

2.8 Deputy J.M. Le Bailly of St. Mary of the Minister for Planning and Environment regarding bringing forward social and private housing capital projects:

Given that the Fiscal Policy Panel report last week emphasised the importance of bringing forward capital projects, what action, if any, is the Minister taking to ensure that much needed social and private housing will be given priority for development?

Deputy R.C. Duhamel of St. Saviour (The Minister for Planning and Environment):

Housing the population is a stated aim of the Strategic Plan which this Assembly has agreed. The Minister for P. & E. (Planning and Environment) will take whatever actions are necessary within the Island Plan policies to assist in the meeting of the strategic aim and 2 such actions that are being undertaken at present include the bringing to this House for agreement of the H1-H3 amended policies and, indeed, the timely writing of development briefs for the redevelopment of States-owned land.

2.8.1 Deputy G.P. Southern:

What actual progress has been made on the H1, H2 and H3 sites since the Island Plan was passed? Has a single sod been turned?

Deputy R.C. Duhamel:

The H1-H3 policy is, as I said, due to be discussed in this House and debated. Prior to that, there has to be a consequential meeting of minds with all the players. A further question has been put by the Deputy of St. Brelade on these issues and I will give further information as to the progress on those issues. We are moving forward as fast as we can while at the same time trying to seek a consensus point of view across all of the industry players.

2.8.2 Deputy G.P. Southern:

Could I request politely that the Minister answer the question, has a single sod been turned? Has any progress been made on any site to construct further housing on the Island?

Deputy R.C. Duhamel:

Yes, indeed, there is a new residential availability report that I am about to sign off, notwithstanding the progress that was made which was exceptional during last year over and above the ordinary averages that have been met over a previous period. This year I am informed that 50 first-time homes, 50 lifelong homes for sale or rent and over 60 social rented homes are under construction and due for completion and there are a further 170 Category A homes that are about to be started.

2.8.3 Deputy J.A. Hilton:

I think the Minister has just said that there are currently 60 social rented houses under construction. There are currently hundreds of families waiting to be housed in this Island and I would like to ask the Minister what consideration he has given to bringing a glasshouse policy back to the House to be debated?

Deputy R.C. Duhamel:

Consideration is being given but only if all other policies that this House has agreed and agreed to debate further have failed.

2.8.4 Connétable J.M. Refault of St. Peter:

I just wish to inquire of the Minister for Planning and Environment, with the F.P.P. (Fiscal Policy Panel) report, they also suggested we should be looking at doing more commercial development type areas. Certainly we have a number of commercial developments which will be self-funded, which are not subject to finding finances and are potentially ready to go. Will he adopt the recommendations of F.P.P. with regard to those commercial entities that are ready to start work now?

Deputy R.C. Duhamel:

As I mentioned earlier, this Minister for Planning and Environment will act in accordance with the Island Plan obviously so long as those policies are agreed by the House. Indeed, this Minister will not act to bring forward sites which are out of keeping with those policies, as I say, until we have changed our minds.

2.8.5 Deputy J.H. Young:

The Minister committed to producing a Residential Land Availability report for us. Could the Minister tell us, can he commit to a date when we will see that report and could he also, by way of giving us a flavour of that report, remind us of the Island Plan objectives for the number of houses per year that currently require us to produce?

Deputy R.C. Duhamel:

Certainly. As I mentioned earlier, the report was on my desk. It is about to be signed. There were 2 minor amendments that had to be sorted out before it was published and the publication date for the Ministerial decision is this Wednesday. The number of houses that are being mooted to be built on average across the board is of the order of 400 per year and the Residential Availability report is suggesting that in excess of 550, I think it was, were completed in the categories that will be reported upon for 2011.

2.8.6 Deputy J.H. Young:

Can I ask the Minister to clarify that answer? Of those numbers he has just given, could he tell us how many are affordable?

Deputy R.C. Duhamel:

That depends on the definition of affordable and in some people's eyes a lot of the buildings that we are building are unaffordable and that is indeed why this House has asked me with others to seek to redefine affordability and to come forward with a proper programme that does deliver truly affordable houses for our youngsters to stem the tide of their exodus from this Island.

[10:30]

2.8.7 The Deputy of St. Mary:

What progress is currently being made with introducing prefabricated housing which can substantially reduce the overall cost of the final build?

Deputy R.C. Duhamel:

This indeed was one of the considerations that was being consulted upon with the construction industry and other bodies in terms of innovation in building technology which would, at a stroke, be able to help to reduce the overall prices. Indeed, in the report that was given to me on Friday - we had a meeting which I will refer to again in a forthcoming question - it was suggested by those working in the industry that they were not particularly keen on innovation and different technologies that could bring down the prices to a truly affordable level. That is why we have had to go around the loop a number of times, as I said, to try and seek a consensus going forward, which will square the circle and bring to this Island proper, truly affordable homes for our youngsters and others who will be able to afford them if indeed these things are undertaken.