

2025.10.21

4.4 Deputy A.F. Curtis of St. Clement of the Minister for Sustainable Economic Development regarding visitor accommodation at La Folie (OQ.227/2025):

Following the comments made by the chief executive officer of Ports of Jersey to the Public Accounts Committee on 15th October 2025, that the request to explore visitor accommodation at La Folie came from the Ports Policy Ministerial Group. Will the Minister, as P.P.M.G. chair, advise how this request originated and whether all members of the P.P.M.G. agreed to pursue this use for the site?

Deputy K.F. Morel of St. John, St. Lawrence and Trinity (The Minister for Sustainable Economic Development):

I thank the Deputy for his question. The P.P.M.G., the Ports Policy Ministerial Group, made the request of Ports of Jersey Limited to explore visitor accommodation options for the La Folie site at its meeting of 23rd June 2023. The minutes from that meeting record that approval was given by the group, which was attended by the then Chief Minister, Minister for Treasury and Resources, Minister for Infrastructure and myself as the group's chair. Since then, the P.P.M.G., instituted again under the current Chief Minister, has received regular updates from Ports of Jersey on the project's progress. It has remained the group's shared position that the La Folie site should be developed as hotel accommodation to breathe new life to that area of St. Helier, a much-loved and valued historic building, and to invigorate Jersey's visitor economy.

4.4.1 Deputy A.F. Curtis:

I hope that the Minister can, in my supplementary, address where this originated. For the avoidance of doubt, will the Minister be able to advise whether he, his officers or any of those members listed, had discussions with any hotel providers about the La Folie site prior to issuing this request to Ports to explore the use, and if so, will he detail the substance of these discussions?

Deputy K.F. Morel:

Prior to the meeting of P.P.M.G., I had already met with the former Chief Minister and the Minister for Justice and Home Affairs to discuss the La Folie site and its potential use as either a headquarters for the sea cadets or a hotel. Having engaged the former Minister for Justice and Home Affairs on the site's use, the request was made of Ports of Jersey Limited to proceed with scoping options for hotel accommodation. This position is consistent with the Port's policy framework, which confirms the Government's support for the redevelopment of Jersey's harbour estates and in a way that incorporates opportunities to develop visitor accommodation and to protect its cultural and historic characteristics. I think it is really important to understand that ... this is all going back a couple years, but from my perspective the intention was to have development done as quickly as possible. Obviously many Islanders have seen La Folie and many Islanders complain about the La Folie site remaining undeveloped. I know from my perspective one of the reasons for thinking that hotel accommodation would be a good use was because obviously it is already a listed building and so maintaining the pub as a pub or as a restaurant in some way is a good idea, because that fits with that listing. In theory, a commercial use would lead to a faster development as opposed to just constant stagnation and non-development of that site.

Deputy A.F. Curtis:

If I could, I thank the Minister, but could he address the substance of my question, which was whether any discussions with hotel providers or groups took place by any Ministers or officers?

The Deputy Bailiff:

Yes that was part of the question that was asked.

Deputy K.F. Morel:

None to my knowledge. I do remember when I was a member of Scrutiny in 2018, possibly 2019, having a discussion with somebody who was part of a portfolio of people who had their own plans for the site. That was long before I was a Minister but what that did do was help me understand that there was the potential viability for it as a site but there were never any formal discussions that I am aware of.

4.4.2 Deputy J. Renouf of St. Brelade:

Is the Minister aware of the planning framework for this site, as described in the St. Helier Urban Character Appraisal, which would limit buildings to 3 stories? Does he believe that a planning application for visitor accommodation should fit within the parameters of this policy?

Deputy K.F. Morel:

As I understand planning policy, it is there to be used as a guide. I do not ask that any application necessarily fit within that. That is why we have the planning officer and Planning Committee and planning appeal system. So if somebody wishes to present an application which is outside of those policies, that is their choice, but they obviously know that there is a higher risk of it not being accepted as a result. But that to me is the planning framework. I think we get into something of a mess as an Island when we insist on only developments that are not commercially viable be presented to planning. I have a lot of criticism of the current Bridging Island Plan, precisely because I feel it is unrealistic in its limitations that it places on development in Jersey.

4.4.3 Deputy J. Renouf:

Has the Minister looked at the brief that the Ports have produced for the site, which, if the sums are done, suggests that the square meterage that they want to achieve and the rooms they want to achieve and the square meterage of the site, they would have to build a building possibly 6 or 7 stories high?

[10:30]

Does he not think that it is beholden on government organisations to have some respect for things such as the St. Helier Urban Character Appraisal and planning policies to protect listed buildings and places, including their setting?

Deputy K.F. Morel:

I will go back to my previous answer. I think any applicant can provide any application they wish. The whole point of having a planning system, which the Deputy used to be Minister for Planning, and he will understand that the system is there precisely to weigh up applications against policy and decide whether or not to go ahead. I think - I will say it again - this Assembly has slowed development in all sorts of areas by insisting that the applications from States-owned entities fit within certain parameters before they even go forward. I think there has to be the potential where those parameters are seen as not being commercially viable, that an application can go forward from a States-owned entity which is outside those parameters, but then that is for the planning system to decide. That is why we have the planning system; and it is a strong planning system, from officer to committee to independent appeal and decision

by the Minister. So I think it is entirely to be left to the planning system to decide whether any application is appropriate or not. It is not for me or any other Member of the Assembly to decide that unilaterally.

4.4.4 Deputy A.F. Curtis:

The Minister might have read the countless amounts of public commentary that do not feel that the proposed use aligns with this. Will he ensure that, while conversations are ongoing, the public's views are taken into account as to the future use. In saying that, the Minister highlighted the Port's policy framework is there to respect cultural and historic uses of the harbour, and so I ask him to pursue this because I think a lot of users of the harbour and the public do not think that the proposed use aligns necessarily with the Port's policy framework's ambition of protecting the historic users.

Deputy K.F. Morel:

I have got to admit I do not necessarily agree with the Deputy. I think a harbour has to primarily be a functional harbour. I think preserving a harbour purely because of the fact that it is old means that it is very difficult to develop that harbour for economic use of the Island. The harbour is one of our most important economic facilities in this Island. To stop development in the harbour because of wanting to maintain the way it looked 200 years ago is a really dangerous place for Jersey to be. But that is just an opinion that I have. The point being that it is not my opinion that matters. It is not the Deputy's opinion that matters. It is the opinion of the planning officer, followed by the Planning Committee, followed by an independent planning officer and then, potentially, appealed by the Minister. The planning system, which the Deputy knows incredibly well, possibly better than anybody else in this Assembly, is there to take into account the public opinions. The public's opinions will be presented in consultation with regard to any planning application that comes forward. That is the place where the public opinion will be weighed against policy, against the application; that is why we have a planning system. This Chamber is not the planning system and should not be the planning system. It is the officer, committee and then the appeal beyond that. That is the planning system, and I leave it to them to decide and they will take into account public opinion.