

6. Deputy G.W.J. de Faye (The Minister for Transport and Technical Services) - regarding the location of the Energy from Waste and Compost Plants:

Following the answers I gave to Members during question time on 14th March 2006 and the subsequent report and proposition, P31/2006 from the Connétable of St. Helier, I would like to clarify my position regarding the location of the Energy from Waste and Compost Plants and how I would like to address the concerns of the Connétable and Members. Having discussed Members' concerns with Ministerial colleagues, I believe it is correct that this Assembly should be given the opportunity to debate the location of the Energy from Waste Plant and the new Compost Facility. On reflection, I do accept the Connétable's concern over the lack of consultation between the Parish of St. Helier and the former Environment and Public Services Committee when the composting operations were transferred from Crabbé to the existing site at La Collette. Consequently, it is my intention to propose to the Connétable that if he is prepared to withdraw his proposition, I will undertake to bring the issue of the location of the Composting Plant to the States at the same time as I put forward the proposition for the relocation for the Energy from Waste Plant from Bellozanne to La Collette. Time is now of the essence and Members will be aware that the Environment Scrutiny Panel has issued terms of reference for a further review of the Waste Strategy. I would therefore ask Members to support my proposal that I lodge a report and proposition on the location of the Energy from Waste and Compost Plants on 10th April 2006 and that a period of 10 weeks is allowed for lodging to enable the Environment Scrutiny Panel to conclude its further work. Therefore, I would ultimately like to propose a date of 20th June 2006 for the debate on this matter.

6.1 Deputy P.J.D. Ryan:

Would he accept that a full report and - shall we say - a resolution perhaps of the roads situation, the access to La Collette, is necessary before any meaningful debate can be had on either of these 2 ways of processing waste. The question of roads access is crucial to the whole thing before we can decide. Would he agree with that?

Deputy G.W.J. de Faye:

Yes, I would agree with the Deputy that an analysis of the road situation has to be an element of the process.

6.2 The Connétable of St. Helier:

The Minister said that he shares my concern over a past Committee's unilateral decision to dump composting on the residents of St. Helier. Would he go so far as to offer an apology to the residents of the St. Helier and other parts of the urban area who have suffered and had their lives blighted by the smells, some of which have come from the composting operation, and undertake to take any measures this summer which may be necessary to avoid this happening again?

Deputy G.W.J. de Faye:

I have investigated this matter within the Department and it does appear to me that there was a minimal level of consultation - possibly no consultation at all - with the Parish of St. Helier with regard to the transferring of the composting operation from Crabbé. With that in mind, I of course am prepared to give a full apology to the Connétable and the Parish of St. Helier for the way that that process was conducted.

6.3 Deputy G.P. Southern:

The Minister had stated here that he will undertake to bring the issue of the location of the Composting Plant to the States, but not to bring the issue of the composting mechanism to the States. Is that a deliberate omission?

Deputy G.W.J. de Faye:

No, Sir, it is not a deliberate omission or an oversight in any way. The fact of the matter is that the issue of composting technology has already been considered by the States and decided upon. As a result of an amendment to the Waste Strategy in July 2005, it was quite clearly concluded by a vote of 36 votes to 12 that the States is content and approves a green waste composting strategy, which is the strategy that is currently being pursued.

6.4 Senator P.F.C. Ozouf:

Sir, could the Minister confirm for the avoidance of doubt that it was not the Committee that he was part of in the last 18 months that was responsible for moving composting unilaterally? Would he also explain what he now intends to do in respect of the planning process? Irrespective of his undertaking - which, no doubt, is welcome by Members - in respect of bringing the location, will he be putting in place the necessary planning approval process to run either concurrently or shortly after the approval by this Assembly of the location? Finally, would he agree with me that in bringing the proposition for the location of the composting facility to La Collette, this Assembly is going to be able to be informed about the latest view of technology and therefore is going to have the final say in relation to not only the composting but the Energy from Waste Plant as well?

Deputy G.W.J. de Faye:

Yes, I would agree with the Senator and I would be the first to, of course, exonerate the Senator in his previous role as President of Environment and Public Services. The unfortunate Crabbé episode did not occur under his particular term of office. Yes, I do think, as I say, time is of the essence. I have to warn Members that energy from waste plants are a commodity that costs very substantial amounts of money and they are now due to the introduction of a number of EU directives, a commodity within the European and global market where the supply is starting to be exceeded by the demand. Quite frankly, the longer we wait on this issue, the more expensive the ultimate solution is likely to be. Therefore, I will be intending to progress the planning application side of the issue, so that time will not be wasted, although of course the ultimate decision on locations will be a matter for this House.

6.5 Deputy R.C. Duhamel:

The Minister just told this House that indeed the method of composting green waste was decided by the previous decision. Would the Minister like to correct his statement or advise this House which method was decided at this particular decision-making opportunity?

Deputy G.W.J. de Faye:

No detailed method of technology to tackle green waste composting was decided, because clearly that really is a matter for the engineering expertise contained within the department, and other advice that the department cares to seek, both in terms of international tendering processes and elsewhere. However, the matter that was concluded by the States when it determined the waste strategy was that the States determined that we would pursue green waste composting as opposed to food composting.

Deputy R.C. Duhamel:

So the Minister is actually withdrawing his incorrect statement in relation to advising this House that the method, i.e. the technology, was decided on a previous occasion?

Deputy G.W.J. de Faye:

No, the Minister is not withdrawing his previously incorrect statement. The Minister is clarifying the statement he earlier made.

6.6 The Connétable of St. Helier:

The Minister omitted to respond to the second half of my question, when I asked what steps he would be taking this summer should the residents of Havre des Pas and its environs suffer the kind of odour nuisance directly from the composting site; what will he do about it this summer?

Deputy G.W.J. de Faye:

The staff who operate the current open windrow system at La Collette are both expert and conscientious in the work they carry out. They go to extreme lengths to ensure that whenever the work that they have to do is likely to produce odours, that the wind is blowing away from local residents. I regret that from time to time, on rare occasions, the work has to be carried out irrespective of what the wind is doing. I take regular and constant soundings from our colleagues at Health, who assure me that as far as is known, there is no health risk whatsoever. I accept that the smell is not pleasant. The smell, as we understand the evidence so far, is not harmful. It is a nuisance and it is a nuisance that we have been seeking to address as soon as possible, and that is why I reiterate that time is of the essence, and that is why I have appeared to be perhaps robust in my determination to see a solution and conclusion to the known problem of odour.

6.7 Senator P.F. Routier:

In the interests of clarity of time scales, my understanding is the department have a time plan for putting in place the new composting in vessel system by September 2007; that is the time scale which has been published. Does the plan of the Minister to have a debate in June of this year delay that implementation of September 2007 for the new plant?

Deputy G.W.J. de Faye:

Yes, Sir, inevitably it does. At the time when the former President of Environment and Public Services was giving assurances to residents of Havre des Pas that he wished to expedite this matter as a priority, the realistic completion date for an enclosed composting facility would have been roughly June-July of 2007. That time has subsequently drifted, and if we were to continue the planning process, as it were, tomorrow, the completion date would be approximately September 2007. Clearly, if we are now to debate the location issue in July - the Senator can do the mathematics as well as I can - it will push the likely completion date of the project, wherever it happens to be, to the end of 2007.

The Bailiff:

Well that, I am afraid, concludes the period allowed by Standing Orders for questioning a Minister on his statement, and we come therefore to public business.