

3. Questions to Ministers without notice - The Minister for Planning and Environment Deputy G.P. Southern:

If I may, could I question the procedures by which the Minister for Planning and Environment has replaced the Minister for Economic Development who I understood was due to be up today?

The Deputy Bailiff:

I am advised by the Greffier there has been a recirculated list and this is the correct Minister who should be answering, apparently.

Deputy G.P. Southern:

Could I ask whether, then, at any stage we will ever get to blood an Assistant Minister in the fiendish art of answering questions, on your feet, without the officer's minutes there?

The Deputy Bailiff:

I am not sure I understand the question, Deputy.

Deputy G.P. Southern:

If the E.D. Minister is not available, and he is apparently not available today, I would have thought we have already seen the Assistant Minister deal very capably with an oral question, but we are not going to have the opportunity to question him about issues relating to his department on his feet, without notice. Is that ever likely to happen?

The Deputy Bailiff:

It is not my understanding that this was rearranged because the Minister is not here. Is that right, Greffier? This is apparently the list.

Deputy G.P. Southern:

News to me.

The Deputy Bailiff:

I am advised that the list is the list and it has nothing to do with the fact that the Minister for Economic Affairs is not here.

Deputy G.P. Southern:

Then I apologise for wasting your time, Sir.

The Deputy Bailiff:

So, we can revert to questions to the Minister for Planning and Environment.

3.1 Deputy K.C. Lewis:

Further to my written question today regarding mobile phone transmission masts - and I thank the Minister for his comprehensive written reply - the Minister has just approved many new phone mast applications. We now have 2 mobile phone operators up and running in Jersey with possibly 2 more operators waiting to move into Jersey with dozens more sets of transmission masts. This would give Jersey more transmission masts per acre than almost anywhere else in the world. This would be a totally unacceptable situation. Does the Minister not agree?

Senator F.E. Cohen (The Minister for Planning and Environment):

There were a number of questions there. I hope I will be able to address them all. Firstly, I did not give permanent consents recently. In view of the current arrangements that Scrutiny have entered into in relation to consulting the public on health risks I decided to take a cautious approach and I have issued temporary consents. If the Minister for Health changes his advice over the next 12 months in relation to health risks surrounding masts then I will take that into account before even considering making these permanent. Secondly, there are 3 operators, not 2;

being Jersey Telecom, Air-Tel and Cable and Wireless. We know nothing of the fourth at the moment. There are no applications at all. As far as the number of masts is concerned, there was a choice. As I have mentioned on a number of occasions before, we could have reduced the number of sites by allowing more lattice masts of the sort of size we see at Five Oaks or on the north coast. I deem those unsatisfactory and unacceptable and therefore I have chosen the route of more wooden telegraph pole masts that are less intrusive.

3.1.1 Deputy K.C. Lewis:

A supplementary, Sir? I recently attended the re-opening ceremony of the Signal Station at Fort Regent, Sir. Wonderful to see the flags flying high over the fort and I would like to congratulate the Assistant Minister for Economic Development on a splendid initiative. However, there are now so many mobile phone transmitters up there that it would be too dangerous for anyone to be permanently stationed there. Would the Minister for Planning and Environment confirm that if recently approved mobile phone masts are proven to be dangerous they would be removed?

Senator F.E. Cohen:

As far as the signal station is concerned, as I understand it, there are not significantly more masts. There are now more antennae there now than there were previously. It is just that some of the older ones have been replaced. I would also like to clarify that there were a couple of issues in relation to the fitting of those antennae and the historic status of the site and the applicant has been given one month to sort those issues out. But as far as the position on making consents permanent at the end of the 12 months, that will, of course, depend on whether or not the Health Minister varies his advice.

3.2 Deputy A.D. Lewis of St. John:

I would like to ask the Minister whether, in the light of the publishing of the documents such as the Planning for Homes document and the Housing Property Plan, will there still be a revised Island Plan published and if so, when? And what consultation is underway to determine its final design?

Senator F.E. Cohen:

We are already well on the way planning how we will review the Island Plan. There has already been an officer group formed. There will be a political group formed and we are shortly to be able to tell Members which specific areas of the Island Plan we will be looking at and how we will be looking at it. It is in the very short term.

3.2.1 Deputy of St. John:

Does the Minister have a date in mind, yet?

Senator F.E. Cohen:

No, I cannot give a precise date but certainly we are talking a few months rather than many months.

3.3 Deputy G.P. Southern:

Will the Minister inform Members when he will take action to bring about greater use of cavity wall installation, the most effective and cheap - I understand at £250 or £300 per household - way to achieve energy efficiency and to reduce C.O.2 (carbon dioxide) emissions? Does he know what proportion, how many homes on the Island are built with such construction and are suitable for such treatment?

