

2025.03.18

**8.1 Deputy M. Tadier of St. Brelade of the Minister for Sustainable Economic Development regarding the cancellation of the 2025 Battle of Flowers (UOQ.2/2025):**

When did the Minister first become aware of the likelihood that the 2025 Battle of Flowers would not be going ahead and what steps, if any, did he or his officers take to seek to safeguard the event (taking place) in/for 2025?

**Deputy K.F. Morel of St. John, St. Lawrence and Trinity (The Minister for Sustainable Economic Development):**

In short, I found out with the rest of the Island, I believe on Friday morning, via the media; questions were sent to me from the media. I am pleased to say that I have been working and my officers have been working closely with organisers to help them through this difficult period. I note that the States Assembly, like myself, value the Battle of Flowers usually, and I know the Chief Minister put out a statement at the weekend, also talking about the importance of the Battle of Flowers. But there is a reality that the Battle of Flowers Association does have significant financial issues at the moment and does need to solve those issues. I have spoken separately to another group of people and they are the group that said that they would not be able to put the Battle on this year; that was the Battle Strategy Group, which is part of the Battle of Flowers Association, a kind of subgroup of it. It was their decision; entirely their decision. At no point have I put any pressure either way on the Battle of Flowers Association to choose whether to put on a Battle or not. I have maintained throughout that it is their decision to make and they informed the Island and myself of that decision, I believe it was Friday morning.

**8.1.1 Deputy M. Tadier:**

The question specifically asked about when the Minister became aware of the likelihood that the Battle of Flowers would not be going ahead. Were there any early warnings that we would be in a situation where we found 2025's Battle, this year's Battle being cancelled? I will leave the question at that.

**Deputy K.F. Morel:**

I think since the Battle of Flowers Association had the accounts prepared properly a month or so ago I think is when it became clear that there were significant financial matters that had to be dealt with, as well as then that they, as an association, would have to then decide themselves whether they could go ahead with the Battle of Flowers this year or not. I believe it has been a question in their minds for a month or so. Like I say, particularly from when those accounts were prepared. I made it very clear to the Battle of Flowers Association, as I have just stated, that it was the decision for them to make, that I stand ready with the grant. It is approximately £220,000. It is in my budget, it is still there. I am hoping that a display of sorts may go ahead in the summer during Battle week and that grant is available for them then.

**8.1.2 Deputy K.M. Wilson of St. Clement:**

Could the Minister explain what governance process was there in place to provide good stewardship of the grant once it was directed towards the association and why the financial issues were not brought to light sooner?

**Deputy K.F. Morel:**

On the latter part of that question, the financial issues could only be brought to light once the accounts had been prepared. It is an independent association; they had to get their accounts done themselves. It was only once those were prepared that we then saw the financial issues. From the Government's perspective, my team of officers undertake governance around all the grants that they disburse and there would have been governance around this. I could not state exactly what those elements were but I am happy to provide that information.

**8.1.3 Deputy K.M. Wilson:**

Thank you to the Minister for his response on that. Would he agree that following this particular scenario that there has been a significant impact on the Island's economy, particularly in terms of the hospitality and the retail industries, could he tell us what he will do to correct that in any way?

**Deputy K.F. Morel:**

I am afraid it is too early to tell or to know whether there is an impact on the Island's economy or not. The reality is that throughout August the Island tends to be full with tourists; pretty much all beds in the Island tend to be full. Obviously the past does not proclaim our future necessarily. We will have to see. It will only be once August has passed and we can see visitor numbers that we would then know whether there has been an impact or not. My view is the chances are that we will still be fully booked throughout August. I think there is high likelihood of that being the case, particularly as we have other things, such as Bergerac going on, which is advertising the Island throughout the United Kingdom and elsewhere. As I have just mentioned, there is hope that there will be a display of some sort this summer. I will work with members of the Battle of Flowers Association who believe that they may be able to put on such an event to try to make sure that they are able to do that. If they were, I think it could be a very interesting event which will, again in itself, raise very positive questions.

**8.1.4 Deputy J. Renouf of St. Brelade:**

The problems with the 2025 Battle are, in a sense, not new and that there have been financial struggles for a few years. The Minister has in his gift a grant, which has previously kept the Battle afloat. Has he given any thought to suggestions that instead of the Battle of Flowers that a new kind of festival could be put together as an alternative and perhaps a better use of public money in the future?

**Deputy K.F. Morel:**

I think that is a very difficult question to answer. New things are always possible. My belief is that the best value part of the Battle of Flowers is very much in the building and the creation of the floats. I think they are a fantastic for the coming together of the community of all ages. I said in this Assembly before that when you go to visit a float in the week before Battle, when it is being made up, you will have people from 8 years old to 80 years old all working together on one float and that is magnificent. That is something that I think is where the true value of battle is. That is not something that I would like to see lost in the event that a new festival did come forward. But it is not for me necessarily to propose new festivals. At the moment I am working with people within the Battle of Flowers Association and I will continue to support them by helping them deal, first of all, with their financial issues, and that does not mean a bail out by any means. Secondly, helping them if they do wish to put on a display of some sort this summer, helping them achieve that as well.

**8.1.5 Deputy D.J. Warr:**

A question on 2024 numbers; the Minister must have done some economic analysis, his department, in terms of the multiplier effect that benefit our economy of the Battle of Flowers as an event, as part of the overall strategic view of our visitor economy. What kind of numbers would you have come up with? Are we talking £1 million, £2 million, £3 million? What is the multiplier benefit of running the Battle of Flowers?

