

## **2.10 Senator S.C. Ferguson of the Minister for Economic Development regarding the provision of allotments:**

What is the progress on the provision of allotments?

**Senator A.J.H. Maclean (The Minister for Economic Development):**

If I may, could I ask my Assistant Minister, Constable Norman, to answer this question?

**Connétable L. Norman of St. Clement (Assistant Minister for Economic Development - rapporteur):**

The Allotment Working Group has now submitted to me its final report and it is a thorough and excellent piece of work. We are now moving on to the implementation stage of the recommendations contained in that report, part of which I hope will be the development of Field 195 at Les Creux, St. Brelade, which is in public ownership because that has had planning permission for allotments done 5 or 6 years ago but the scheme was dropped. We will be looking for planning permission for that and hopefully that will become a flagship and a benchmark project to the benefit of the Island and in particular the residents of St. Brelade.

### **2.10.1 Senator S.C. Ferguson:**

The proposals in the report, a copy of which I have here, require a simple organisation, a start-up loan and subsequent self-financing similar to something like the St. Brelade's Bowling Club and the report contains realistic costings. Why is the Assistant Minister referring the project to an established organisation in the Island to obtain research into resourcing, particularly when field 195 is shovel ready with planning permission as a pilot project?

**The Connétable of St. Clement:**

When we are dealing with public money, which we would in this case, I think we all have a duty to make sure that we have the best value and the most appropriate administration available. The working group did, not unanimously, recommend the setting up of a new quango called the Jersey Allotment Board, which would have paid officials. That is still an option but I am looking at other options to see if there are organisations or administrations already in existence which can carry out the work that this Allotment Board would have done, providing better value to the community and therefore keeping the costs of providing allotments to the public at the lowest amount possible.

### **2.10.2 Senator S.C. Ferguson:**

The Minister is aware that the seed corn, not the grant, the seed corn for this project is something in the order of £40,000. Is the Minister aware that the current costs of the Country Gardens Scheme, run by an established group, costs the holder £200 a year and requires, in addition, membership of the overall group, while a simple allotment association, as recommended, would cost members £100 a year and still be self-financing?

**The Connétable of St. Clement:**

Those figures do not stack up. If you take purely the figures in the Working Group report, you would need something like 1,000 allotments for it to break even and that simply is not going to happen. I think the Country Gardens Scheme, which has been

run but the R.J.A. and H.S. (Royal Jersey Agricultural and Horticultural Society) is an excellent project. It provides good value to those who have taken advantage of them, as can be seen by the very speedy way that they were taken up by the R.J.A. and H.S. members.

**Senator S.C. Ferguson:**

Why then ...

**The Bailiff:**

No, I am sorry, Senator, I think you have had a few. I will come back to you at the end. The Deputy of St. John.

**2.10.3 The Deputy of St. John:**

Is the Minister telling Members that the group that had been looking into this particular subject for so long - and they are in fact all within the agricultural and horticultural industry - have only found one field, given that I am having reports from across the Island that people require allotments? We are now coming into the second winter, when you have to prepare your land for planting in the spring and yet he has only come up with one field? Will he confirm that the people who carry this work out for him are all in the agricultural industry therefore they are not really interested in seeing allotments?

**The Connétable of St. Clement:**

No, that is not true. The Working Group comprised of a number of independent people; individuals from the R.J.A. and H.S., the Jersey Organic Association and indeed the Jersey Farmers' Union. We wanted a broad church. Sorry, I do not think the Deputy is very well. He seems to be having some sort of fit. [Laughter] They have done a truly excellent job and there are a number of sites which can be identified. The important thing is to get one site - a flagship site - working and up and running as a benchmark and an example for future developments. We have a number of sites. I can think of one in Trinity, another one in St. Clement, which the Minister for Planning and Environment wants to build upon; there are a number of sites. What we need to do is to get this right. We are talking about public money and it is a relatively new venture for Jersey. We need to get it right and if we can get one benchmark, flagship project up and running in the relatively short term, it will help other sites to be developed in the future. Of course, if there are other sites and private individuals want to use their land for this purpose, they are perfectly entitled to do so. They do not have to wait for the States to make a decision on this.

**2.10.4 The Deputy of St. John:**

Can I come back on that, please? So, the Minister is telling us that the group comes from a wide spectrum, given that the majority of them are all in agriculture in one form or another and they are in fact creating a protectionism situation for their own members? Is the Minister telling this House that we need a flagship area in the first instance, given that R.J.A. and H.S. have already been running one in St. Lawrence for 2 years, or coming up for 2 years, is that not sufficient? Is it that the real answer is that most of the Parishes do not want to see huts and the like within allotments and thereby they are standing on it, for want of a better word, or sitting on it? Would the Minister look at using Anderson shelters within allotments which are buried within the ground and can be quite easily covered with soil and therefore they could be planted over the top? The Minister needs to be looking wider than his current scope.

