

21.02.09

16 Senator S.Y. Mézec of the Chief Minister regarding the proposed extension of the Millennium Town Park over the Gas Works site (OQ.41/2021)

Will the Chief Minister advise whether the Government remains committed to extending the Millennium Town Park over the Gas Works site, and what support, if any, will be provided to Andium Homes to ensure their plans to achieve this remain viable?

Senator J.A.N. Le Fondré (The Chief Minister):

Yes, we do remain committed to the decision of the Assembly from January 2018, which requested Andium Homes, subject to planning permission, to make an extension of the Millennium Town Park, providing additional park and homes. Obviously the Government have previously supported Andium Homes via a £250 million bond and I am confident the new position of the Minister for Housing and Communities will allow for additional political focus to be directed to projects such as this. The Minister will be expected to work closely with Andium. I understand the current proposal will then form part of an ongoing planning application, obviously. It is important due process is respected and is mindful of the heritage considerations. At this stage, it is a little bit too early to tell what, if any, support or any further support is required by Andium, but in much the same way that the heritage considerations were considered when the current Millennium Town Park was constructed, I - or perhaps more appropriately the Minister for Treasury and Resources, as the guarantor - would certainly welcome further dialogue with Andium on this matter. That is being followed up.

6.16.1 Senator S.Y. Mézec:

I welcome the Chief Minister's answer there. Would he agree that a worst-case scenario, which is that the plans become unviable because of those heritage concerns that he has rightly raised, and the scheme were to be abandoned and a previous planning application were to be reinstated that involve no extra green space and piling in of unaffordable homes on to that site must not be allowed to happen? Will he guarantee the Assembly and the residents of that part of St. Helier they can count on the support of the Government to ensure that that does not happen and that we will have an extension of the Millennium Park one way or another?

Senator J.A.N. Le Fondré:

I am always very cautious about giving guarantees at 20 seconds' notice, but what I will say is that the decision of the Assembly from January 2018, it was approved, it was made. On that basis, I see no reason why the Government should not be supporting that, which would therefore obviously include the extension to the Millennium Town Park. What I do want to understand is what the financial considerations are. Obviously for any planning development, including the one he has just referred to, they will also have to take account of the heritage sensitivity of the site.

6.16.2 Deputy M.R. Higgins:

I have mentioned this to the Chief Minister already, but should not the States, as a matter of urgency, involve the geological section to do radar surveys of the site and perhaps do other excavations onsite to determine the extent of the heritage aspects, in other words, the dolmen, where they are located, and other finds? Because that information will be vital in determining, first, the planning application, and second, whether it can be incorporated within the scheme, as they have done in cities like Liverpool, Lincoln and London, where they can be, for example, viewed in the underground carpark so people can preserve them, see them, but at the same time not prevent the scheme going ahead.

Senator J.A.N. Le Fondré:

The short answer, personally I do support the kind of work that the Deputy refers to. I would be very interested to know what was underneath. I do have to caveat that personal position, first understanding what the financial consequences are: is it the right approach from the heritage perspective? The reason I put it that way, we had a preliminary discussion with Heritage on this matter and I believe one of the suggestions at the moment is letting the planning process run, but it is something I am having some very, very preliminary conversations on and obviously will be guided by the professional advice on it. But on a personal perspective, I am not in disagreement with what the Deputy has referred to.

6.16.3 The Connétable of St. Brelade:

With a previous hat of having developed the original town park, is the Minister cognisant of the pollution beneath the area of the old gasworks, notwithstanding the Jersey Heritage aspects?

Senator J.A.N. Le Fondré:

In a former life - to capture a certain phrase used by one of our unfortunately late Members - I have not only smelt and watched the old works when I think it was the Grand Marché development took place, which certainly brought to light very physically the level of pollution that is in place down there. Whatever development takes place down there will have to be mindful of the contamination and the pollution on that side, but equally, as we are aware, I think it is the highest level of protection granted for that site due to the nature or potential nature of the heritage that is down there. The Connétable is absolutely correct. I rather assume that was taken into account when those planning applications were put in place.

The Connétable of St. Brelade:

I thank the Minister.