**Deputy K.F. Morel:**

The truth is I do not know. That work has not been done since I was Minister. I am unaware of it having been done by any previous Minister either. As I said, I believe - because we can see this with the other months in August - that Jersey is full regardless of whether the Battle takes place or not from a tourism perspective. I think initially in the early days the Battle was very much focused on driving tourism into Jersey, and that is absolutely right. I think now the premise of Battle has shifted to the community, away from that driver of tourism. I think though from many regular tourists to Jersey who will have now heard about the cancellation of the Battle of Flowers, that those people will have been disappointed. Because we do know there are people who come back year after year for Battle. We are hugely grateful for their repeat visiting of the Island and they will be disappointed. But I think my guess - and it is a guess - is that economically I do not think this will have an enormous impact. I think it is

the community element, that the community is the part of the Island who suffers the most with the Battle being cancelled.

**8.1.6 Deputy D.J. Warr of St. Helier South:**

The Minister has said: “Let us find out after August what the figures look like and see if we saw a decline, a measurable decline in visitor spend.” I am not exactly sure how you would measure it all. But is that not shutting the gate after the horse has bolted in terms of trying to think of other alternatives, a plan B? Is there a plan B? I am not talking about Battle of Flowers but an alternative plan B, big event which his department is thinking about or might even be contemplating.

**Deputy K.F. Morel:**

I think there is a reality in life; nobody can see the future, everybody can see the past. Can I talk about what will happen in August here today in March? No, I cannot because I do not know. I do not know what the impact is and nobody in Jersey knows what the impact is in that respect. The future will reveal itself to us. I think my department, through the Visitor Economy Strategy, make it really clear the importance of event-led tourism in Jersey but that is very much in the shoulder and the winter months. Because we know that the summer itself, that Jersey does tend to sell itself. I am talking in generalisations. I can understand that there may be some people in the hospitality industry who do not necessarily see that in the same way that the department does. But, in general, summer tends to be sold. What Jersey needs to do, particularly to increase the productivity of the hospitality sector, is to have more tourists visiting the Island outside of the summer months. If I were to seek large events I would be seeking them outside of the summer months, rather than in the main summer months. That said, we have a huge range of events, such as the Jersey Festival of Words, we have the Jersey Marathon, we have various other events as well throughout the year, Liberation 80 coming up this year, which are all throughout those shoulder months and are really important to the Island’s tourism industry.

**8.1.7 Connétable M. O’D. Troy of St. Clement:**

Minister, I hope you understand that the Battle of Flowers underpins the main season in August, as does the Battle of Britain in September. At the end of that visitor numbers fall off a cliff. Unfortunately, with the departure of Condor/Brittany Ferries, whichever way you would have wished it to have gone, or myself, we have started the season badly. Because French visitor numbers through a company called Moreau Fils, which is attached to Condor, their bookings are not there. There is a huge deficit in the start of the season. There is nobody to blame for that, it is what it is. But we are looking down the barrel of a gun whereby we might end up losing some well-known establishments towards the end of this year. As far as the crystal ball is concerned, advance reservations are the key. I think it might be prudent to have conversations with the industry before August to see how we are faring and to decide whether there needs to be more input in Visit Jersey ...

**Deputy K.F. Morel:**

Sir, if I may, I am still waiting for a question.

**The Deputy Bailiff:**

I have got to say, are you going to come to a question, Connétable?

**The Connétable of St. Clement:**

Yes. Therefore, try and underpin the season, would it be prudent for the future for the Battle of Flowers if we insist that either a Member of the States or one of the senior officers in finance were to be part of the Battle of Flowers Board going forward, given the amount of money that is invested in the Battle of Flowers from the States of Jersey?

[14:30]

**The Deputy Bailiff:**

Minister, a brief answer if you can.

**Deputy K.F. Morel:**

Yes. The truth is I do not know. I do not want or wish Jersey to become a Government-controlled Island. I think there is huge value in independent companies and independent associations undertaking events, businesses, et cetera by themselves. For Government to become controlling of the Island would be the very last place I want to Jersey to go. In that sense, I would be sceptical of that as an approach, although I do understand it would be something I would be happy to explore.

**The Deputy Bailiff:**

Thank you. That brings the period for that question to an end.

**Deputy M. Tadier:**

Sir, could I get a final supplemental?

**The Deputy Bailiff:**

I am afraid you do not, sorry, because ...

**Deputy M. Tadier:**

That is highly unusual, Sir.

**The Deputy Bailiff:**

It is unfortunate, is it not, but that is the way it works? I gave a set time for it.

**Deputy M. Tadier:**

Can I contest it? I think that is a precedent because I have never seen that in my 16 years.

**The Deputy Bailiff:**

The Greffier is in a very generous mood, final supplementary. **[Laughter]**

**8.1.8 Deputy M. Tadier:**

I would have been very happy, the last speaker is very good. I believe also that the Battle of Flowers is quintessential to Jersey's tourist offering and much more than that. While the Minister said that he could not see the future, surely he could have seen or asked for what the plans were for the Battle of Flowers when handing over a grant of such a significant amount. Why was not a detailed business plan and a budget forecast put in place so that the department would envisage that this kind of scenario, given the track record of the Battle of Flowers in recent years financially, that we would not find ourselves in this situation where we are having to tell visitors to the Island that the Battle of Flowers is not going ahead in 2025?

**Deputy K.F. Morel:**

We did have a business plan; that was what the grant was paid against. No grant has been paid this year because no business plan has been provided this year