**The Connétable of St. Clement:**

The Deputy is making assumptions which simply are not true. I believe, and my experience is that the Constables in general are supportive of such initiatives as allotment schemes and certainly the Planning Department have been very supportive and helpful. I think we have got a wonderful opportunity here and instead of being negative about it we should be positive and look forward to a bright future in this area.

**2.10.5 Deputy D.J. De Sousa:**

The Connétable mentioned a field in St. Brelade; have any areas been identified in and around St. Helier and, if not, why not? If they have; how many?

**The Connétable of St. Clement:**

I cannot recall any being specifically noted in the report in the vicinity of St. Helier but clearly it is obvious to me that what we want is areas near the urban conurbations because we do not want people travelling out to the country to look after things. I mean I can think of one or 2 in St. Clement, as I mentioned before and I am sure there are others in St. Helier but what I want to do is not be running before we can walk. Let us make sure we get the administration right, let us make sure we get the pricing right, let us make sure we get the technology right, so that we can develop the scheme bit by bit. Do not try and do everything at once; have a flagship benchmark scheme and then build it on from there.

**2.10.6 Deputy D.J. De Sousa:**

It is okay that we take our time and do it properly but most of the concentration of accommodation is in St. Helier. Most people do not have gardens or anywhere where they can grow anything. I have been contacted by a large number of people that would like to see it in St. Helier. It is important that we have it in St. Helier, so surely it should have started in St. Helier and not St. Brelade.

**The Connétable of St. Clement:**

The Deputy makes a very valid point. The advantage of the St. Brelade project of course is that the land is already in public ownership, it has had planning permission in the past to be used for this purpose and of course we cannot pretend; there are a lot of people living in St. Brelade as well as in St. Helier who would welcome this facility. Personally, if the Deputy can help me identify some sites in St. Helier, yes, let us go for them.

**2.10.7 Deputy R.G. Le Hérissier:**

Would the rapporteur refute the slur upon the R.J.A. and H.S. by the Deputy of St. John that they are a protectionist body given that they do not usually plough their own furrow? [Laughter] Would he not say that they have pioneered the use of allotments and have been much more outward looking than other bodies?

**The Connétable of St. Clement:**

The Deputy is absolutely right. They have been pioneers in this field in recent times and they should be congratulated on the efforts that they have made.

**2.10.8 Deputy D.J.A. Wimberley of St. Mary:**

If the rapporteur does not hurry up there will not be any sites left in St. Helier because we will have accommodated the extra 7,000 people on those sites. [Approbation]

But my question is I am just puzzled, this report is referred to and I am not aware that it has come to Members and it would be very nice if I could have sight of it, thank you. That is a question, by the way.

**The Connétable of St. Clement:**

The report was a report to me by the Working Group. It is about 2.5 inches thick with all its appendices but I am quite happy to let the Deputy and anybody else who wants to have a photocopy of the executive summary made available to them.

**2.10.9 The Deputy of St. Mary:**

I do not want an executive summary only; I might wish to go into the full document and I would like a reference and is that possible, so I can look at it on the web? If he says it is 2.5 inches thick, I would rather not have it but I would like to be able to see it. It is an important matter for my constituents anyway.

**The Connétable of St. Clement:**

The full document, there is but one copy of the 2.5 inch thick document, would be available at the Howard Davis Farm for any Member to inspect, by appointment, with the appropriate officer.

**2.10.10 Deputy J.A. Hilton of St. Helier:**

The Constable asked Deputy De Sousa whether she knew of any land that is available in St. Helier for allotments. May I suggest that he might like to consider Field 1248 at La Pouquelaye [**Laughter**] which was refused for housing last week? In the middle of a built-up area, it may be that he might like to look at that and consult with residents of La Pouquelaye to see whether it would be suitable. Thank you.

**The Connétable of St. Clement:**

I do hope that my role as allotment star is not going to put me in the position of having to be the anti-planning Minister as well.

**2.10.11 Senator S.C. Ferguson:**

The Minister has rubbished the estimates which were based on real quotations. Has he queried the validity of these with the group and as a corollary to that, can he not arrange to have the whole report published electronically for all Members to see? [**Approbation**]

**The Connétable of St. Clement:**

I have not rubbished or criticised any of the work of the Working Group. In fact, I have complimented them most sincerely on an excellent piece of work. I do not know what the technological arrangement would be to have the full report put on the web but I will certainly make investigations into that.

**2.10.12 Senator S.C. Ferguson:**

The Minister has not answered my question. Will he query the validity of the estimates; the financial estimates, with the Working Group to reassure himself that his 1,000 allotment break-even figure was plucked from the air?

**The Connétable of St. Clement:**

Nothing plucked from the air; it is a matter of simple mathematics. If you multiply a certain amount of income by a certain number of allotments, or you divide the cost of

this Allotment Board by the amount collected, you come up with a number. It is simple mathematics; it is not a matter of challenging or validating.