

22.11.01

**9 The Connétable of St. Helier of the Minister for the Environment regarding town cramming (OQ.110/2022):**

Will the Minister indicate whether he thinks that the Government can fairly be described as pursuing a policy of “town cramming” in St. Helier and, if not, why not?

**Deputy J. Renouf of St. Brelade (The Minister for the Environment):**

I thank the Deputy for his question.

**The Bailiff:**

The Connétable, in fact.

**Deputy J. Renouf:**

The Connétable, I do beg your pardon.

**The Bailiff:**

No, through the Chair: “I apologise to the Connétable.”

**Deputy J. Renouf:**

I apologise to the Connétable. Not a good start, let us see if I can do better.

**The Bailiff:**

Let us draw a line and start this one over again, shall we, Minister? Off we go, yes.

**Deputy J. Renouf:**

The Connétable will perhaps not be surprised to hear that I do not agree that this Government is pursuing a policy of town cramming in St. Helier. However, I do think he raises an important issue and this is one to which we must remain alert. It is worth remembering that the bridging Island Plan sets policies that mandates significantly stronger requirements for open space in town. While the plan aims to concentrate development in the Island’s built-up areas, particularly St. Helier, it also makes very clear that the development of town needs to take place in a manner which makes it a better place in which to live, work and visit. In this regard there are some specific policies to deal with the provision of open space. To give one example, policy C18 ensures that developments of 5 to 10 homes “are required to provide appropriate communal space for play on-site where possible or otherwise make a contribution to the provision of new or enhanced space for play within 5 minutes’ safe walking distance or 500 metres from the site.”

[11:00]

So the plan seeks to support the town to grow in a way which enhances and complements its character and identity where people have a good living environment, with access to open spaces and community facilities such that it becomes a place of choice to live for people of all incomes and backgrounds.

**4.9.1 The Connétable of St. Helier:**

I am grateful to the Minister for that answer. He will know that there is a proposal to extend the Millennium Town Park, which was part of my manifesto when I was re-elected in June, and he will not be surprised to know that I want to see that happen. He has also said that pocket parks are

possible but would the Minister not agree that the north of town needs a large public park, the sort of place a child can get out of breath in or indeed a person of my age, but rather than park users being put cheek-by-jowl, which is currently the case during the summer in the Town Park, that the generous provision of public green space is the essential quid pro quo of expecting the north of town in particular to take hundreds of new homes?

**Deputy J. Renouf:**

I thank the Connétable for that supplementary. I think the provision of open space in the town, and in particular the north of town, is particularly important. I note that the Assembly has expressed a view on this and would like to safeguard that site in the north of town for an extension, provided that education facilities can also be provided for appropriately. My strong hope and preference is that we are able to find an alternative site for schools and we are able to extend the park, but I am mindful of the constraints that are in previous decisions of this Assembly.

**4.9.2 Deputy R.J. Ward:**

Can the Minister for the Environment tell us how many homes are planned to be built within a radius of, let us say, 300 metres of Millennium Park?

**Deputy J. Renouf:**

No, I regret I cannot provide that. I am sure that if we are given a little bit of notice, we could find the answer to that question. I am aware that there are considerable numbers of homes being built in the area to which he refers.

**4.9.3 Deputy R.J. Ward:**

I can inform the Minister that it is 976 homes are planned, and I have used 300 metres as a pretty quite wide estimate; it could be 200 metres. Therefore, is the original question of town cramming, particularly the north of St. Helier cramming, not absolutely accurate because that is cramming homes into a very small area?

**Deputy J. Renouf:**

It is interesting to look at issues of town cramming. Density is of course a very important measure of what might be called cramming. It is not the only one and we need to look at the built form and the way that buildings relate to the environment, which is why open spaces are so important. Areas like Belgravia and Mayfair in London are well built-up and have high densities but are considered reasonable places to live and probably would not be described as crammed. It is important that we look at the whole picture. You can draw circles around areas and have high densities, you can expand those areas to include open areas and have lower densities, so in general terms St. Helier is not a crammed location. This work was done as preparation for the bridging Island Plan. Comparisons with other equivalent sorts of buildings, the provision of open space is considered to be good in St. Helier with the exception of play areas, and that is why I quoted that quote from the bridging Island Plan in answer to the Connétable's original question. We are mindful of the need to particularly improve access to facilities for children's play.

**4.9.4 Deputy S.Y. Mézec:**

There can surely be no doubt that 976 homes within a few hundred metres is cramming when there are currently no guarantees in place about extra green space or places in schools. So what will the Minister be doing to give us those cast-iron and set-in-stone guarantees as soon as possible that school places will be guaranteed for the children who will live in those homes within walking

distance and a large amount of open green space provided for those people, many of whom will have no outdoor space at all as part of their homes.

