

Transcribed extracts, relating to use of States-owned land, from debate about appointment of Chairman and Non-Executive Directors to SoJDC (P.32/ 2011)

Tuesday 07 June 2011

Senator Ozouf

Minister for Treasury and Resources

(15:00)

Sir, the other thing that I want to say is that I don't think that I am a member of this Assembly that lacks ambition, but I have to say, that the ambition that Senator Shenton has for SoJDC almost dwarfs my own.

SoJDC is not suddenly going to become the Island's biggest development company. It is not going to become a Dandara or Harcourt, or anything else, it is going to be a facilitating entity under political instruction, under the Urban Regeneration Task Force, for specific projects. The only land that SOJDC currently has is the Waterfront. That has been the subject of a lot of debate, and I'm going to make a couple of comments in relation to that. Any other land that could have petrol stations on or supermarkets on, or retail malls or whatever else, it is actually subject to this Assembly's calling. And I do not believe that in the tenure that Mr Boleat will be interim Chairman, we are not going to see a grand expansion of this development company. It isn't a development company. It is an entity that is designed to facilitate development and that is very different from being a landowner and a developer as is being portrayed.

And indeed, I would say that there are three principal objectives that I would set for SoJDC and for Mr Boleat's job description almost in terms of what he is going to do in terms of the next 9 months. And yes sir, I've heard a number of members, including Deputy Martin, and I understand that members don't want to see SoJDC, and they've got reservations about that. And I understand and respect that: it's been well ventilated in this Assembly. But this Assembly has instructed me, and we have had debates about it, and I am instructed in order to set this up, and I don't think that any member would say that there isn't, at some point to actually bring closure to a certain issue and to move on.

And we have been here for months. And certainly, as far as Jurat Tibbo is concerned, and other members of the WEB board, I think it is fair to say, that they have been in complete limbo over the last few months. We should not be proud members of this Assembly in terms of seeing this entity, with all of the attendant costs that Senator Perchard is concerned about, actually being lacking in their ability to get on with the job in terms of securing the jobs that we do actually want to do. And I think that there does come a point where we, despite some difficulties, despite some challenges, we actually need to move on, and this amendment actually frustrates that process.

There are three objectives, as far as I am concerned, for the interim Chairman. Setting up SoJDC, and putting in the proper governance arrangements, and sorting out the inherent situation that they have got from WEB. Secondly, making progress in relation to the potential development of Phase 1 Esplanade Square: not the whole of it, but the Phase 1 which, if I may say to members, is an extremely valuable one for the taxpayers of this

Island which, if it is not given a chance, will go in terms of other areas, and the taxpayers will not see a return on their own investments which they have made in relation to Esplanade Square. And I have to say sir, and I am going to be asking, that this Assembly does send a message of support that does actually say that that very small first phase of Esplanade Square can actually go ahead and this Assembly can benefit from the tens of millions of pounds from that, indeed, if it's possible to secure it...

(intervention by Senator Perchard on a point of order)

15.05

I am grateful for the opportunity given to me by Senator Perchard of perhaps clarifying, for the avoidance of doubt, what I actually said. We need to give certainty to a Board to actually get on with the job. We've asked Jurat Tibbo to be interim chairman for an embarrassing period of time, and the States members who have discharged with diligence and care, their responsibilities as board members, have not had certainty with what they should be doing. The entity has been in limbo for too long and this Assembly needs to move on. And that's the important issue. Whether or not it is a legal entity or whether it's the new entity, it needs to move on, it needs certainty and it needs a board in order to do that. And that, I think, is an honest assessment, and a plain-speaking assessment of where we are.

And the other important issue that I want to see SoJDC start the process of is delivering urban regeneration with the view of assisting my colleague, the Housing Minister, in delivering social housing on States-owned sites. We will have a debate on the Island Plan in a couple of weeks time, and Members are aware of the importance of delivering social housing on States-owned sites. And SoJDC is the vehicle in which we will actually deliver that. And I think that that is an important issue....

16:19:10

Sir, Deputy Martin (sic) (de Sousa?), I do want to say to Deputy Martin...

16:19:23

I know that she is a caring Deputy and cares about her constituency, and I do believe that SoJDC will be able to deliver for her constituents, within her constituency and for her constituency's benefit, in time, affordable homes that otherwise would not be developed. And that, I've been asked to confirm sir, what the intention of the non-executives are. I would first of all say, and remind members, that it is the Urban Regeneration Task Force that is going to be setting the policy. We are not setting up another Docklands, WEB unclear body where there is a lack of clarity where what they are doing. They will take their instruction from the political URTF. And they will implement that. And every single site that they are asked to develop will be subject to the 15 day call in rule and will be subject to that.

But what I will say, is that we have out together a group of individuals that are capable of implementing the political decision of urban regeneration; regeneration of St Helier, particularly; and the delivery of affordable homes on

States-owned sites. And that is something that Deputy Le Claire and Deputy Power and Senator Le Main and, of course the current Minister and Assistant Minister for Housing, actually want to happen. And we've actually looked out for, in the original selection of the Board, people who were actually capable of delivering in terms of that implementation.

And if the entity is going to be successful in securing Phase 1 of Esplanade Square, which as the Planning Minister is quite right to have said, is worth many tens of millions of pounds, in terms of the realisation of a land value, not a developer, but in terms of facilitating of ensuring we get a return, that can then be used in terms of delivering this Assembly's capital priorities, which I know are likely to be, in all likelihood, likely to be directed towards affordable housing. There's a delivery mechanism for the Minister's affordable housing and there's the exciting prospect, the lucrative prospect of the capital receipt from the land that SoJDC will have inherited from WEB. And I'm confident that they are going to be able to do that.

16:23:10

Sir, I hope that answers the Deputy of St Mary's question? He's got an increasingly effective knack, if I may say so sir, of trying to get Ministers, in their summing up, to commit in terms of what the proposition is about. I recommit my own Ministerial instruction to SoJDC to concentrate on regeneration, affordable homes and, if possible, the commencement of Phase 1 of Esplanade Square.

16:27:23

Deputy of St Mary

Sir, could I get some clarification. At the end of his summing up, he said that he would recommit, I think presumably he meant that URTF, as that is the political steering group of SoJDC, I think, he can confirm if that's what he meant...he said he would recommit them to concentrate on regeneration, on affordable homes and on Phase 1 of Esplanade Square. Could he confirm the prioritisation of those three goals please.

16:27:53

Senator Ozouf

Sir, the deputy is correct in saying that it is the URTF that will responsible for considering new projects for SoJDC, and transfers of land....

16:28:22

...and the first project I would imagine is to be underway, that has already been discussed, is potentially resolving the JCG issue and I am determined, that to reach the Housing Minister's objective, to give him the capacity of getting on with the potentially exciting development that will mean that social housing sites can actually get on with new development and exciting regeneration in there.

The first priority of course, as has already been discussed, is going to see whether the entity can now get on and secure some sort of future, not as a

developer, but as an agency and facilitator of development of Esplanade Square.

Those are the priorities for the new entity and I hope that we will have an excellent board that will be capable of doing that and that the board will ensure that there is an executive capable of delivering those projects. ..

The proposition was adopted 34 *pour*, 13 *contre*, with 3 abstentions