

2024.04.16.

4.5 Deputy A.F. Curtis of St. Clement of the Minister for the Environment regarding greater public access to the Island's geospatial data (OQ.60/2024)

Will the Minister advise what consideration, if any, is being given to enabling greater public access to the Island's geospatial data, including free access to aerial imagery at the Jersey Library?

Deputy S.G. Luce of Grouville and St. Martin (The Minister for the Environment):

Access to free public interest maps and geospatial data is in place using the Government of Jersey web-mapping application on the gov.je website, and the mapping team are constantly updating the service to provide a wide range of free-to-use public interest maps. The team are working directly with Jersey library to install the Government's public web-mapping application, so it is also easier for Islanders to access aerial imagery and also the wider range of public interest mapping layers, such as Jersey school catchment areas, the bridging Island Plan, countryside access and recycling points, to name a few.

4.5.1 Deputy A.F. Curtis;

I thank the Minister for sharing the progress. In respect of the Minister's portfolio, does he agree that access to aerial imagery, which is currently too costly for individuals to access, will give a greater equality of arms with regards to planning, enforcement and compliance matters?

Deputy S.G. Luce:

The Deputy and I both share a wide interest in maps and, before I get to answer the specific question he has given, I would say to Members that I personally use the States of Jersey mapping pages where there are over 200 different maps that you can access. Looking at them at the moment; roads by ownership, 3D buildings, the Jersey tree map, there is a heat loss map, there is a natural site, St. Helier Ring Road all on the first page. There is lots and lots to do. But I agree with the Deputy. He was previously an attendee to the Geospatial Board, the mapping service team, and he knows that there is an ongoing issue with the funding. We currently have a situation where all these maps on the website are free of charge, but that people pay for those more valuable pieces of data, and it is the commercial payment that funds the website and the updating it and the free access to the public. While I accept that some of that important data is really good to get at, it is expensive to create. At the moment, the business model we are using is that that more valuable data is paid for, and those payments fund all the other services which provide free access to the public.

4.5.2 Deputy J. Renouf:

One of those, I think what he would call high-value datasets, would be L.i.D.A.R. (light detection and ranging) that has been acquired of the Island, which has important scientific value. Does he agree with me that it would be good if we could gain public access to that without payment, as it would further scientific research, for example, in archaeology and so on? This might be helpful for scientists, academics and, indeed, Islanders who want to look at these aspects of our heritage.

Deputy S.G. Luce:

I agree, and L.i.D.A.R. was a really interesting map to look at because it looks through the tree canopy, through the foliage, and shows us some boundaries, field boundaries, that we would not be able to see otherwise. The service team are modernising the website to make it more

accessible for the public, and they are going to add places of interest, cycle rack locations, defibrillators; I name a few. But I accept the fact again that some of this more valuable data is expensive to create. But I do say to the Deputy, I will go away and look at ways that more of this type can be made free to the public.

4.5.3 Deputy A.F. Curtis:

The Minister may or may not be aware that revenue from geospatial data has flatlined for many years. Actually, despite continuous pushes to create this as a growing financial return, those have not materialised. Does he agree we need to investigate that actually the economic value of selling the data is overrated and the economic value of the community having widened far-reaching access to the data could be far more beneficial in the long run?

Deputy S.G. Luce:

I am happy to go away and ask officers to investigate why this has flat-lined. It may well be that we have not publicised this enough. I mean, how many members of the public realise there are over 200 maps available to them, free of charge, with vast, varied interests that can be looked at. So I will ask officers to investigate and, as the Deputy says, if there is a better case to be made for making some of this more valuable data free of charge - a better case for the public - we will certainly look to do that.