**Deputy J. Renouf:**

With respect to the Deputy, I feel that it is not entirely within my power to provide all those assurances. These are decisions that will be made by the Council of Ministers and then with the Assembly to decide. In terms of what I do have within my power, it is to make sure that future planning applications fit within the planning framework that we have established which balances, attempts to balance, the tension between, on the one hand wanting to make sure that we sustainably develop land in the areas where the facilities are best located, and on the other hand preserves open spaces. Those 2 measures are both strongly supported in the Island Plan, and my job will be to ensure that that tension is managed in such a way as to make sure that the quality of life at those areas of town is preserved.

**4.9.5 Deputy S.Y. Mézec:**

The Minister referred to future planning applications but those 976 homes are current applications. They are ones that are already dealt with under the current rules and, as things currently stand without intervention, will go ahead. So is the Minister really saying that at this point he cannot say anything to give hope to people who either live in that area or will live in that area, that any guarantees can be given about school places for their children for traffic management so that they are not constantly breathing toxic fumes as they are walking down the streets in their areas, and that they will have access to open green space. Because it sounds like there are no assurances whatsoever and that is extremely disappointing, is it not?

**Deputy J. Renouf:**

I can assure, as I have just mentioned, that I will be attempting to ensure that the policies in the Island Plan are followed to make sure that we do maintain access to open spaces. I have also expressed in my answer to the Connétable my strong desire to see the Millennium Town Park extended if at all possible. Beyond that I think I am at the limits of my powers.

**4.9.6 Deputy G.P. Southern:**

Could the Minister inform Members what direct input he will have with the Minister for Children and Education in the decisions made as to how many places are found in this particular north of town area?

**Deputy J. Renouf:**

I assume the question to be referring to the number of school places that might be provided in an area close to the north of town. I would say that that is likely to be a very live debate involving, not just Ministers, but the public and all interested parties. I would hope that the Minister for Children and Education will take my views into account and be listening to them, as she would with other Members of the Council of Ministers and the Assembly.

**4.9.7 Deputy G.P. Southern:**

The question - and it was a question - was what direct input will the Minister have into that debate?

**Deputy J. Renouf:**

I am slightly at a loss as to know what he expects Minister for the Environment to do. Do I propose a proposition to my colleague on the Council of Ministers? This is an area of debate. It is likely to be

an area of discussion as we look at the various options. The Minister published last week some paper on the question of school places that is likely to lead to considerable debate, and I will be taking a full part in that.

#### **4.9.8 Deputy L.V. Feltham:**

From his answers, the Minister is indicating that he does not feel that there is town cramming happening in St. Helier according to his definition of town cramming. Could he inform the Assembly what his definition of town cramming would be?

#### **Deputy J. Renouf:**

Yes, we have policies in the Island Plan that set definitions of hyper-cramming and super-cramming. From memory, the hyper-cramming is something like 450 units per hectare and super-cramming is 150 units, but I would have to get back to the Deputy to confirm that. So, the Island Plan says that in the cases of proposals that come above those thresholds, there has to be justification provided that would be considered by the Planning Committee or whoever was considering those applications. So we do have policies in place to try and avoid that, and I would expect those policies to be followed by whoever was the decision-maker in terms of planning applications that came forward.

#### **4.9.9 Deputy L.V. Feltham:**

The Minister further referred to a comparative being Mayfair and Belgravia. Could he inform the Assembly why he thinks that is an appropriate comparison? If indeed he does, would he undertake perhaps to walk around St. Helier Central with myself and my St. Helier Central colleagues?

#### **Deputy J. Renouf:**

I spent some time last week cycling around that area to try and appraise myself more of the conditions there. I accept fully that it is a dense development area at the moment and there is plenty of building going on to add to it. The question of the comparison was to make a very specific point which is that density is not necessarily the only method of judging quality and access to open spaces. It is possible to develop in a dense way that also is an acceptable and good way in terms of providing an environment that is a pleasant one and an open one with sufficient open spaces. Building form and building density are related but they are not exactly the same.

#### **4.9.10 The Connétable of St. Helier:**

Would the Minister not agree with Minister for the Environment that the calculation of open space to which he refers in the Island Plan is fundamentally flawed because it calculated every square foot of open space, including all manner of small pocket parks and other little corners in the town? It did not take into account the number of large parks to which I referred in my original supplementary in which a person can get out of breath.

#### **Deputy J. Renouf:**

I am not sure the comparison is exactly correct, or the point is exactly correct. The qualification criteria also did not include beaches, for example, which are of course available in Jersey and not in many other jurisdictions, so we may have gained in one area and lost in another, so to speak. But the point is about the comparative nature, so I would have to check to be absolutely sure, but I am assuming that the criteria chosen were in order to enable accurate comparison on a similar basis with similar places. So on that basis it would have been a valid comparison to make.