

23.02.07

2 Deputy M.B. Andrews of St. Helier North of the Minister for Infrastructure regarding infrastructure issues in the Grand Vaux area (OQ.9/2023)

Will the Minister provide details of the work, if any, that is being undertaken to address infrastructure issues in the Grands Vaux area in the aftermath of the recent flooding?

Deputy T. Binet of St. Saviour (The Minister for Infrastructure):

I can assure the Deputy and Members that officers from all the relevant departments are working on an integrated plan to reduce further flood risks. I have committed to providing an update in person to the residents of Grands Vaux in approximately 5 weeks' time.

4.2.1 Deputy M.B. Andrews:

In relation to the provisions that could be increased, could the Minister indicate what those provisions would be in the event of future flooding?

Deputy T. Binet:

I am not sure that I can suggest any provisions but I can say that a lot of the work that has been done relates to work that is upstream of the reservoir. I think the simple fact is that the drainage network, however clean it may be, simply cannot cope with the volume of water that we experienced 10 days ago. I think all of the focus has to be on prevention rather than the cure. Those are the areas that we are investigating at the moment.

4.2.2 Deputy S.Y. Mézec of St. Helier South:

In some of the commentary that has been around the subject I have seen a figure of £200 million quoted as a potential cost for updating the old Victorian pipe network downstream from Grands Vaux. Could the Minister just explain where that figure comes from and how it is calculated?

Deputy T. Binet:

I have to confess that it is an exceptionally approximate figure. In speaking to Jersey Water yesterday they indicated it would probably require a pipe of some 5 metres in diameter to run from Grands Vaux out to sea. Unless the tide was out, you would need a significant amount of pumping equipment to pump that water to sea level. I think it could well be significantly more than that. I think one has to accept that it is really not a very practical and viable option.

4.2.3 Deputy M.R. Scott of St. Brelade:

Has the Minister considered whether there needs to be restrictions on development in the area to avoid more flooding in the event of another extreme weather event? If so, has he communicated that to the Minister for the Environment for the purposes of his own policy making?

Deputy T. Binet:

There are ongoing discussions with all the relevant parties and I think, in terms of further development in Grands Vaux, it is simply a matter of design. If buildings are raised above the flood level they can be designed above that and, while there might be problems with access to the housing while there are periods of flooding, if and where the house is already built above the flood levels there do not seem to be any problems. It is more a matter of design than stopping development.

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

Does the Minister consider that Jersey Water have taken sufficient responsibility in terms of reservoir management for the incident that occurred?

Deputy T. Binet:

This is quite a sensitive topic. I think thus far Jersey Water can find themselves to providing us, very adequately I think, with clean drinking water. I do not think it has been on their mind to be part of an integrated system but, I have to say, over the last week to 10 days I am delighted to say that they really have come good and the discussions are a lot more meaningful than they were in the first 24 hours.

4.2.5 The Connétable of St. Brelade:

Is the Deputy aware whether the present level in the reservoir is at the correct level to prevent further spillages should we have excess rainfall?

Deputy T. Binet:

Having spoken to Jersey Water, the whole situation is a lot more complicated than it first seems but, I have to say, my instinct tells me that I would be a lot more comfortable if it were a metre or so lower than the level that it is at, at the moment. But that is just a personal comment and I am reluctant to make too many comments of that sort because I think we should be driven by the facts. As I say, I would not read too much into that. We will be making a very much more detailed presentation to residents, and to anybody else who is interested, in about 5 weeks' time. We will know a lot more by then.

4.2.6 Connétable A.S. Crowcroft of St. Helier:

The Minister may recall that in February 2010 the twin town of St. Helier, Funchal, suffered catastrophic flooding, and extensive infrastructure changes were made as a result of that. Would the Minister consider asking his officers to liaise with their counterparts in Funchal to see whether he can learn anything from the experiences of that city?

Deputy T. Binet:

I am certainly happy to do that but I am delighted to say that there have already been some pretty good suggestions, some fairly creative work done between the Drainage Department of I.H.E. (Infrastructure, Housing and Environment) and Jersey Water. I think we may find a locally-based solution but I am certainly more than happy that we make that contact.

4.2.7 Deputy G.P. Southern:

The Minister keeps referring to a plan for Grands Vaux, does he not accept that what we need is a plan for the Island to replace the Victorian sewers where appropriate? We need a much larger scale of initiatives.

Deputy T. Binet:

Delighted to be able to tell the Deputy that there is an ongoing programme. We are going to be raising some more money. We are working on that at the moment and I perhaps extend a personal invitation to the Deputy to visit Grands Vaux and Bellozanne and the new treatment plan, and happy to spend some more time with him going through our programme of works.

4.2.8 Deputy G.P. Southern:

When the Minister says a “programme of works”, is that a programme of works that is already engaged or is it a programme of works to be performed in the future?

Deputy T. Binet:

I think the answer to that is both. There is a lot of good work going on and there is another £40 million worth of extra work programme that we are looking to find funding for at the moment. That is work that is currently underway.

4.2.9 Deputy M.B. Andrews:

When I spoke to the residents of Grands Vaux, some were very concerned about the response to the flooding and that there should have been an evacuation within hours of there being fair sight of the flood. So why was this not the case?

Deputy T. Binet:

I have to say I do not think the Grands Vaux flooding was handled badly. I think it was handled fairly well. It could have been handled better and when I say we are working on a fully integrated plan, I mean to have something at the end of this that really is first rate. We learn from our mistakes. There were some mistakes made, I think, but overall it was not bad. I think I also have to pay tribute to Andium who did a brilliant job and the fire service. **[Approbation]**