

3.8 Deputy D.J.A. Wimberley of St. Mary of the Minister for Planning and Environment regarding the costs and benefits of building underground parking spaces within the North of Town Masterplan:

In view of the need to seek out best value for money, can the Minister advise Members what he has done to evaluate the costs and benefits of building underground parking spaces within the North of Town Masterplan, against the costs and benefits of providing spaces above ground and avoiding the need for so many spaces by measures such as reducing car commuting and creating car clubs.

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

Most modern urban planning and regeneration accepts the principle that car parking in towns is best delivered underground or semi-underground or out of town. I intend to pursue the revisions to the Masterplan with this ideal in mind. I would point out, of course, that costs of underground car parking vary from site to site. Car clubs and car sharing can be a help in providing a solution, but they play only a small part. My department is working with other departments and the Parish to deliver a holistic solution to car parking in the north of town. As I previously stated in my earlier answer, a privately-owned site has emerged as a possible solution to delivering some of the key principles of the Masterplan, including car parking. Thank you.

3.8.1 The Deputy of St. Mary:

Thank you for that answer, which does not answer the question. It is nice to know that we are going to have a modern approach, but I did ask whether the Minister has undertaken any analysis of the costs of building underground versus the cost of providing spaces over ground, or against the cost of initiating and promoting car clubs, or the cost of promoting a move away from car commuting towards other modes, which is part of the Sustainable Transport Policy? Has he done any work on the comparative costs and benefits?

Senator F.E. Cohen:

Some comparative cost work has been done in relation to underground car parking as opposed to over ground car parking. As I said in my answer, this is very much on a site-specific basis and we are currently looking at a new site for the provision of some of the car parking. Thank you.

3.8.2 Deputy G.P. Southern:

In a previously written answer the Minister said that he could not give an assurance that the creation of underground car parking will not necessitate a further environmental or health impact assessment. Can the Minister firm-up on that and can he confirm to Members today that going down up to 5 metres, which was never planned previously, in a major part of this area, it will be certain that a new environmental and health impact assessment will have to be done?

Senator F.E. Cohen:

It seems that whatever one says the Deputy always views the matter from a half-empty perspective. As I have previously said, we are looking at a new site for the provision of some of the key elements of the Masterplan. That will be properly costed in relation to the delivery of car parking and at that time I will make the information available to States Members. Thank you.

3.8.3 Deputy G.P. Southern:

I will repeat my question in a different form. Will digging out up to 5 metres depth on this site require a new environmental and health impact assessment?

Senator F.E. Cohen:

If the Deputy wishes to dig out 5 metres, that is up to him. I do not intend to do so. Thank you.

3.8.4 Deputy G.P. Southern:

He really cannot get away with that. In his written answer then, which rather contradicts it, it says: "There is contamination in only 2 areas of the Gas Place site. The impermeable clay layer is variable between 1 and 8 metres [notice 1 and 8 metres] below the surface. The depth of excavation is likely to be no more than 5 metres." If it is 5 metres then he will require an environmental impact assessment, will he not? Otherwise he endangers the health and the environment all around this site and could open up to the States being sued for millions.

Senator F.E. Cohen:

For the final time, can I express to the Deputy a very simple principle: we are looking at another site. Thank you.

The Greffier of the States (in the Chair):

Do you wish a final question, Deputy?

3.8.5 The Deputy of St. Mary:

Yes, indeed. I am astonished that the Minister is not aware of how this looks, to be spending £10 million on one underground car park and more than that on another underground car park with no evaluation of the alternatives. He has not offered a single shred of evidence that he has looked at the alternatives, the costs and the benefits, of doing the same job in another way. Does he not accept the gravity of this in the light of the financial constraints that we are all told we are under? Here he is spending over £20 million without any looking at alternatives. Will he assure the House that he will do this cost-benefit analysis before we come to debate this matter?

Senator F.E. Cohen:

I am endeavouring to deliver a Masterplan that will be cost-neutral. I have expressed a view this morning that this may result in a requirement for developer levies, which is normal in this sort of programme. I will most certainly evaluate all possible car parking alternatives, but at the end of the day, underground or semi-underground car parking is more expensive than above-ground car parking, but in urban planning terms it is better and it will be a decision of this House which route we take. Thank you.