are going to have, towards people preferring to purchase a lot of the things that they would have otherwise gone to town, especially on Saturday, to buy or to try on, then you can see that now with a number of the computer packages. You can get measuring devices that take your weight and your shape and your size. You take all the exact details and there is a company set up in the U.K. - and we may even have an offshoot over here before long - that gives you perfectly tailored suits without having to step into the tailors or the gents' outfitters or whatever. Now, once you get into that style of convenience, people are going to have to be a little bit more creative and think about other reasons for wanting to socialise and aggregate in the central areas. If we do not do that and do not find something to take its place and do it pretty sharply, then the reasons for having towns and cities or whatever, which are generally collection devices to allow some of these facilities to take place, that reason will disappear and I think there will be further pressure for people to want to live in the countryside because they can get all the benefits of living in the town online. If we allow in planning terms the arguments to gain ground and momentum in that vein, then I think we run the risk of upsetting our Island Plan policies, which inevitably will mean people wanting to live in the countryside by preference because there is no real reason for living in town. That is something that we have to watch.

The Connétable of St. Ouen:

If we go through this potential trial period of 18 months to have shopping at all times, do you think it would be difficult to reverse that?

The Minister for Planning and Environment:

Yes, I do. I do, yes.

The Connétable of St. Ouen:

So once we implement that it would be ...

The Minister for Planning and Environment:

Yes, I think once we do it, it is there. If you look at the number of shops that are disadvantaged from trading on a Sunday, it is only a handful of the larger ones. Everybody else can trade if they wish to, and a lot of them do not because there is not the volume of business. But this is the thing that surprised me the other day. We have the tourism stats coming in saying that we had maybe 300,000 visitors when in times past it was closer to a million, and the newly convened Tourism Board are suggesting, somewhat mistakenly I think, that they are going to wave a magic wand and those numbers are going to go back to the good old days of a million visitors. I think they are living in cloud cuckoo land. I do not think that is likely to happen. If it does, the planning fallout will be that we need more beds. We do not have enough. A number of hoteliers, as you know, over the last 20 or 30 years have decided to sell their hotels or accommodation as a way of gaining their pension monies or whatever and the number of beds has reduced massively. So to think that we can get back to a similar style of holiday offering that we had when we had the so-called bucket and spade brigade, cheap and cheerful or whatever, is mistaken. So I think it is positive rather than negative but we have to look at the bigger picture for the next 10 to 20 years and say right, okay, if people through the Island Plan are being told that the best place for building buildings is in town and built-up areas at the moment in order to save their countryside, which is more precious, then we have to find new reasons for encouraging them to not only live in town but to spend their recreation time in town as well and to attract others from the countryside to participate in the same type of experiences. I do not think it is just going to be shopping that is going to be the key attractor. It is going to have to be something else. I have a few ideas as to what it might be, but it is up to others to pitch in and to realise what the bigger potential picture may well be.

The Deputy of St. Martin:

I am going to wind up there, Minister, because we are over time. Thank you for coming today. It has been very useful and I am sure we will come up with some good ideas to try to stimulate retail. With your vote of enthusiasm for finding new ideas we might be coming back to you.

The Minister for Planning and Environment:

You will have to put me on the board then. [Laughter]

The Deputy of St. Martin:

Thank you very much indeed.

The Minister for Planning and Environment:

Thanks.

[13:49]