

23.11

14. Connétable A.S. Crowcroft of St. Helier of the Minister for Housing and Communities regarding a new primary school in the vicinity of Millenium Park (OQ.237/2023)

Given the number of new housing units being built or planned in the vicinity of the Millennium Town Park, will the Minister advise whether the Government's plan to build a new primary school in the area, rather than an extension to the park, is being reconsidered; and if not, why not?"

Deputy D. Warr of St. Helier South (The Minister for Housing and Communities):

I thank the Constable for his question. I have a huge amount of empathy for the Constable. Indeed, before I was elected, one of my commitments, as he well knows, was that the Millennium Town Park should be extended all the way through to St. Saviour's Road. If I am being honest, that is still my preference today. I still believe that town residents need green space, but I also now recognise that the issues are significantly more complex. The good news is what this Government is proposing will deliver more green space and a new school, albeit not quite in the way I had originally envisaged. Current plans for the former Gas Place site comprise a 2-form entry primary school, including a new nursery and a special educational needs facility and community facilities. The scheme will also provide new green spaces, improve the network of cycle and walking access across town, and improve the quality of town.

3.3.1 The Connétable of St. Helier:

Would the Minister for Housing and Communities not agree with me that there is an important problem of timing here? Andium would have been delivering the extended town park as we stand here today. The extra facilities being offered by the Government are distant. They are distant geographically, and so we will not get the marriage value of doubling the size of the town park. But, more important, they are distant temporally. They are far in the future, these new parks that we have been promised will be created. The needs of people in town now are surely worth accommodating.

Deputy D. Warr:

Again, I do agree with you, but I have to say we have a process to go through, and obviously through our future places project, of which I know the Constable is a member. We will work our way through this. As I say, I appreciate his frustration. I am frustrated as well, but we have to accept there is a process to follow.

3.3.2 Deputy S.Y. Mézec:

It took hours for the disunity in the newly reshuffled Government to appear like that. It is incredible, is it not? The Minister referred to his broken manifesto pledge to extend the Millennium Town Park. No ifs, no buts were the words that he used for his voters in St. Helier, and it turned out there were plenty of ifs and plenty of buts. Will the Minister confirm whether or not this supposed Future Places Group will consider the options that have previously been brought and rejected, unfortunately, by this Assembly when Deputy Coles brought a proposition to look at the available sites in that region so the best of both worlds can be delivered: a good school for the children who deserve it in that part of town and an extended town park when he knows there are plenty of options available to deliver that?

Deputy D. Warr:

I thank the Deputy for his question. Clearly, if there were lots of options, we would already be trying to find those solutions. As the Deputy is aware, we are already currently building on the northern quarter, which is going to provide much needed homes for residents of St. Helier. But I come back to my point is that the new option on the table will increase the amount of green space in town, and I

think it is a good compromise. We have to tolerate compromise in town when we are having to densify town versus keeping green fields in the countryside.

3.3.3 Deputy S.Y. Mézec:

The Minister referred to the northern quarter development, planning permission which was varied to increase the density of homes there when Andium proposed extending the town park, something which no longer counts because of the reversal of that decision. Will the Minister be reviewing the density of the developments that are proposed in that very small part of town to ensure that it has the right number of people accommodated in there so they can have a decent quality of life with plenty of open green spaces they deserve and places in schools for their children?

Deputy D. Warr:

I thank the Deputy for his question. The reality is, the Minister for Planning is in charge of density and size of buildings. We will be meeting all of those requirements and, obviously, what is really good news is that those spaces have been increased to make living more - I am trying to find the right term - a better quality of life for residents of St Helier. As I say, that is within the remit of the Minister for Planning, and clearly all homes now are built to these new standards.

3.3.4 Deputy R.J. Ward:

Given the new Assistant Chief Minister seems to be against building the school that the Minister did have in his manifesto but then changed his mind on, is the Minister worried about being outgunned around the Council of Minister's table?

Deputy D. Warr:

I thank the Deputy for his question. The reality is that we need a new school in the centre of St. Helier and Deputy Ward brought forward that proposition, which we have to acknowledge is in there and is in the bridging Island Plan. So, there is that choice. As I said before, we have a choice. We either build the full extension of the Millennium Park and where do we put the school after that? Do we put it somewhere which is not accessible and easily accessible for those new residents in the centre of town? The whole point of, I am sure, the Deputy's proposition was to ensure that we had good quality education in the centre of town; that was the point. We are fighting over semantics here. We are trying, as I say, to deliver the best of both worlds and the best for everybody that we can.

3.3.5 Deputy R.J. Ward:

I thank the Minister for his acknowledgement, even though it may have been through slightly gritted teeth. Can I ask the Minister, just to reassure the parents and, most importantly, the children at Springfield School in that area, that they will be getting a new school? They will be getting extra green spaces elsewhere and a slight extension to the park and that this will not be reneged upon because of a current change in personnel.

Deputy D. Warr:

I thank the Deputy for his question. Absolutely. It is in the current Government Plan, and I will be supporting that Government Plan.

3.3.6 The Connétable of St. Saviour:

Surely, wherever the new primary school is built, the absolute number one priority should be child safety. We have many, many very busy roads in town. Does the Minister not agree?

Deputy D. Warr:

I thank the Constable for his question. I absolutely do agree. Clearly siting a school in the centre of town is probably the most safe place for a town school to be, particularly as the networks are developed around there for access by walking and cycling.

3.3.7 The Connétable of St. Helier:

Does the Minister not agree with me that the children of St. Helier, their parents and their grandparents have far more to gain from the Government doubling the size of the town park than they do from building a school on the site?

Deputy D. Warr:

Thank you, Constable, for your question. Have they got more benefit? Absolutely. I am sure in an ideal world they have. Sadly, we have to make compromises. But as already said, we are increasing the overall amount of green space in the proposed project..28.