

2019.07.16

12 Deputy G.J. Truscott of the Minister for Infrastructure regarding maintenance of the Railway Walk: (OQ.185/2019)

Further to his answer to Written Question 280/2019, which aspects of maintenance of the Railway Walk does the Minister intend to significantly revise; and will he consider a tree and native hedge-planting scheme in the forthcoming review of the area by the Growth, Housing and Environment Department?

Deputy K.C. Lewis of St. Saviour (The Minister for Infrastructure):

The Railway Walk is a superb Island asset. Our philosophy is to maintain a good balance between the natural flora and fauna and a conducive public walking and cycling route. The future maintenance tender specifications and longer-term strategy plan for the Railway Walk is due to be undertaken in the final quarter of this year and will involve a current status survey; discussions with Natural Environment officers regarding the potential for adding value to wildlife and natural fauna; a wider consultation with interested parties; a review of current planting, with the aim to make it as valuable as possible for wildlife and flora; maintenance of existing mature specimen trees bordering the walk, and ways to improve the walk's hoggin surface. The Deputy can be assured that this review will include tree planting and native hedge and shrub planting where possible.

5.12.1 Deputy G.J. Truscott:

I thank the Minister for his response and I am encouraged by what I hear, so I look forward to the tender going out later in the year and the work that will be included. There was a time when there were 5 parks and gardens employees tending the walk, it is 3.6 miles, a vein of nature that goes through St. Brelade, it is a wildlife reserve, we have red squirrels, *et cetera*. It is treasured by the Island; it is an amenity in a built-up area that is well used as well, also by tourism. If it is about money, because like everything in life there is a balance to be struck and I can understand 5 gardeners are quite an expensive thing and I can understand it and I have bought in to the idea of letting it go back to nature. But there is again a balance to be struck here, because there are certain areas of the Railway Walk that are basically becoming jungle-like and what I would like to do, and hopefully the Minister will accept my invitation, is that we go on a walk up the Railway Walk so that he can see for himself the condition (1) of the surface and (2) of what is happening there, which might better position him ...

The Bailiff:

Could you come to the question please?

Deputy G.J. Truscott:

Will the Minister accept my invitation?

Deputy K.C. Lewis:

Yes, the make-up of the Railway Walk, to make it a more environmentally diverse and natural site, as opposed to the manicured lawned areas of the past. Prior to this, the area had some planting that was not of native species and it had been maintained as a more formal parkland, rather than the open natural space. The walk was identified by the Department of Environment as a very important long narrow strip of land, which delivers a great wildlife corridor from St. Aubin to Corbière. I believe a meeting has been set up towards the end of this month and I look forward to meeting the Deputy then.

5.12.2 Connétable M.K. Jackson of St. Brelade:

Given that the Parish has received several complaints regarding the maintenance of the Railway Walk and these have been passed to the Minister's department and are being dealt with, would the Minister agree that the principle of contracting out much of the parks and gardens work is far from satisfactory in the eyes of the public?

Deputy K.C. Lewis:

Yes, we are looking to carry out the actions within the review towards the end of the year. There is a lot of work being done, as the Constable may be aware, on the Railway Walk. There are many services under the Railway Walk and we are due to have some extensive work done by various services, so that will involve taking up part of the Railway Walk. It will be reinstated and laid with new hoggin to a very high specification. But, as I say, it was recommended some time ago to have a more natural environment, just like the *branchage*, not quite so severe and not quite so manicured, more of a wildlife area.

5.12.3 The Connétable of St. Brelade:

The Minister is evading the question. The question was really with regard to using subcontractors instead of in-house States staff, which was the case in the past. Would he agree that the present situation, where all work is contracted out, is far from satisfactory?

Deputy K.C. Lewis:

Indeed, as the Constable is aware, my department is a shadow of its former self, so we do not have much choice but to contract out this work, as we no longer have hundreds of staff that we can call on.

5.12.4 The Connétable of St. Brelade:

Would the Minister agree that it would be far better if we were to take this sort of work back in-house and employ the necessary staff as required?

The Bailiff:

That is outside the scope of a supplementary. Final supplementary.

5.12.5 Deputy G.J. Truscott:

I do understand labour is very expensive, but while I was at Social Security as the Assistant Minister, we got the Back to Work teams to help the contractor down there. Probation Services could also help and they would be very keen and, if necessary, I could organise volunteers to come and help the contractor to do the work there. Is that something the Minister could consider?

Deputy K.C. Lewis:

Certainly, that is something worth considering but, as I say, there is much work to be done by many of the services to tear up the Railway Walk and re-lay piping, *et cetera*, before we lay it down again. The Railway Walk carries everything except trains at the moment, because there are many services, including sewerage pipes, below the Railway Walk and it is a very well used service area. But all the various utility companies are legally obliged to reinstate to a very high standard and we will be making sure that does happen. As I say, it was decided many years ago to have a more wild, if you like, environment as opposed to the manicured lawns. But more than happy to meet up with the Deputy and indeed the Constable and go through that.