

2024.05.21

3.9 Deputy L.K.F. Stephenson of the Minister for Infrastructure regarding plans to boost the capacity of Jersey's mains drains network. (OQ.98/2024)

Will the Minister provide an update to the Assembly regarding plans to boost the capacity of Jersey's mains drains network to accommodate the development of further housing? Particularly in relation to any sites that have already been rezoned for housing, but where the development is currently delayed due to a lack of drain capacity.

The Connétable of St. John (The Minister for Infrastructure):

Much of the Island's foul sewer network is nearing maximum capacity. We have managed to secure significant additional funding for 2024 and 2025, totalling £15.6 million to start the key infrastructure projects to address some of these wider network issues. In the short term, these projects will include the West Park surface water separation - an outfall project - due for completion by December, Maufant, St. Peter and the airport, and the West Hill key infrastructure project, which is due to be completed ... the first part is due to be completed by December 2025 to tie in the proposed developments at J1109 and T1404. In order to meet the long-term needs, the department is requesting additional funding from 2026 onwards, approximately £10 million per annum, to address further infrastructure improvements to give the Island greater foul sewage capacity where it is required. Further local sewage network upgrades may be required to be implemented by the developers to meet the specific needs of each of the development sites. My department is fully committed to delivering the required infrastructure, provided that we can assure further funding in 2026 onwards.

3.9.1 Deputy L.K.F. Stephenson:

I thank the Minister for his answer. Could he provide some more details about plans for the St. Peter facility, which I believe is to be to the north of the airport, including when the work will start and finish and how that will be paid for? Is that coming out of the money that has already been allocated?

The Connétable of St. John:

There are a number of proposed developments at St. Peter's. One of those developers is in discussion with the department about extending the network to near the Parish Hall, which will be a requirement of the developer. The discussions are ongoing with potential sites with landowners and I am advised that those discussions are very positive. I do not believe that any of the developments have been delayed; the first of the plans were approved last week by the Planning Committee and the Planning Committee was given assurance by the department that the connection would be in place in time for those completions.

3.9.2 Deputy S.M. Ahier:

The Minister just mentioned the Planning Committee last week which discussed Field J1109 at Sion and the main concern was the drainage problem. One of his officers said that more funding will be required to ensure that the sewage system does not exceed capacity in 2026. Does the Minister believe that funding will be available to carry out that work?

The Connétable of St. John:

I believe that the West Hill works will be done in 2 phases, and I believe to connect the 2 new proposed developments, that will be part of phase one. Therefore, I believe that will be done in time by the end of December 2025.

3.9.3 Deputy S.M. Ahier:

Is it not true that to complete these drainage works that the Minister will need alternative funding streams? Is it not his intention to bring in a waste charge before 2026 to ensure this happens?

The Connétable of St. John:

There is no decision been made as to how we achieve additional funding for 2026 onwards; those discussions are ongoing and obviously would be subject to a debate in this House. But there is absolutely no decision on how we would get that funding at this time.

3.9.4 Deputy H.L. Jeune:

I think my question was a little bit answered by the previous question, because the Minister mentioned that he needs £10 million per annum extra from 2026, yet the Minister for Treasury and Resources said that only business cases in the C.S.P. would be increased in some questions earlier. Given that the infrastructure is not mentioned as a C.S.P. priority, is the Minister confident that he will convince the Council of Ministers to agree to this extra funding?

The Connétable of St. John:

I think you will find that the public realm is part of the C.S.P., which is part of the infrastructure. The sewage treatment works at Bellozanne had significant investment and has got plenty of capacity. Hindsight being such a wonderful thing, perhaps the sewage treatment works should have been built in phases and we should have spent more time working out how we were going to get the sewage to Bellozanne, rather than how we were going to treat it when it got there. We heard in an earlier question about the challenges at Grève de Lecq, the importance of having a robust network. In addition to the capital works that I have described for the new project, we spend over £6 million a year maintaining our existing network. So I think it is vital, not only that the Council of Ministers understands the importance of having good infrastructure, but also this Assembly.

3.9.5 Deputy H.L. Jeune:

I just remind the Minister that the public realm in the C.S.P. is only mentioned in relation to St. Helier, and of course this question was related to the rezoning of houses in other places around Jersey, and affordable housing at that. Would the Minister not agree that it would be important for the C.S.P. to also recognise affordable housing being developed in other parts of the Island, and that not providing the correct infrastructure ahead of affordable housing will act as a blocker rather than an enabler?

The Connétable of St. John:

We discussed this very subject at my recent Scrutiny Panel hearing when we discussed why there are only 12 priorities in the C.S.P.; I said there could have been 120. The drainage infrastructure is vital. We have to have it. It is not a nice to have, it is not an aspiration, it is essential for this Island. I do not believe that any of the sites rezoned in the bridging Island Plan have been or will be delayed due to my department and its ability to provide the infrastructure.

3.9.6 Deputy K.L. Moore of St. Mary, St. Ouen and St. Peter:

In an earlier answer, the Minister mentioned that some developments would rely on delivering improved drainage through planning obligations. Does the Minister accept that for some relatively small sites with, say, 130 or 60 units, covering that cost as a result of planning obligations in addition to the other items that are required of them by his department will only seek to increase the costs of those homes to the ultimate beneficiaries who are people who are seeking affordable homes?

The Connétable of St. John:

A lot will depend on the price paid for the land and whether the person buying the land understood the full requirements when they undertook that purchase. I am not sure of the details of the price of the land at St. Peter's in question, but I am aware of the land at Sion, where the purchaser paid well over the odds for affordable home provision. It is in the round. The planning obligations that go on to each home go right to the bottom line on what the Islander pays for those homes or the housing provider pays for the rental property. It is up to us all to work together to ensure those prices are as low as possible, but I do believe there is also a responsibility on the people that purchase the land and pay the price they do, and they understand their responsibilities when they do so.

3.9.7 Deputy L.K.F. Stephenson:

I would just like a little bit more clarity about the funding from the Minister, if possible, please. Am I right to interpret his answer that the £15.6 million that is currently allocated for 2024-2025, will that cover the 4 - I believe it was - listed projects: West Park, Maufant, the airport and one other? If that was West Hill or not. Will that cover those in their entirety or will some of those projects require further funding? If so, have any discussions taken place about what funding mechanism will be used to pay for them?

The Connétable of St. John:

It is too early to say, because the work is underway. Some £1.9 million has been spent on preparation work. We need to survey what we currently have; we need to spend a lot more time and effort on separating surface water from sewage. If we are successful in that, as we are doing at West Park, we will need less in terms of attenuation tanks than if we do not do that. The civil design and tender documents are currently being prepared. Once we receive those tenders back, we will be in a better position to answer that question.

[11:00]