

2.3 Deputy D.W. Mezbourian of St. Lawrence of the Minister for Education, Sport and Culture regarding the proximity of mobile telephone masts and base units to schools:

Would the Minister advise Members what consultation, if any, he has had with the Planning and Environment Department to ascertain the proximity of any telephone masts and base units to all schools in the Island?

Senator M.E. Vibert (The Minister for Education, Sport and Culture):

As yet, there has been no detailed consultation with the Planning and Environment Department with regard to the proximity of existing telephone masts and base units to all schools in the Island. I am informed my department has no knowledge of any masts in close proximity to any of our school premises. Adopting the precautionary principle, the current policy of my department regarding applications on E.S.C. (Education, Sport and Culture) sites is to refuse at present to consider the siting of masts on key operational or highly populated sites such as schools, colleges, youth centres, sports centres, and to consider requests for other sites, e.g. on more open space, on an individual basis and decide whether to allow planning application to be made, and any approval would be subject to a Ministerial decision by myself.

2.3.1 Deputy P.V.F. Le Claire of St. Helier:

The Minister said that he was not aware of any telephone masts that were on school sites, but there is, I believe, a telephone mast above a play-care centre at Fort Regent, which is extremely close to the nursery facilities there. Is the Minister willing to investigate the proximity of that mast and the potential impact it might be having on those school children?

Senator M.E. Vibert:

Yes, Sir.

2.3.2 Deputy D.W. Mezbourian:

A number of recent studies have recommended that masts should be no closer than 300 metres to schools, and indeed, I understand that proposed new French law will forbid installation at less than 100 metres from them; notwithstanding, of course, these recent disclosures, the 2002 Stewart report stated that no masts should be near schools. Will the Minister therefore give an undertaking to have consultation with the Health Minister on this issue and report the findings of that process to the House?

Senator M.E. Vibert:

The matter has been discussed at the Council of Ministers and I am willing to not only work with the Health Minister, but also the Planning and Environment Minister on these issues. May I say, I think there is a whole host of conflicting reports about mobile phone masts and other things, and I think what needs to happen is for the House to be better informed before certainly any scares are put about. I think that is very important that we should reassure the public that we are taking the issue seriously, but we should not - and I think that refers to all of us, Sir, the States' Members - quote works and other things without proper consideration and ensuring

that that is correct. But I am afraid in the past there have been scare stories about various things that have proved to be totally unfounded.

Deputy D.W. Mezbourian:

I would like to thank the Minister for that response, Sir, and to state that I am sure his reply will give some comfort to members of the public who were listening today.

2.3.3 Deputy P.V.F. Le Claire:

Given the Minister's last response and given his response to my questions that he would be willing to look into the location of that telephone mast, would the Minister - as he has outlined - report back to the States with the details of any masts within the prerequisite distance - whatever that is - not only in relation to States' schools, but also to all schools and all nurseries, so that the States may be apprised and as well-informed as the Minister? As the Minister has pointed out, we need to be made sure of today.

Senator M.E. Vibert:

That is a very wide-ranging issue. What I think is the best thing to do is for the appropriate Ministers to work together to ensure that we are best informed - and the States are best informed - about the safety of such masts, the positioning of such masts; the whole issue. I think that my response should form part of that rather than individual issues such as trying to ascertain the exact distance of various masts and so on, before we know what the prerequisite distance is, et cetera. So, I will be looking at the issue very closely with my fellow Ministers, because I am sure all our concerns are to ensure the well-being and future safety of all the inhabitants of the Island.

2.3.4 Deputy P.V.F. Le Claire:

I appreciate the Minister telling us that we should be cautionary, Sir, but would the Minister - in a spirit of openness - be willing to circulate to Members the potential sites where these considerations need to be understood?

Senator M.E. Vibert:

I have no idea what the Member is talking about, Sir. Sorry, I do not know what he means by potential sites and where they are. We know where all our schools are, we know where all the approved nursery schools are, there is also a map of the phone sites in the Island, and we will be comparing the 2, but until we know what the appropriate distance is, I fail to see how we can take it any further.