Senator F.E. Cohen:

No, I am afraid I do not know what proportion of houses are built with that form of construction. I would imagine that it would be very difficult to come up with a convincing figure but I will

certainly ask my department to do so. One of the key elements of the Environment Department's objective is very clearly in the longer term to encourage greater responsibility in relation to issues such as the use of fossil fuels and part of that will be to encourage people to better insulate their homes. If you are going to encourage people to better insulate their homes, the best way of doing that is clearly to provide them with some financial assistance. It will be one of the main focuses of environmental taxes, if and when we are able to implement the taxes, and very clearly one key area they will be used for - if they are hypothecated taxes - will be to encourage the better insulation of homes throughout the Island.

3.3.1 Deputy G.P. Southern:

If I may just a quick supplementary? Will he make cavity wall insulation one of his prime targets?

Senator F.E. Cohen:

I am afraid, Sir, I am not an expert on which is the most effective methods of insulation. What I can assure the House is that if cavity insulation is the most effective form of insulation then it will be the one that we will promote the most.

3.3.2 Deputy G.P. Southern:

If I may, Sir, just a quickie? Will he return to the House with such data as to what is the most efficient and cost effective means of insulation and improving?

Senator F.E. Cohen:

I will come back to the House with not just that data but with significantly more data in due course. This is a major subject and taking our environmental responsibilities seriously is a key focus for the Council of Ministers and something that I, personally, will be concentrating on with the launch of the Eco-Active Programme in a couple of weeks time.

3.4 The Connétable of St. Helier:

Would the Minister confirm that the relatively recent supplementary planning guidance for the Waterfront suggested that there should not be a great deal of retail on the Waterfront and specifically that it was not an appropriate site for a supermarket; and would he undertake to communicate that advice and that recent policy to the Minister for Economic Development?

Senator F.E. Cohen:

I want to be very careful in this area. The Waterfront is already the subject of one planning application. There will be others shortly and I do not think it would be appropriate to answer specifically other than to say I will assure the Connétable that the Minister for Economic Development is aware of the issues.

3.5 Deputy S. Power of St. Brelade:

The Minister will be aware of my continuing interest in the final development brief that is to be written by his department for Fields 190 and 192, La Moye. The Minister will be aware that it was the subject of a case study in the planning process recently published. Can I ask the Minister to confirm where he is with the publication of the final development brief for this, in my view, sensitive site? I would like to thank him, also, as a minor member of the planning process for his excellent co-operation in producing that report.

Senator F.E. Cohen:

I cannot answer the question specifically. It may be appropriate to advise the House that I also was in a bit of a muddle over who was going to be answering questions without notice and it was not until yesterday afternoon that I found out it was me. Unfortunately, none of my briefing notes cover Field 190A but I will get the answer and ensure the Deputy has it later today.

3.6 Deputy R.G. Le Hérisier:

I wonder if the Minister, bearing in mind the sentiments expressed by Deputy Power, can please tell us what his reaction is to the Planning Process Report and in the light of experience we have had recently, could he tell us how, as a Minister, he intends to approach this report?

The Deputy Bailiff:

Concisely to that matter.

Senator F.E. Cohen:

It is too early for me to give an adequate response to that. I have read through the report. I am very pleased with many of the comments in the report. I think it is a constructive report. I think much will come out of the report which will result in perhaps significant change but it is too premature for me to respond to specifically at this stage.

3.7 Connétable D.J. Murphy of Grouville:

About 6 months ago I questioned the Minister with regards to alternative energy sources and in particular to tidal power. He said there was a report due out very soon which would hopefully show the way forward and the attitude of the States towards tidal power. Can you tell me when this report is due, please?

Senator F.E. Cohen:

Yes. This will form part of the first elements of the energy review and that will be available in the first quarter of this year.

3.8 Deputy J.B. Fox:

I wonder if the Minister can enlighten the House where we are at in relation to the Plémont planning and whether we are furthering looking at alternative sites and if the proposed developer is willing to consider any such proposed alternative site. Thank you, Sir.

Senator F.E. Cohen:

Again, I am sorry, I hope I am not appearing to be difficult on this but this is the subject of a current planning application and, again, I would want to be very careful. All I can say is that all the avenues that the Deputy would wish to be examined are currently being examined and I sincerely hope we will be able to come forward with some options in the not too distant future.

3.9 Deputy of St. John:

Bearing in mind the Minister's answer to Deputy Southern, would he also consider the possibility of having a similar approach to solar energy for domestic consumption? Of course, provided that the Minister responsible for the weather can guarantee a bit more sunshine.

Senator F.E. Cohen:

I think, at this stage, it is inappropriate to cherry-pick one or 2 things that environmental taxes would be directed towards. This will be part of a comprehensive study. I personally am very enthusiastic to see some form of assistance provided to encourage solar energy and wind energy generation, and all forms of micro-energy generation but I think I will be just one part of the decision-making process of how the hypothecated taxes are most effectively used to deliver more environmentally conscious decision-making which will be, of course, at the core of those proposals.

The Deputy Bailiff:

Is there another question? Very well, I call that to a halt and we will come then to the second question period which is the Chief Minister.