

STATES OF JERSEY



COMMITTEE OF INQUIRY: PLANNING APPLICATIONS BY THE CHANNEL ISLANDS CO-OPERATIVE SOCIETY LTD.

Lodged au Greffe on 18th February 2014
by Deputy R.G. Le Hérisier of St. Saviour

STATES GREFFE

PROPOSITION

THE STATES are asked to decide whether they are of opinion –

- (a) to agree that a Committee of Inquiry should be established in accordance with Standing Order 146 to inquire into a definite matter of public importance, namely the manner in which the 2 planning applications made by the Channel Islands Co-operative Society Ltd. in relation to properties in Pitt Street, Dumaresq Street and Charing Cross, St. Helier were dealt with;
- (b) to agree that the Committee should comprise a Chairman and 2 other members, all working on an honorary basis, and to request the Chief Minister to take the necessary steps to identify a Chairman and members with suitable skills and experience to undertake the inquiry and to bring forward to the States for approval the necessary proposition relating to their appointment;
- (c) to agree that the Committee should be requested to complete its work within 6 months of commencing the inquiry.

DEPUTY R.G. LE HÉRISSIER OF ST. SAVIOUR

REPORT

Introduction

The controversy surrounding the C.I. Co-op application to redevelop its properties in Pitt Street and surrounding areas closely follows that surrounding the proposed redevelopment of the Bath Street area by the Le Masurier Group.

Unfortunately, judging by media coverage, the Le Masurier controversy generated considerable anger and rebuttal but there was little evidence, as each side presented its case, that greater understanding had been reached as to what went wrong or how matters could be improved to avoid a repetition of the farrago.

Again, in the case of the Co-op application, serious allegations have been made about how the Planning Department has handled matters. Not only is the Co-op aggrieved, but officers of the Department will rightly feel that their reputations have been maligned with no right of reply. Indeed, it is unclear whether faults, if there be any, lie at the political or officer level or with both parties. There is also a view that, for example, this is all down to Minister X, and now that personality is out of the picture, so the matter is resolved. That is too naïve an interpretation. An Inquiry needs to look beyond such interpretations and consider what other factors can lead to perverse and dysfunctional processes and outcomes.

Proposal

It is proposed that an independent Inquiry be undertaken, probably by someone experienced in planning procedures, analysing how the matter was dealt with. The Inquiry would have all the powers available to a States Committee of Inquiry and be required to report back in 6 months. Time is of the essence given that the reputation of the planning process is at stake.

I am hoping that the Minister will support this proposition, because if he did he would signal to the various stakeholders and to the public in general, that he is committed to improving the process and to a healthy and open debate as to what may have gone wrong. Furthermore, parties like his officers would be able to take part with his support and encouragement.

Financial and manpower implications

Standing Order 150 states that it is the responsibility of the Minister for Treasury and Resources to give directions on the expenses that a Committee of Inquiry may incur and how these expenses are to be funded. It is nevertheless my belief that the Chairman and members should all work on an honorary basis and buy in planning expertise as required. If this was done, I consider that the total cost of the Inquiry should not exceed £50,000 which I believe should be met from central contingency.