

2025.03.18

4.12 Deputy T.A. Coles of St. Helier South of the Minister for Infrastructure regarding the redevelopment of Fort Regent (OQ.60/2025):

I am aware that the first part of this question has been answered in the media but it is the second part. Will the Minister state when the public engagement regarding the redevelopment of Fort Regent will begin and when it is anticipated that any concept designs will be made available?

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

I thank the Deputy for his question. The Government will be launching a new and, we believe, exciting vision for the redevelopment of Fort Regent, together with a public consultation on 2nd April. This will include detail on potential concepts and future uses for Fort Regent. Prior to the consultation going live, we will be briefing Scrutiny, I hope, on 28th March and all States Members on 31st March and we will include public meetings in April.

4.12.1 Deputy T.A. Coles:

Unfortunately, I am going to be away for the briefing on the Scrutiny Panel, though that is unfortunate. The public engagement, obviously there are concepts and ideas already being floated around, but how much influence will this engagement have if sport is not due to return to the Fort? Could the public persuade the Minister to get some scope for sport?

The Connétable of St. John:

There will be an element of sports at the Fort, I believe. The engagement is to find out what the public want. Clearly we have got ideas and we have worked up some of those ideas. I would expect to see new sports at the Fort that we have not seen on the Island before, and also some exciting concepts.

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

In the Minister's press release on a vision for Fort Regent, he mentions a relocation of soft-play facilities which the panel and Assembly will have noted. Will he confirm what public engagement has or will take place with regards to the provision of soft play at the Waterfront?

The Connétable of St. John:

The soft play, we want to make sure that it is a continuation of service and we need to make sure we have got a new venue for soft play while we operate the current soft play. If soft play is to stay at the Waterfront or move back to Fort Regent, that will be part of the consultation.

4.12.3 Deputy A.F. Curtis:

Members of the public may have seen soft-play equipment moving into the Waterfront over the previous days. Will the Minister confirm why no public consultation on the form and function of that has taken place to date then?

The Connétable of St. John:

We believe that we need to provide soft play indoors, and in St. Helier, and we found a location. As I said in my earlier answer, we will consult as to whether soft play stays at the Waterfront or returns to Fort Regent.

4.12.4 Deputy P.F.C. Ozouf of St. Saviour:

I think everybody welcomes the Minister's publication of what he is going to be doing. We received the email yesterday - and it is a good job it is the 2nd April rather than the 1st - I understood an announcement was going to be made on the 1st. I wonder whether the Minister would confirm or otherwise - I know that there is some exciting discussion which we do not know a lot about Project Breakwater and the important infrastructure that is going to be required for Jersey - can he give us any insight into whether or not the funding for this exciting Project Breakwater is going to include Fort

Regent because it is high time that something is done with Fort Regent, which I am sure he wants to enthusiastically support?

The Connétable of St. John:

The discussions about funding are ongoing and we will be providing more detail at the private briefings for Members and when the public consultation starts.

4.12.5 Deputy J. Renouf of St. Brelade:

The statement that the Minister put out with regard to Fort Regent mentioned that the plans that the J.D.C. (Jersey Development Company) had developed will be put out for consultation. Can he clarify whether this means that there is a plan that the J.D.C. have already come up with and that we will be consulting on that, or are they consulting on asking for ideas from the public?

The Connétable of St. John:

There has been lots of work, as Members will know, over many, many years. We have been working with our partners, the S.o.J.D.C. (States of Jersey Development Company), for many months around different concepts. We want to test those concepts with the public, and that is what the consultation will be for. I believe that the plans are exciting but we want to hear from the public, their views on what we are planning, and also alternative use.

4.12.6 Deputy J. Renouf:

Can I ask the Minister why it was not considered a good idea to start with public consultation to encourage the public to come forward with ideas and help the Government shape those proposals rather than develop proposals in a small group of people and then ask the public whether they fancy them or not?

The Connétable of St. John:

Tens, if not hundreds of thousands of pounds have been spent on Fort Regent over many years and so we are not starting from a blank sheet of paper. We are looking at finding ways to do this as quickly as we possibly can. There is a general feeling, I believe, among the public that people want the work to be carried out and for Fort Regent to be open and for us to get back to the Fort Regent that we all love. I think we have to do that as quickly as we can. We do want to include the public's observations of the concepts that we have come up with - and we do have an open mind - what we need to do is provide something that is affordable and sustainable.

[11:30]

4.12.7 Deputy M. Tadier of St. Brelade:

The Minister told the media in May of 2024 that the plans would include a skatepark, a children's play area, youth and other leisure facilities, and would require in excess of £80 million worth of investment. Is this statement still valid today?

The Connétable of St. John:

Members will be aware of the struggles we have had to find a suitable location for a skatepark in St. Helier, and I believe that the long-term solution is at Fort Regent. We have a site there which has got a lot of space, it does not have many neighbours, so I believe a skatepark will be featuring there. We have got the largest skatepark in Britain at Les Quennevais superbly used. Hopefully we are going to have some exciting events there this year but we do need a facility in town.

