

4.14 Deputy T.M. Pitman of the Minister for Education, Sport and Culture regarding the future use of St. James' Centre:

Given the continued cost to the taxpayer of keeping St. James' draped in scaffolding - around £70,000 in the last 5 years - will the Minister advise whether he supports transferring this building to the Jersey Youth Service and, if so, would he undertake to liaise with Property Holdings to ascertain whether the cost of making the structure good could be met from the sale of the existing and dilapidated La Motte Street Centre?

The Deputy of St. John (The Minister for Education, Sport and Culture):

The future use of St. James' has been under consideration for many months, I am told, although this was before my time in the Assembly. Liaison with Property Holdings has already taken place. I am pleased to report that Property Holdings have been able to find a solution. The funding necessary to carry out the remedial work to the church building will be found from Property Holdings maintenance budget for 2012. This work will be completed in 2012 and the scaffolding can then be removed. I am also pleased to report that the Treasurer of the States has agreed a feasibility study of the St. James' site and that this study should be prepared to show how it could be redeveloped. I understand that this includes consideration of moving the Youth Service to the St. James' buildings. The Deputy's question was deliberately couched: "Do I support it?", the move of the new centre to the St. James' building, and without having looked at all of the details my initial reaction is, yes, I would support that. The review will be complete by the end of March 2012. At that time I will have discussions with the Assistant Minister for Treasury and Resources to agree the best way forward. I can assure the Deputy that I will give those discussions a high level of urgency at the end of March.

4.14.1 Deputy T.M. Pitman:

Could I just say that I really welcome the news from the Minister, and could he perhaps clarify the House why he has managed to come up with a solution now and yet for 5 years we have been draping it in scaffolding at huge cost to the taxpayer? What is the magic wand he has managed to wave?

The Deputy of St. John:

I would love to be able to say that I take the responsibility for that, but I am afraid I cannot. This was formulated by the department with Property Holdings prior to my time. It would be very nice to take the credit for it, but in all honesty I cannot do that.

4.14.2 Deputy J.H. Young:

Would the Minister please confirm that within the feasibility study of the future use of St. James', and his personal commitment to the transfer of the building to the Youth Service, would he please give a commitment that he will take into account, the present valuable use by the cultural sector of those buildings, albeit in difficult circumstances because of their condition, including facilities for such groups as the Jersey Youth Theatre, which has accommodated the expansion of cultural activities in Jersey. Would he please give a commitment in that study that he will ensure in some way that that use can continue albeit potentially on a shared basis? Also would he clarify whether he would wish to see that use continue in some way?

The Deputy of St. John:

To enable improved access for young people in St. James', and the general public, to the Youth Service officer in their change of venue to St. James' there is going to have to be several elements to it. It should allow for a wide range of arts projects and provide an alternative to using licence premises, i.e. bars and nightclubs, for events such as Gig School and Junior Battle of the Bands. The financial basis of the proposal is that the sale value of the La Motte Street- the existing Youth Service venue - the estimated value is in the region of £5 million and this would be sufficient to meet the relocation costs and moving the Youth Service. It will include the outstanding

maintenance costs and it would leave additional funding to be used for purposes not yet agreed, but including investment in the facilities of the Jersey Arts Centre and compensate for the loss of St. James'. To enable the Youth Service to use St. James' it would be necessary for both the Arts Centre and the Arts Trust to vacate the vicarage and for the Youth Service to take operational control of the former church. However once converted this would remain in community use, not only by the Youth Service but also by other groups including potentially the Arts Centre and the Arts Trust, which I think is the thrust of the Deputy's questions.

4.14.3 Deputy G.C. Baudains:

With regards to St. James', is the Minister sure the building is worth repairing. The structural engineers have indicated to me that the problems are so severe and so longstanding that the only viable option for this building is to demolish it.

The Deputy of St. John:

I would be led by Property Holdings on this. It is their call. It is in their core remit to decide on the very things that Deputy Baudains is alluding to. I remain to wait until the end of March when Property Holdings will be having meetings with my department where we can finally assess the kind of problems that Deputy Baudains is referring to. I am assured at the moment that overall ...

The Bailiff:

A concise answer, Deputy. I think you have answered it.

4.14.4 Deputy T.A. Vallois:

Could the Minister confirm whether the estimation of £5 million for La Motte Street includes part-use for affordable housing and social housing?

The Deputy of St. John:

I am led to believe that it is valued at £5 million by Property Holdings. I am not clear on exactly the basis of that valuation. I do not have that information but I can supply it to the Deputy at a later date.

4.14.5 Deputy T.M. Pitman:

It is good to see the Youth Service apparently being welcomed. We will be watching. Could I just ask the Minister if he will confirm that with this refurbishment he will also make sure the steps are refurbished so St. Helier No. 1 can have our polling station back?

The Deputy of St. John:

I will certainly bring that to the discussion at the table of Property Holdings.