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4.6 Deputy J.A. Martin of St. Helier of the Minister for Treasury and Resources regarding the Jersey Gas site:

Following the controversial planning application for the Jersey Gas site and the alternative proposal that the land should become an extension of the Millennium Town Park, can the Minister inform the Assembly whether there have been any discussions between the department and Jersey Gas regarding the possible purchase of the site?

Senator A.J.H. Maclean (The Minister for Treasury and Resources):

Yet again, this is a responsibility for Deputy Noel, Property Holdings, my Assistant Minister, so I would ask him to answer the question.

Deputy E.J. Noel (Assistant Minister for Treasury and Resources - rapporteur):

There have been no discussions between the department and Jersey Gas regarding the possible purchase of the site. Further, as is outlined in the Treasury comments to the P.156 debate that we will have later today, the public has no funds to acquire this site within the current budget nor has a bid for funding to acquire the site and create a public car park being tabled for consideration in the long-term capital programme. Simply, the answer to the Deputy is no.

4.6.1 Deputy J.A. Martin:

Having read those comments, does the Minister not think that then the Minister for Treasury and Resources is absolutely relying on the States not to back the Constable and has been very tardy? He is the Minister in charge of Property Holdings: it could be a land swap; we do not even know the price we are dealing with, and should not be in these jobs since September to find out. Jersey Gas, would he not agree, do not want to develop. They need to develop to make funds so they can facilitate a move down to La Collette. It is his department who should be doing these discussions and I am absolutely amazed at the Minister's answer. Would he not agree it is very slow and they should be proactive in this, not relying on a States decision?

Deputy E.J. Noel:

As far as I am aware the States have no desire to acquire the site for any purpose at all. I have had discussions with the Constable in December where we talked about a wide range of interaction between the departments that I am responsible for and the Parish and one of the suggestions that I put forward to the Constable was that the Parish takes over the running of the Town Park. In this regard perhaps the Parish would consider using some of their substantial resources that they have to acquire the site themselves.

4.6.2 Connétable A.S. Crowcroft of St. Helier:

Could the Assistant Minister advise how imminent is the relocation of Jersey Gas? Is an alternative site available? If it is not pressing would Deputy Noel agree with me that there is no urgency for this application to be determined? Is it not rather a device to establish an inflated value on the site?

Deputy E.J. Noel:

I will take that again in 2 parts, if I may. The first part: as far as I am aware the gas production and the gas provision has already moved down to La Collette. I may be wrong but that was my understanding. What is left on that site is the retail aspects and some residential aspects, and obviously the old Gasometer facility that was damaged a few years ago. With regard to whether or not we should be delaying a decision on the site, again I go back that this is normal due process of our planning law. The Minister has an obligation to determine a live application that is before him.

4.6.3 Deputy G.P. Southern:

What consideration, if any, has been given to the possibility of a land swap for this site and, if none, will the Assistant Minister pursue this avenue?

Deputy E.J. Noel:

The Deputy seems to infer that a land swap has no cost. If we carry out a land swap this is exactly the same as paying cash, there is no difference, because you swap a piece of land that you would have used for something else, it has a value. We have not looked at this because we have not been asked to consider purchasing this site. I believe nor should we.

4.6.4 Deputy G.P. Southern:

In that case, may I have supplementary, and I am asking him to consider a land swap for this site in particular because of the fact that it is adjacent to the new town park and should not be allowed to spoil what progress we have made on that particular aspect.

Deputy E.J. Noel:

If that is the case then I think the Deputy should be free to bring forward an amendment to the Island Plan because currently this is in the Island Plan to be developed out for housing.

4.6.5 Deputy M. Tadier:

It was mooted in questions just now that the States is not interested in buying the site if that were on the table, but can the Minister confirm that the States has never been asked whether it would like to buy the site and were that proposition to come to this Assembly it may well be that the States decided that it would wish to buy that.

[10:30]

Can the Minister perhaps give an answer to that in one or 2 parts as to what his opinion is?

Deputy E.J. Noel:

I can do that in one part, just for the Deputy. It is not the role of the States or Government to develop out and provide every single site in St. Helier. It is for the Government and this Assembly to facilitate the development of those sites. That is exactly what we have done in the Island Plan and what our planning process does. We should facilitate, not necessarily do.

4.6.6 Deputy M. Tadier:

The Minister seems to be fixated ideologically about what this Assembly should and should not do where actually I would have thought that as independent Members we should take every case on its individual merits, which of course the Minister for Planning and Environment has to do when judging planning decisions. Could he clarify what he has just said and say that it may well be that after a debate, were it to happen, that the States would decide that this is the best thing to do for Jersey and we can determine what the future of that area should be with the interaction of the Parish of St. Helier and greater public consultation as well.

Deputy E.J. Noel:

That is perfectly possible. This Assembly can make decisions and get the Government to act on those decisions, but in my original question from Deputy Tadier he asked me what my opinion was and my opinion has not changed. Government should facilitate the regeneration of St. Helier, not necessarily do it.

4.6.7 Deputy J.A. Martin:

Look where facilitating the Sea Cadets got us. Yes, my final question to the Minister in charge at the moment of Property Holdings and property in Jersey, despite his cosy chats with the Constable of St. Helier, will he please at least undertake to find out the costs of this site and what the gas company would ... I do not care if there is no money in the pot at the moment, this is the last part of

extending the Millennium Town Park, and for anybody who lives around there, I would ask the Minister to take it on to find out how much or what the gas company would need to walk away. It is simple. He has the experts working for him at the moment. Thank you.

Deputy E.J. Noel:

My discussions and meetings with the Constable are never cosy. They are quite often productive but never cosy. The value of the site is purely dependent on the planning permission that is given to that site. Without a planning decision given to the site you cannot determine the value. So it is a bit chicken-and-egg in a sense. For us to be able to understand the value of the site we first need to have an approved scheme on that site.

4.6.8 Deputy J.A. Martin:

Supplementary. The gas company did say they needed the monies to facilitate their move and they did not say it was about planning, and this has never been asked. Could the Minister undertake to find out the cost?

Deputy E.J. Noel:

I can only repeat what I have already said. We would not know the cost without knowing what the permissions were on that site.

Deputy K.C. Lewis of St. Saviour:

May I raise the défaut on the Constable of St. Saviour? In doing so, may I apologise, I believe the Constable had a medical appointment this morning, I was remiss on not mentioning it earlier. I would be grateful if the record could be amended accordingly.

The Bailiff:

Does the Assembly agree to raise the défaut on the Connétable of St. Saviour? Very well.

Deputy M. Tadier:

Should it not be défaut excuse in that case rather than raising a défaut?

The Bailiff:

I think the record will show that she had a reasonable excuse.