

2025.05.13

2.11 Deputy D.J. Warr of St. Helier South of the Minister for Infrastructure regarding clubs operating out of Fort Regent (OQ.114/2025):

Will the Minister confirm whether all the clubs currently operating out of Fort Regent have been allocated adequate new facilities prior to the closure of the Fort and outline what engagement, if any, has taken place with the clubs concerned?

Connétable A.N. Jehan of St. John (The Minister for Infrastructure):

My officer wrote to the Deputy yesterday evening, pointing him towards my recent correspondence with the Economic and International Affairs Panel on this subject, which I hope was helpful. That correspondence included updates on the status of the private tenants who have been given notice to vacate Fort Regent. There has been regular engagement with all Fort Regent tenants in recent years with more detailed discussions since the beginning of this year. In the case of gymnastics, for example, I am delighted that the 3 clubs are working well together and have now agreed the design of the new dedicated gymnastics facility at Oakfield. A meeting that is scheduled for this week for the skating club that should have happened last week, but unfortunately some people were not available. We continue to engage, work with and offer assistance to those clubs and businesses who have not yet found new facilities. I have committed to engage and meet with them personally, where required, in order to find solutions.

2.11.1 Deputy D.J. Warr:

I thank the Minister for his answer and I can confirm I have received a copy of that correspondence between the E.I.A. (Economic and International Affairs) Panel and the Minister for Infrastructure advising interactions with sporting clubs. It identifies there are still a number of clubs for whom no home has been found. I notice the Minister has referenced Empire Skating, but there is also currently inadequate provision for outside sport, such as netball who require specialist surfaces. Does the Minister not agree with me that his department is trying to fit a quart into a pint pot and that the biggest losers of closing the Fort are the sporting community? Why is his department continuing removing sport from the Fort without there being sufficient capacity ahead of the decant?

The Connétable of St. John:

I thank the Deputy for his question. Oakfield is being built at a cost of £8.4 million. The 3-court centre is being built as a direct result of engagement with Jersey Netball. We are trying our hardest with all sports, including netball, to find solutions. We have many courts that lay idle night after night, day after day, weekend after weekend, that are more than capable of hosting netball, 5-a-side football, basketball and volleyball. What I am trying to do with my colleagues from Education is ensure that we use our whole estate before we invest in any more sheds around the Island.

2.11.2 Deputy A.F. Curtis of St. Clement:

Respectfully, the idea of using education facilities is one that has been long established, given that there is a decant going on and there is a need to provide facilities for those who are being decanted. Will the Minister be more specific as to the challenges and delays in opening up the education estate, if that is one solution to the decant?

The Connétable of St. John:

It is a very good question. Only last year we finally agreed service level agreements with our tenants at the school. The buildings belong to the public of Jersey, not to a headteacher, not to a governing

body, but to the public of Jersey. We are trying to work with our partners to ensure that we get far better utilisation with a centralised booking system and where people are able to book the court that they need when they need it.

2.11.3 Deputy A.F. Curtis:

That sounds like good progress the Minister is reporting on. Will he be able to update the Assembly as soon as possible on what timescale he intends those platforms and the new arrangements might come into play?

The Connétable of St. John:

I would like this to have happened within months of coming into office, but clearly things take longer than we hope. The foundation is for us to have got that service level agreement in place. That ensures who cleans gutters and who does not clean gutters and so on and so forth. The usage of the facilities, the priority clearly is the school when the school needs them, but when the school does not need them we need to make sure that we get best use out of them and that we are not playing pickleball for 2 people on a 5-side court when we have empty halls around the Island.

2.11.4 Deputy H.L. Jeune of St. John, St. Lawrence and Trinity:

We have heard today that maybe what we read in the paper is not necessarily true, but we have seen a lot of letters in the paper about concerns for individual sports and sporting clubs not feeling that they are being listened to. I was wondering if the Minister could explain what steps he is taking now currently to help to facilitate their concerns and finding the right locations for these clubs.

The Connétable of St. John:

With my background in logistics, I find this very simple. It is basic logistics. Unfortunately, I have to leave it to officers to work together to find those solutions. I have met with many sports on many occasions. Only last week, in the throes of Liberation, I met with the organiser of the Fort group for over 1½ hours, discussed having a further meeting with him and his group, as well as individual sports, which I committed to at a public meeting. I am more than happy to. Some sports need specific surfaces. Netball has been mentioned. Skating has been mentioned. They play on totally different surfaces. We have those surfaces. We need to ensure we get the right sport in the right place at the right time.

2.11.5 Deputy H.L. Jeune:

I thank the Minister for his answer. Could the Minister confirm that all these sports clubs will have the correct places to go and continuing their sporting prowess when the Fort is closed at the end of the year?

[11:45]

The Connétable of St. John:

I have discovered in recent weeks that we have people who are sub-letting space at Fort Regent, which is contrary to their agreements. Those organisations are unknown to us as a government. We have organisations and people at Fort Regent doing massage, for example. That is not the responsibility of government. Our focus is on finding solutions for the clubs that need them and particular for young and old alike.

2.11.6 Deputy D.J. Warr:

Does the Minister understand why he received such a hostile reception at a recent meeting in the Pomme d'Or? How does the Minister believe he will improve communications with the various clubs going forward?

The Connétable of St. John:

Yes, I do. I was given an email mid-afternoon of that meeting saying that the group did not want to meet with me outside of that meeting. Clearly, having been at the meeting myself, it was quite obvious to me that they had not been asked I wanted to meet. A politician had been asked and had declined the opportunity. I am more than happy to meet with any group.