

2.10 Deputy P.V.F. Le Claire of the Minister for Housing regarding affordable housing provision outlined in the draft Island Plan:

Does the Minister feel that the affordable housing provision, outlined in the draft Island Plan, is sufficient to meet the social needs of the Island over the Plan period?

Deputy A.K.F. Green of St. Helier (The Minister for Housing):

Yes, I do. The Island Plan, with one or 2 amendments which we will be debating over the next few days ... if the homes and sites identified do come forward then I believe we do have sufficient to meet the requirements during the life of the Plan. Of course, we will have to constantly review delivery against need; that is essential.

2.10.1 Deputy P.V.F. Le Claire:

With numbers I will circulate to Members later, I have the mean average from the Housing Department for the end of the Plan period set at 1,480 families waiting, representing 2,700 people, 1,500 children. The last time there was that many people waiting on the list was 1974 with 1,280. The average time to get into housing at that time was 3½ years. Is he willing to look at the numbers from his own department to see quite clearly what they are saying that under this current Plan there will be that amount of shortfall?

Deputy A.K.F. Green:

There is a shortfall currently of which there is no doubt, but manipulating the figures to come up with that high amount is not fair. It is around 600 homes that are needed.

2.10.2 Deputy P.V.F. Le Claire:

On a point of order? The Minister... I can appreciate that he is frustrated as I am, but he has just accused me of manipulating the figures. These are the department's numbers and they are provided to me by the department and I will circulate them to Members. He has had them already.

The Bailiff:

Deputy Green, it is not in order to accuse another Member of manipulating figures.

Deputy A.K.F. Green:

No, Sir. It is a matter of interpretation. Thank you. I apologise for that. But the fact is that we have over 600 families, about 650 families on the waiting list. Yes, some of those families are 3-, 4-, 5-member families, so the numbers come up to that. But the fact is we need to provide more homes for the individual families. I do not think the Deputy and I disagree on the provision of homes, it is just how many we need. What we need to do is to get on with the job and stop talking.

2.10.3 Deputy P.V.F. Le Claire:

May I press the Minister on this point, because I am trying to assist the Minister and I do agree with him that we need to get on and do this, but I think we need to get on and look at the real numbers as well. I have just heard that there are now 650 families on the waiting list. The last published details on the website, which I managed to get the Minister to agree to - and congratulations he did that - were 452. Now I am saying to the Minister, his department's numbers, the mean average, not the highest and not the lowest, the mean average which we were tracking is 1,480 heads of households representing 2,700 on the waiting list by the end of this planned period. Is he not

concerned, and will he not agree, to look at these numbers more openly and more robustly with me and other Members?

Deputy A.K.F. Green:

Two parts to that question, first of all I can be accused of manipulating the figures. I did the 650 from memory. It is 450. I apologise for that. Yes, I am prepared to meet with any Member that wants to meet with me and discuss the problems that we have to face. We do have a housing problem. It is a crisis for some individuals. But we are going to do something about that. The Island Plan assists me in doing that.

2.10.4 The Deputy of St. Mary:

I wonder if the Minister can assist me with a problem I have with the Island Plan, which is if he finds that he is still short of sites after whatever the States decide on sites and zoning and so on, is he able to come to the States and amend the plan?

Deputy A.K.F. Green:

I think that is probably an answer for the Minister for Planning and Environment to give, but if the developments do not come forward as hoped and housing supply is constrained then I will be pushing the Minister for Planning and Environment to come forward with a revised plan to increase supply, which might include the rezoning of green fields. I hope not, but might include it. It is something I do not normally support. We must develop the brownfield sites, we must develop the States own sites. There are loads of sites sat out there that have had planning permission for years and nothing has happened on them. That is what we have to get on with.

2.10.5 The Deputy of St. Mary:

Could I ask a supplementary, Sir? That was fighting talk, but what measures will the Minister take to ensure that permissions and so on get built and that he does not go into greenfields, but that he uses sites that are there and could be made to happen?

Deputy A.K.F. Green:

Again, I think we are straying into the Minister for Planning and Environment's area, but I have already said that I intend to carry out an annual review of supply against demand. Hopefully it will be able to prove that we are improving the situation year on year.

2.10.6 Deputy M. Tadier:

It is a slightly complex questions, but does the Minister agree that as long as we continue in this model of affordable housing on one side - which is subsidies at the market rate - and the market rate on the other side, we will never solve the underlying problems of affordable housing in Jersey, but we will risk creating a dual economy, where we have those who cannot afford to buy at market rate and those who simply must be stuck in one system rather than the other, Sir?

[15.45]

Deputy A.K.F. Green:

As the Deputy said; a very complex question. It is a very fine balancing act to provide the affordable homes. What is affordable? Different members of society will be able to afford different levels. There will always be for some an impossible dream of owning a house however much we subsidise it. It is a very difficult balancing act. Not forgetting that we do not want to deflate the market so much that we provide a

situation of negative equity for our families. If we think we have problems now, if we see young couples in the negative equity situation we will have major problems over here. So, it is a very fine balancing act.

2.10.7 Deputy G.P. Southern:

Is the Minister content that the figures, the estimates, for housing need in the next Island Plan are accurate and that in particular provisions to provide States rental accommodation or its equivalent are sufficient?

Deputy A.K.F. Green:

Given the information that we have to hand, the current most up to date information, I am content that there is sufficient in the Plan, as I believe it will be amended.

2.10.8 Deputy J.A. Martin:

It is always nice to hear a Minister for Housing say: "Let us stop talking about it and get on and do." I have been hearing that since 1995 and we have not done. So he may have tools other Ministers for Housing did not have. But I doubt it very much. The question is that is it not a fact that the Minister for Housing is so confident because he has been promised some sort of deal between commercial sites and 'B' sites and jam tomorrow for category A first-time buyers and social rented? We do not know, as mere Back-Benchers, what these deals are, but it certainly will not be in the first 2 to 5 years of the Island Plan. Is that not true, Minister for Housing?

