

## **2.1 Connétable A.S. Crowcroft of St. Helier of the Minister for Planning and Environment regarding the decision to approve a large residential development on the headland above Portelet:**

Will the Minister explain the reasons behind his decision to approve a large residential development on the headland above Portelet against the recommendation of his senior planning officers and in spite of opposition from the National Trust and other bodies?

### **Senator F.E. Cohen (The Minister for Planning and Environment):**

Portelet had an existing consent for the same number of units. I regarded the previously approved scheme as not making the best of this wonderful site. Had an existing consent not been in place I may not have approved the application. The developer commissioned Sir Richard McCormack in partnership with a local architectural practice to design a new scheme for the site. Richard McCormack is one of Europe's leading architects and a former president of the Royal Institute of British Architects. He has been responsible for designing many award-winning buildings including the Ruskin Library at Lancaster and the Jersey Archive. The McCormack proposal at Portelet is for the same number of houses and apartments as previously approved, albeit that it has more developed space. The scheme is, in my view, of exceptional architectural competence. It is a 21st century design of the highest standard. A number of issues are still outstanding. I have not, as yet, approved 2 of the proposed houses and the architect is examining lowering the height of some of the buildings. The colour and materials used in the exterior are still to be finalised to increase local relevance. I have also required that the buildings are constructed to relevant European environmental standards. While the planning officer had recommended refusal, the department's architect stressed the exceptional quality of the architecture and supported my approval of the scheme. It is not unusual for the Panel or I to determine an application contrary to officer recommendation. Only 2 objections were received from private individuals, the only other objection was from the National Trust. This was a short 2 sentence letter but this did not emerge until the day before the hearing. This short letter raised the issue of sustainability, an issue that the planning officer advised was not relevant as the site already had a live consent. In conclusion, I am certain that this development will be exceptional and I am privileged to have had the opportunity of approving a scheme of this quality for Jersey.

### **2.1.1 The Connétable of St. Helier:**

While I share the Minister's enthusiasm for good architecture and, indeed, St. Helier's recently working with Sir Richard McCormack on a scheme for the town area; does he not believe that residential accommodation of this size and this height is not more appropriately situated in a town area for reasons of sustainability, if not the visual impact on the precious west coast of the Island?

### **Senator F.E. Cohen:**

No, Sir, I do not. The fact is, as I have already stated, the application had an existing live consent which I regarded to be unimpressive and not making the best of the site. The scheme, while bold and perhaps could be considered to have come from the school of brutalism, it is in fact designed specifically for the site, will be bold and imposing and I believe will be a wonderful scheme and of great benefit to the Island.

### **2.1.2 Deputy G.P. Southern of St. Helier:**

Will the Minister state whether we now have a new Planning Law which dictates that as long as you employ a prestigious award-winning architect you can build where you like?

### **Senator F.E. Cohen:**

I regard the Deputy's question as rather silly. We all know that the Island has been lacking in high quality architecture for many decades. **[Approbation]** I am following a policy that encourages great architecture in the Island and I am delighted that we now, for the first time in decades, have the opportunity of buildings designed by architects of the quality of Sir Richard McCormack, Sir

Michael Hopkins and, indeed, others, and I am delighted to have had the opportunity of bringing those architects to Jersey.

**2.1.3 Deputy C.J. Scott Warren of St. Saviour:**

Would the Minister accept that it is the location which is important, even for the most excellent architecture? The location for each building has to be right. Would he agree with that, Sir?

**Senator F.E. Cohen:**

I most certainly would agree with that and, as I have made clear, that had this site not had a pre-existing consent for the same number of units, the outcome of this application may have been somewhat different. But I would reiterate that the scheme was designed specifically for this seaside location by Sir Richard McCormack and I think it is wholly appropriate.

**2.1.4 Deputy P.V.F. Le Claire of St. Helier:**

Normally we have come to expect there to be a certain amount of planning gain when developments of this nature take place in Jersey. What planning gains will the Island expect to receive from this development?

**Senator F.E. Cohen:**

The specific gain, of course, is that we will have a scheme of exceptional architectural competence. I was not given a free hand in this development because very clearly there was a pre-existing consent. The current application was, in my view, a significant improvement over the pre-existing application. There is a gain in that the total development area is a little less than the existing developed area on the site.

**2.1.5 Deputy G.P. Southern:**

Is the Minister not aware that the site already has a prestigious award-winning architect for it design? He was God.

**Senator F.E. Cohen:**

It is a rather strange question from the particular Deputy.

**2.1.6 Deputy A.D. Lewis of St. John:**

The Minister used the words that such a development would be bold and imposing; does he really believe that in a spot such as Portelet those are descriptions that would be appropriate?

**Senator F.E. Cohen:**

Yes, I do. I have taken a great interest in architecture most of my life, and I believe that this scheme, as bold and imposing, is wholly appropriate for the area and as I have previously said, I am delighted to have brought such a scheme to the Island.

**2.1.7 Deputy R.G. Le Hérissier of St. Saviour:**

I do have a conflict as a member of the National Trust Council. Would the Minister not accept that his statement that he only received a 2-line letter the day before is slightly off-beam in that that was the time it took to reach him? That was not because of late delivery from the Trust. Would he not also accept, Sir, that there were quite legitimate concerns voiced over a long period which undoubtedly reached his ears from various Jersey heritage bodies, and that he should and would have responded to those in any event?

**Senator F.E. Cohen:**

It was not a 2-line letter, it was a 2-sentence letter. We are not entirely sure why the letter only emerged the day before. The National Trust seem to think they sent it some time before, the department have no record of having received it. Having said that, the copy I received was an

unsigned copy the day before. It raised issues about design in very simple terms but primarily it raised the issue of sustainability, which is, as I have said, was not relevant as there was a pre-existing consent. I have repeatedly asked the National Trust and other heritage bodies to engage with the department at the earliest stages of an application rather than at the end, and I must urge them again to do the same. I have recently invited the National Trust to meet me on a monthly basis to go through applications at the beginning of the application process; it is far easier for the National Trust to have a relevant input at the initial stages of a development rather than appearing the day before an application is to be determined. It just makes it extraordinarily difficult. There were no other objections from other heritage bodies.