

22.11.01

**3 Deputy M.B. Andrews of St. Helier North of the Minister for Infrastructure regarding costs of renovating and maintaining States-owned buildings (OQ.101/2022):**

Will the Minister advise how the expected costs of renovating and maintaining States-owned buildings are appraised and, in particular, whether such costs are determined as a percentage of the individual property value or in relation to the value of the whole States estate?

**Deputy T. Binet of St. Saviour (The Minister for Infrastructure):**

I would like to thank Deputy Andrews for his question. The maintenance and upkeep of the estate is based on its use and the operational requirements of the function of the building, not its value or the value of the estate. The priority is to ensure the best endeavours are undertaken to make the building safe to occupy and to operate. In the past, where maintenance is set within individual departments, it has been very easy to divert some of the elements to other uses, projects or resources and this has resulted in an overall decline in an ageing estate. This approach was exacerbated by the fact that in the last 5 years the budget has fallen by about £3.5 million per annum under savings and targeted measures, which in real terms is a 45 per cent drop on the current 2021 budget of £7.6 million. The shortfall will be addressed over the coming year by undertaking a full condition survey of the estate, then targeting and prioritising the resultant works with the budget.

**4.3.1 Deputy M.B. Andrews:**

Does the Minister believe that data trends should be established to provide data on the renovation costs as a percentage of the overall estate value?

**Deputy T. Binet:**

I believe that is going to be part of what is undertaken with the property review over the coming 12 months. We have been granted £600,000 for that.

**4.3.2 Deputy M. Tadier:**

When I speak to constituents and the wider public they say to Minister for the Environment that the States continually let their own properties run into the ground, do not invest in them, and therefore they find an excuse to ultimately sell them off. Does the Minister accept that this practice needs to change under this leadership and that the Opera House is a good case in point where we have seen a building with a tenant, where the landlord is Property Holdings, and it has been under-invested for decades, only to now be in a situation where it is shut, we are being told, for the next 2 years?

**Deputy T. Binet:**

As the Minister for Health and Social Services said, this is a new Government and I think we can expect a new approach. We will be looking at the property survey that will be undertaken, and I am sure that we will be taking hopefully a more proactive approach to dealing with our property matters.

**4.3.3 Deputy M. Tadier:**

It is a new Government, does the new approach mean that when the report comes back and finds we have so many properties that we cannot afford to do up that the automatic approach will not be

to sell off the family silver but it will be looked to replacing the money from those decades of under-investment to make sure that we have a portfolio that is fit for purpose?

**Deputy T. Binet:**

I do not think it is wise for Minister for the Environment to pre-empt what will happen over the coming years other than to say that a constructive approach will be taken. We have yet to undertake the survey so I think it is a little bit early in the day to commit to anything.

**4.3.4 Deputy G.P. Southern:**

Will the Minister accept that the easiest way to save on any budget is to cut back on maintenance, and we saw this with our own housing stock for the past 2 decades which was left to rot and has now cost a fortune to repair? Is it not the case and will he assure Members, will he guarantee to Members, that a philosophy which lets ... well done, Philip, you just put Minister for the Environment off there gurning at me.

**The Bailiff:**

Please through the Chair. No: "Well done, Philip"; that is not parliamentary language, Deputy.

**Deputy G.P. Southern:**

Is it not the case that under his leadership this philosophy of letting things go will be stopped?

**Deputy T. Binet:**

I do not think once again that it is appropriate for Minister for the Environment to give any absolute guarantees. I think I have been in office for some 16 weeks. We need to take a full appraisal of the property portfolio and start making some sensible decisions about them over the coming years.

**4.3.5 Deputy G.P. Southern:**

Is the Minister saying that he will let maintenance budgets slip and slide and will put up with buildings that are rotting.

**Deputy T. Binet:**

I do not recall making that statement. The plain answer to that is no.

**4.3.6 Deputy R.J. Ward:**

Let Minister for the Environment give the Minister another chance. Can the Minister guarantee to this Assembly and to the people of Jersey that States money will not be spent just to appoint where something is saleable and then sold to a private enterprise so that they can make money where the States should be keeping its assets?

**Deputy T. Binet:**

At the risk of repeating myself for the third time, the answer is no; I am not giving any guarantees of any description other than to say that I guarantee I will use my very best endeavours to treat the estate properly.

**4.3.7 Deputy R.J. Ward:**

Would the Minister accept the spending of States money to bring properties up to a standard and then selling them to private enterprise?

**Deputy T. Binet:**

Sorry, could I ask that question to be repeated because I do not think I quite understood it?

**Deputy R.J. Ward:**

Sorry, I will work on my diction. Does the Minister accept the spending of States money on the repair of States-owned properties that could then be sold to private enterprise?

**Deputy T. Binet:**

Perhaps I am being a trifle ignorant but I do not quite understand the question. I am awfully sorry.

**The Bailiff:**

No, I do not think we can keep doing this. As I understand it, the question that is being posed is: is the Minister accepting of a possibility where public money will be spent to bring properties up to standard and then they will be sold to private enterprise? Is that the essence of the question?

**Deputy T. Binet:**

Fairly obviously that has to be a distinct possibility but not a guaranteed fact.