Deputy A.K.F. Green:

No, Sir.

2.10.9 Senator T.J. Le Main:

I would like to follow that question, but I think that the Deputy Martin of St. Helier No. 1 has hit the nail on the head. I think the Minister is sitting on the fence. I would like to ask the Minister that in view of the meetings, certainly that I have had with Deputy Le Claire and with housing officers... will the Minister be supporting some of the so-called brown sites he supports, such as Samarès Nurseries, Longueville Nurseries and others which are so desperately needed, crisis situation virtually for elderly people living in awful accommodation for rental? Will he be supporting that in the Island Plan and give this Assembly some robust support for people for rental needs?

Deputy A.K.F. Green:

I could answer that in a word and the answer to that is yes. But I might ask the Senator what he did when he was Minister for Housing. **[Approbation]**

2.10.10 Deputy R.G. Le Hérisier:

In the light of my question about under-occupation, would the Minister acknowledge that there are certain pinch points to the system, namely people requiring 3-bedroom homes? I have clients who have been waiting a long, long time. How does he intend to ensure that the right mix of housing is available and that in so far as it is humanely and humanly possible that the right numbers are allocated to the right size?

Deputy A.K.F. Green:

I agree with the Deputy, there are some pinch points. A lot of effort has gone into providing one- and 2-bedroom homes recently to allow the release of the under

occupied 3-bedroom homes. There is a lot more work to be done around that and it is a balancing act. The one thing I will say, if I am Minister for Housing after the next elections - if I get in and I am Minister for Housing - I do not want to see the development of any further one-bedroom homes. I would like to see what I call 1½ bedrooms, which I think gives more flexibility to the older folk. But the Deputy is quite right, we do have some pinch points. It is a fine balancing act and I am working hard to put that right.

2.10.11 Senator A. Breckon:

The original question referred to affordable housing. I wonder, given that average earnings are £32,000 per annum and that average properties are about £500,000, can the Minister define what is affordable housing?

Deputy A.K.F. Green:

What the Senator is asking is what I alluded to when I said there will always be some people for which housing will not be affordable. The magic figure that I am advised at the moment is around £240,000 to £300,000. But for many families that still will not be affordable. That is why we have to make good quality rental housing available with good security of tenure, so it is not seen as second class, but is a practical, viable choice for those earning less.

2.10.12 Deputy J.A. Martin:

It follows on from Deputy Le Hérisser's question. It worries me that the Minister for Housing does not really understand what even sheltered housing is, because at the Town Hall recently he said sheltered housing was somewhere where people get meals-on-wheels delivered. My question is, to follow on what I said before, he said no, that there is no jam tomorrow. Obviously he will not let us know where the funds are coming from. He said yes to Senator Le Main, that he will be supporting all the fields that are up for amendments. Does that include the field at Le Pouquelaye, because that is much needed? I think that will depend on whether the Minister is the Minister for Housing after the next election.

Deputy A.K.F. Green:

There are a couple of questions in there and mostly I have been misquoted. Sheltered housing is totally different to homes for life. That is what I said. In answer to Senator Le Main's question about brownfield sites... he did not ask me about greenfield sites he asked me about brownfield sites, in particular Samarès and Longueville. I will be supporting Samarès and Longueville.

2.10.13 Deputy P.V.F. Le Claire:

I am hesitant now. I just heard the Minister for Housing saying he is going to support Samarès and Longueville. I congratulate him on that. I will provide evidence, in this question, to show that while there are 2,543 permitted homes on the shelf and under construction, those are all in 'Category B.' There are only 115 in 'Category A.' I will provide those. Those are provided to me by the Planning Department. I will also provide the figures and the buildings in relation to what is going to be available, which is occupied now. I will give those to Members. Castle Quay, 90 per cent sold, 250 units, 130 occupied. Salisbury Crescent, built, occupied. Carlton Hotel built, occupied. Laurels Hotel, built, occupied. Rex, built and occupied. I will come, if I may, to ask the Minister to reconsider his statement denying what Deputy Martin said that these are going to take 2 years and what he said on 7th June. He may be familiar

with these words: “We need to get on with it. I have got families that need to be housed. They cannot be housed now, because I know that it will take 2 years or 18 months to get some of these schemes off the ground.”

Deputy A.K.F. Green:

The Deputy is right it will take something like 2 years to get these schemes off the ground. No amount of passing greenfields will change that. It is still 2 years from planning to get occupied. It does not matter how many sites we pass, it will be 2 years. I regret that. We will obviously be working on Le Squez in the meantime; there is delivery of a number units there. We need to do more. Just moaning about it and not assisting me in getting it done. Does not help. We need to work together to get it done. [Approbation]

2.10.14 Deputy P.V.F. Le Claire:

Just on a point ... I do not know if it is a point of order, but I certainly did hear and we can refer to transcripts. The reason why I was ... and I am trying to help the Minister, believe me. The reason why I refer to Deputy Martin in coming to her support was because in his previous answer the Minister denied that it was going to take 2 years; when the Deputy asked the question. I am certain ... we will review Hansard. The Minister needs to realise, would he not agree, that Members are not enjoying standing up giving him a hard time, they are trying to help him see the reality.

Deputy A.K.F. Green:

Sir, I did not realise there was a question there.

Deputy P.V.F. Le Claire:

The question was, does the Minister not see that we are trying to assist him and not give him a hard time?

Deputy A.K.F. Green:

That is fine. Then I am happy to work with Members.

Deputy P.V.F. Le Claire:

Can I thank the Minister for a difficult question time?