

2019.03.26

13 The Deputy of St. John of the Minister for Infrastructure regarding the prospect of temporarily linking Liberation Square and Weighbridge Place for the purposes of ‘Liberation 75’: [OQ.80/2019]

Further to the Fiscal Policy Panel’s recent reports and in light of concerns expressed by the business community, will the Minister revisit the proposals to merge Liberation Square and Weighbridge Place and consider whether a temporary link between the 2 areas could be developed, that would allow for interaction between them for the purposes of Liberation 75, but which would then allow a reversion to the current traffic arrangements?

Deputy K.C. Lewis (The Minister for Infrastructure):

In light of Deputy Maçon’s proposition P.34/2019, which calls for the cessation of the project and a re-allocation of the project funding, I have instructed all work on the project to cease, with the exception of a planning application, until the project is debated on 30th April 2019. It will be for this Assembly to determine whether the project goes ahead, or not.

3.13.1 The Deputy of St. John:

Would the Minister agree that the money being spent on Liberation Square would go a long way towards providing car parks around the Island that would facilitate a park and ride scheme?

[Laughter]

Deputy K.C. Lewis:

I admire the Deputy’s tenacity, regarding park and ride. I do not think that would go very far towards it, but that is a matter for Members, if and when the decision is made.

3.13.2 Deputy M. Tadier:

Does the Minister agree that the temporary link completely misses the point of this project? The idea of this project is to create a legacy, starting off from Liberation 75 [Approbation] but which will be put there reinvesting some of the money that was gained from the sale of public land from the States of Jersey Development Company, reinvesting that in the public domain, so that public and future generations can benefit from that, rather than obsessing constantly about cars and traffic as the only legacy. Would the Minister put on record whether he publicly supports the principle of this scheme, while fully accepting that there are operational matters that are genuine and that need to be addressed, to see if this scheme can be functional?

Deputy K.C. Lewis:

Indeed, the Deputy makes an excellent point. I can say that looking at all the plans and talking to Infrastructure officers it will be, if it goes ahead, a magnificent park; I do not dispute that for one moment. There will be implications for traffic flow, I cannot say otherwise. But, as I say, I am in the hands of Members as to whether the project goes ahead, or not.

3.13.3 Deputy M. Tadier:

I have a supplementary. I just wanted to push the Minister on whether he supports this project in principle, because it seems it is being suggested that Ministers are now abandoning this project and it is important to make sure that, at some point, it has got ministerial support. Given that it is a key project for his department, we should know whether it has his support, at least in principle.

Deputy K.C. Lewis:

I say this is the project I have inherited. I thought it was a supplementary coming through. No, this is the project that was agreed by the last Government and I have inherited this. As I say, it will be a magnificent park and, as the Deputy suggests, it will be a marvellous addition to the parks in St. Helier for many years to come and for many generations to come. But I cannot alleviate the concerns regarding the traffic implications.

3.13.4 Deputy R. Labey:

Just to mention that Deputy Maçon has deferred his proposition from 30th April, so we will be some time before we get to decide this. We have all seen squares, magnificent town squares throughout the continent of Europe, where cars are only allowed - and traffic is only allowed - for certain periods of the day. I agree with Deputy Tadier that this could be an absolutely fantastic project, but is there any way that we can examine a dual use?

Deputy K.C. Lewis:

That is a possibility, but shared spaces are definitely considered to be unsafe. It has been suggested that we could close a road just for the day, but we are back to square one, in that respect; that we need to have the roads open, or the roads closed. We cannot really do a halfway job on this.

3.13.5 Deputy R. Labey:

The current thinking, everywhere else but Jersey, is that shared spaces are not unsafe if they are done properly. Shared spaces are a magnificent way of smartening up a town and if they are done well they serve both purposes well and are completely safe. Will the Minister change his mindset on this?

Deputy K.C. Lewis:

It is not my mindset, it is a matter of health and safety. If the Deputy looks at the plans, which were on display a week, or so, ago, you will see there are going to be magnificent lawns there, which do not include a double-decker bus coming right across it. Either we do the project, or we do not; it is one, or the other.

3.13.6 Connétable M.K. Jackson of St. Brelade:

Two questions I want to ask the Minister. One is: would he agree that there is significant expenditure to be put towards the redevelopment of Liberation Square, which is looking somewhat tired? Secondly, would he agree to putting a traffic trial in place, in short order, so that we can move forward on that and just not leave it until the end of the month, as he suggested?

Deputy K.C. Lewis:

Yes, indeed, there has been significant traffic modelling, which has been undertaken by the department; but to illustrate the point, more than happy, as many States Members have suggested, and members of the public, to do a trial period, maybe within the next 2 weeks, to see the traffic implications first hand.

The Deputy Bailiff:

Final supplementary, Deputy of St. John.

The Deputy of St. John:

No, Sir, I am fine.