4.12.8 Deputy M. Tadier:

In 2009 I was on a Scrutiny Panel that looked at the issue of Fort Regent and we found that 2 key factors on the declining footfall were, first of all, the removal of the swimming pool, but also difficulties in accessibility. Would the Minister confirm whether or not accessibility, i.e., perhaps a lift access from Snow Hill area to the Fort with an adjoining bridge, which was suggested in 2022, might be back on the table and, if not, why not?

The Connétable of St. John:

Clearly, the Fort was designed to keep people out originally and we need to find ways of getting people in, so access considerations will certainly form part of the consultation.

4.12.9 Deputy L.K.F. Stephenson of St. Mary, St. Ouen and St. Peter:

Can the Minister confirm if providing a permanent home for the Special Gymnastics Club is part of the redevelopment plans and what the plan is for that club when the Fort closes at the end of the year?

The Connétable of St. John:

We have been in regular dialogue - and I suspect that my predecessor was also in regular dialogue - not only with the Special Gymnastics Club, but the other gymnastics clubs located at Fort Regent. We are in the process of investing £8.4 million at Oakfield, and that includes a dedicated gymnastics facility. We have been talking to the national governing body for advice on the layout of that facility and we look forward to welcoming the 3 gymnastics clubs to Oakfield when we open in October.

4.12.10 Deputy L.K.F. Stephenson:

Have all 3 clubs agreed to that move?

The Connétable of St. John:

The move has been planned for a long time and we continue to have fortnightly meetings with those 3 clubs on how we are going to operate. As I said earlier, we are taking advice and guidance from the national governing body for gymnastics.

4.12.11 Deputy K.M. Wilson of St. Clement:

Could the Minister confirm or provide some guarantee that whatever future plans emerge for Fort Regent that they will remain free to the public?

The Connétable of St. John:

Sorry, can the Deputy just confirm the end of that question?

Deputy K.M. Wilson:

It will remain free to the public.

The Connétable of St. John:

Access to Fort Regent will remain free but facilities there, you will have to pay if you want to use certain facilities, just as has been the case throughout the history of the Fort Regent being open as a leisure centre, but access to the gardens, et cetera, will remain free.

4.12.12 Deputy K.M. Wilson:

Would the Minister give some consideration to concessions, considering that we are still in a cost-of-living crisis?

The Connétable of St. John:

We want as many people to use the facility as possible, both locals and visitors alike. The commercial aspects are still up for consideration, and I am sure any operator of any facility that operates at Fort Regent will give consideration of concessions.

4.12.13 Deputy D.J. Warr of St. Helier South:

Obviously there is a bit of history around closing public sites down, La Folie is the prime one, and obviously the Minister attempted to shut down the Lido as well. What risks does the Minister believe he is potentially going to incur by closing the Fort down for 3 years and has he thought of any alternatives? Has he engaged with the Fort Regent groups to see if there is an alternative way which is not about shutting the Fort down?

The Connétable of St. John:

I thank the Deputy for his question; I would just like to correct him. At no time have I said we should close down the Lido. What I have said is we should have a lease in place with any operator that operates at the Lido, and that is something we now have, and we are currently out for a tender process. Officers are in regular dialogue with those people who operate at Fort Regent. Five years ago there were 39 groups, currently there are 17 groups, and we are happy to consult with anybody. La Folie that is mentioned has been under the control of Ports of Jersey for many, many years. One of the first things I did when I became Minister for Infrastructure was ask whether we could take back the La Folie so we could get something done there. Lots of effort is going into Fort Regent. We need to close Fort Regent so we can do the works quickly, cheaply and safely.

4.12.14 Connétable K.C. Lewis of St. Saviour:

I was surprised recently to see some outline plans in principle from the Jersey Development Company with regard to replacing the existing cinemas with 2 smaller cinemas further to the west on the same site. Does the Minister not believe that this would be better suited to re-site the cinemas inside Fort Regent? Having spent many decades in the cinema industry, I can inform the Assembly that cinemas do not require a sea view. Does the Minister not agree?

The Connétable of St. John:

I agree about the sea view. We want Fort Regent to be a leisure complex and that may include cinemas; it may not include cinemas. But clearly if you have got a leisure complex you want to have as many offerings there as possible to attract footfall which may use more than one of those facilities.

4.12.15 Deputy T.A. Coles:

The Minister mentions obviously S.o.J.D.C. is the delivery partner for this project. Can the Minister confirm who has final say on the consultation and arrangements to go into Fort Regent, please?

The Connétable of St. John:

The Regeneration Steering Group was overseeing Fort Regent. It has taken longer than we would have hoped to get to this stage but we want to make sure that we are as prepared as we possibly can for that consultation. We want it to be as meaningful as possible but it will be the Regeneration Steering Group that will oversee any redevelopment at Fort Regent.

