

## **2.15 Deputy R.G. Le Hérissier of the Minister for Planning and Environment regarding the modification of a listed building:**

What latitude, if any, exists to modify a listed building such as Sion Chapel given proposals for alternative uses?

### **Senator F.E. Cohen (The Minister for Planning and Environment):**

For some years, I have endeavoured to assist the church officers in providing a solution to Sion. We need to balance conserving and restoring the most important easternmost buildings with a practical understanding of the changes necessary to the western range of buildings. This balance will provide the financial sustainability to maintain the historically important church. This could mean that the western buildings may be lost and the area redeveloped. I have stressed to the church officers that I will take a flexible approach to planning issues in order to deliver a financially viable solution. Part of the problem from the perspective of the local church officers is that it would seem that a large part of any funds realised for a partial sale would revert back to the Methodist Church's central fund and may not be hypothecated for the maintenance of Sion. I am more than happy to engage further with the church officers at short notice and am anxious to deliver a workable and viable solution.

### **2.15.1 Deputy R.G. Le Hérissier:**

It is pleasing, as with fencing, that the Minister is not wedded to one particular view. Would the Minister accept that, for example, the provision of a floor within the church would make it much more acceptable to alternative ideas and, indeed, there has been, I understand, an approach, for example, from a body wishing to develop a community organisation within the church?

### **Senator F.E. Cohen:**

A practical solution to the church is something that I am very keen to deliver, as I have already explained. It is perfectly possible that a structure that does not affect the existing church can be built within the church and that could provide a perfectly acceptable and usable space and a solution from the planning perspective.

### **2.15.2 Senator J.L. Perchard:**

The Minister said that there is priority to conserving and restoring those buildings on the Historic Buildings Register such as Sion Chapel. Does the same policy apply to the almost identical chapel on Route de Trodez, St. Ouen and how many chapels does the Minister wish to conserve and restore and how many green fields does he propose to build on?

### **Senator F.E. Cohen:**

The Senator is being rather naughty. He knows perfectly well that I have no intention of building on green fields and indeed the Island Plan that has been placed in his hands - and I hope will be a cure for any insomnia that he may suffer from - is based around enshrining the protection of the countryside for the next 10 years. As far as the Methodist Churches are concerned, I believe that there are 15 properties. It would clearly be preferable to preserve all 15 although I think in practical terms that is unlikely. One of the problems is the central pooling of funds and a mechanism needs to be designed to enable the Methodist Church as a whole to apply whatever funds are received from the sale of disused buildings and use those for the maintenance in perpetuity of the remaining buildings.

### **2.15.3 The Deputy of St. John:**

I am concerned that the Minister is putting so much emphasis on funding if something is sold. That should not come into it in my book. That said, being the Chairman of St. John's working party, the Parish are concerned that we could finish up with derelict building in our Parish if planning and others take forever to come up with a reasonable solution to this. Will the Minister give us an indication when something sensible will come from his department in relation to historic buildings that things can move forward, not only in St. John but in other areas and I am thinking of up in the north of town with another big building that has been in headlines recently.

#### **Senator F.E. Cohen:**

The Deputy seems to seek to blame the Planning Department for the lack of the opportunity from the owners of a building or the potential developers of a building to come forward with proposals. If the owners or potential developers of any building, whether it be a listed building or any other building, wish to obtain pre-application advice in relation to that building, I am more than happy to assist in providing that pre-application advice within the constraints that I have outlined in a previous answer.

### **2.15.4 The Deputy of St. John:**

The Minister did not pass any comment re. the funding because is it within his brief to find out what properties are worth and whether or not the money should be reinvested in that particular site because to me I do not believe it is in his brief.

#### **Senator F.E. Cohen:**

The Deputy clearly did not understand the point I was making, which was that for the church at Sion to be retained in part, there will need to be a provision of funding for its maintenance. The idea was that the enabling development of the western end of the site could provide that funding, but there are structural problems within the Methodist Church in relation to hypothecating the receipt of those funds.

### **2.15.5 Deputy R.G. Le Hérisier:**

Yes, to confirm, if there were to be a resolution or a mutually acceptable resolution to the funding problems or the building, for example, were to be leased rather than purchased outright, can the Minister confirm that if there were to be proposals, which sympathetically kept the outer fabric of the church, he would look at a proposal, for example, which entailed, for example, the insertion of a floor, which would make the revamping of that building so much easier and perhaps acceptable to community groups?

#### **Senator F.E. Cohen:**

The Deputy is an Executive Member of the National Trust. The National Trust has fought long and hard for the preservation of many buildings, and I am sure that he is proposing something that will greatly complement and assist the building and its long-term survival. I am more than happy to look at his suggestion, in fact, go even further and to say that within the constraints of the planning application process, I would initially offer pre-application support to such a suggestion.