

**REPLY BY THE MINISTER OF  
THE PUBLIC SERVICES DEPARTMENT  
TO QUESTIONS ASKED PURSUANT TO RULE 6 OF THE  
RULES OF PROCEDURE BY DEPUTY LAURIE QUERPEL**

**Question**

1. *Can PSD confirm that no other viable landfill site remains on Guernsey that could be used for landfill to dispose of the Island's residual waste?*

**Answer**

If by "viable landfill site" you mean a site that has relevant permissions in place, or would reasonably be expected to obtain such permissions, which include Planning consent and a Waste Management Licence, the answer is no. However, I will go on to say more about potential sites in the answers to some of your other questions.

**Question**

2. *If such a site exists could the Department identify the site and what its likely lifespan could be if used for such a purpose?*

**Answer**

As outlined above, there is no such site currently available. However, the Department is aware that Les Vardes Quarry is often suggested as a potential location for landfilling waste and indeed it is the largest remaining site in Guernsey where such activity would theoretically be possible. It would most likely have sufficient capacity, at current rates of landfilling, to last for more than 20 years, but to be more precise would require a more detailed investigation. Although it is a quarry, and quarries have previously been used to dispose of waste previously in Guernsey, that does not necessarily make it viable in practice, nor a preferred or acceptable course of action to take.

There are of course other former quarries in the north of the island, which although smaller could in theory be used for landfill. Many of these currently have other uses, most notably as part of the island's water storage. In most cases there would also be significant access issues, as well as the proportionately very high cost of engineering a site that typically would provide less than five years' capacity. Even if one could overcome the very significant planning and permitting issues, any financial benefit is most unlikely.

**Question**

3. *If such a site exists could the Department outline the reasons against using it for the purposes of landfill and what potential problems would have to be overcome to do so?*

**Answer**

Landfill is a method of waste disposal and, as such, is at the very bottom of the Waste Hierarchy. Therefore to continue with such a practice would be contrary to the principle on which the current waste strategy is predicated – namely that, as far as possible, it follows the Waste Hierarchy, which means focusing on waste prevention, minimisation, recycling and recovery. The waste strategy is environmentally sound and sustainable, whereas landfill is

neither. It is therefore being phased out in developed countries in accordance with the aims of the EU Landfill Directive. In the UK, for example, a tax on landfill has been in existence since 1996 to discourage reliance on this method of waste disposal. Set against this background it is difficult to see how Guernsey could argue that opening a new landfill site is acceptable.

If, however, the States were minded to do so, there would be a number of issues to be resolved before Les Vardes Quarry could be used for the purpose of landfill. First, the site is not in States ownership, so it would be necessary to acquire it before any works could take place. Clearly this would have a cost attached, although it is acknowledged that any new waste management system would involve initial costs such as these.

Setting aside for a moment the fact that the States have agreed to reserve Les Vardes Quarry for future water storage, it would be necessary to engineer the quarry to prepare it for accepting waste. The Department has not costed such works in detail but by way of comparison the costs of engineering Mont Cuet, which was opened in 1998, were approximately £4.5m. Les Vardes Quarry is larger and, unlike Mont Cuet, it is within the water catchment area which increases the risks of contamination from any run-off of leachate – i.e. the liquid formed when putrescible waste rots. This would significantly increase the scope and extent of the preparatory works required, and consequently the cost.

Before Les Vardes could be operated as a landfill site, it would require a Waste Management Licence from the Director of Environmental Health and Pollution Regulation (the Director). Clearly it is not for Public Services to pre-empt the outcome of any licence application but it is fair to say the Director has given a strong indication that she would be unlikely to grant a licence to any landfill site in the future because the practice is a source of pollution, even when well managed.

In terms of the management of the site, you are already aware from your parish role that Public Services has liaised very closely with the Vale Douzaine in recent years regarding the management of Mont Cuet. This is in response to complaints from both the Douzaine and parishioners regarding various nuisances, most significantly odour and wind-blown litter. These problems go hand in hand with landfilling operations, and the measures we have put in place at Mont Cuet have come at a cost. One would expect such issues, and complaints, to increase if a larger landfill site were to be opened up in a more populous location.

Notwithstanding all of this, the fact remains that Les Vardes Quarry has been earmarked by the States for water storage since 2006. Whilst the need for additional water storage may not seem pressing now, it should be borne in mind that this decision was taken as part of a long-term planning process. Les Vardes is the only remaining potential reservoir of any significant size and to remove it from the equation at this stage would be foolish in the face of changing weather patterns and potential population shifts, both of which are directly relevant to future storage needs.

As a final point, the above highlights several practical issues regarding the use of Les Vardes specifically. However as you will be aware from involvement in the wide-ranging public consultation that accompanied the development of the waste strategy, many different factors have to be considered before deciding on the best solution for Guernsey. Any waste strategy needs to be an holistic approach, encompassing all our waste arisings and each stage of the waste hierarchy. The end disposal method (e.g. landfill) is only one piece of this jigsaw, and to consider it in isolation, purely on the basis of some notional cost benefit, is ill-advised. It

ignores many other factors that islanders said were important to them (which included cost as one of the key considerations).

You may also recall from the public consultation workshops that scenarios which included landfill as the end treatment scored consistently badly when measured against all these various criteria, and the one included within the final shortlist of options was overwhelmingly rejected by attendees.

**Question**

4. *Does the Department acknowledge that modern management “tools” (quarry lining for example) in regard to landfill make the practice a more sustainable and environmentally acceptable option for the disposal of residual waste?*

**Answer**

I believe the answer to the previous question shows that the Department does not acknowledge this, and on the contrary considers landfill to be the least acceptable method of waste disposal.

**Question**

5. *If a site suitable for landfill does exist and could be utilised for a significant period of time, would it not be reasonable to use it, in effect, as an interim measure bearing in mind that technologies associated with the processing of waste will advance and in the coming years may well offer a more cost effective and technically effective way of dealing with the Island’s waste?*

**Answer**

The Department has heard such arguments many times over the years. It is always seen as somehow more attractive to do little and await new developments which will prove to be a panacea in terms of waste management issues. Thus far, no such new technologies have emerged and there is no reason to suppose there are any in development. Even if there were, given Guernsey’s geographical location, the States cannot take the risk of relying on anything other than technology that is well tried and tested because, unlike other jurisdictions, it cannot simply take its waste to another nearby facility.

In addition, the solid waste strategy has been under discussion since the late 1990’s at least and millions of pounds have been spent to date. Now that the States have agreed a solution, and the implementation of that solution is under way, there is nothing to be gained and much to be lost from stalling yet again while we await the next good idea.

One of the very positive aspects of the approved waste strategy is that, of all the options considered throughout the extensive consultation period that preceded its production, it is the most flexible. All of the up-front measures, such as waste minimisation and recycling, would be components of any waste strategy regardless of the end treatment option selected.

Therefore any resources dedicated to those aspects would be needed in any event. The chosen end treatment – export for energy recovery – has the advantage that if, one day, a technology emerges that is truly better and also suitable for use on-Island, it will be relatively simple to switch to that option.

Moreover, the development of Les Vardes as a landfill site would be anything but a short term option. As noted already, the acquisition and engineering costs would be many millions, and once that site has been used for landfilling waste its potential future uses (and value) are very limited. Using a quarry destined for water storage as an interim measure for waste disposal is arguably the worst of all worlds, as it blights future water storage possibilities and is also not environmentally sound. Furthermore, if the quarry is only, say, half full when a new technology emerges there would be a dilemma as to whether the States should maximise the investment made in preparing the quarry for landfill and therefore continue to bury waste until it is full, or whether it should switch at the earliest opportunity to a better method of waste disposal. The result could be a potential water storage asset half full of rubbish at a very high cost, both financially and environmentally. Consequently the Department could not support this approach.

*Staff time to prepare written answers: Approximately £180*

**Date of Receipt of the Question: 8 January 2014**

**Date of Reply: 22 January 2014**