

3.7 Senator A. Breckon of the Minister for Housing regarding the need for more homes for States rental:

Does the Housing Department still need more homes for States rental?

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

Yes.

3.7.1 Senator A. Breckon:

I can go a supplementary on that, I think. In the Budget debate last week, the Minister for Housing said in regard to building more State rental homes: "The only limiting factor is site availability." In that case, can he say why he is willing to sell Ann Court?

Deputy A.K.F. Green:

It is said that you cannot have your cake and eat it, but sometimes you can. The Ann Court site is one of these cases. We can have our cake and eat it. At the moment we have a site that is having a shaft put in it by T.T.S. (Transport and Technical Services) to prevent flooding to the north of town, we are going to have 200 underground much needed public parking spaces, we are going to have parking for residents and possibly up to 200 units of social housing. My job as Minister for Housing is to get the best out of a site that I can. This site is a slow-burn site, because all that other work has to happen first. The Housing Trust has substantial funding that they wish to invest in social housing. I am using my responsibility as Minister for Housing to make sure I maximise all the resources available in Jersey.

3.7.2 Deputy R.G. Le Hérissier:

Would the Minister not acknowledge that once the housing authority is on its way, once the new site he or the Minister for Planning and Environment are bringing forward is approved, we will at last have reached a solution to the housing problem? Would he not acknowledge this is utterly naïve, given that it is intimately linked to the population issue and no solution seems in sight?

Deputy A.K.F. Green:

I do not think it is utterly naïve to have a long-term plan over 30 years to solve the housing problem. Supply is the problem. The availability of funding has been a problem over the last 10 years, as has the availability of land. We solved the funding problem with the Budget last week. The draft Island Plan Review will give me a short-term solution if the Assembly accepts it and that will then give me time to work on sites in town. This morning, I cannot disclose where, I signed an exclusivity agreement with a landowner in town, which will allow us to develop a site in town if we can agree a price and we can get the planning permission. But I need short-term work. I have 700 families on the waiting list and we can realise some of those sites more quickly than Ann Court.

3.7.3 Deputy G.P. Southern of St. Helier:

Does the Minister accept that the greatest demand is for social rental housing and can he assure the House that he will not repeat what happened some years ago when housing allocated as social rental got converted into affordable first-time buyer homes? Can he assure the House that he will not be pulling that sort of trick again?

Deputy A.K.F. Green:

I do not know about pulling of tricks but I do know that is why I formed the Strategic Housing Unit; we do need affordable housing across all the different tenures. I will ensure

that there is suitable social housing and I will ensure that people who find their circumstances better will be able to leave subsidised sheltered housing and get into their own affordable homes. That is all part of the Strategic Housing plans.

3.7.4 Deputy J.A. Martin:

In the first answer the Minister gave, I found it quite contradictory because he said that Ann Court, because of the shaft being put down there and the parking on top, was a slow-burn project, but the Jersey Homes Trust are rearing to go and have lots of money.

[10:30]

Which is true? They have 700 people waiting on the list but will the Minister also admit that the policy of all the trusts regarding who can stay is who can pay? I know of people living in 3-bedroomed houses just with 2 adults and because they are in a trust house they are staying put and it is causing a jam in the middle. The answer to Ann Court really does not add up. Is it a slow-burn or a quick win or is someone being shafted?

Deputy A.K.F. Green:

If my fellow Deputy of St. Helier can tell me how to drill a shaft quicker, how to build 200-odd much-needed underground public car park spaces, how to get car parking underground on top of that for the residents and then be able to build the flats quicker, I would be very pleased to hear from her.

Deputy J.A. Martin:

We have just approved £150 million for the housing development company to borrow; I am sure that is where he could get it from.

Deputy A.K.F. Green:

No amount of money is going to get that shaft dug quicker, no amount of money is going to get the car parking spaces built quicker. Money is not the problem, it is engineering that needs to be carried out properly. I find it quite silly.

3.7.5 Deputy G.C.L. Baudains:

Maybe I can help the Minister out with the last problem he is facing. Building on the question that Deputy Southern asked, would the Minister agree that the previous policy of selling off rental houses to first-time buyers was a mistake, given that he has just said that he now has 700 families on the waiting list? Could he give us an indication of how many rental houses were sold to first-time buyers over the last, say, 2 or 3 years?

Deputy A.K.F. Green:

I cannot answer the latter question but no, I would not say it was a mistake, it depends on the circumstances. Very often if somebody's circumstances have changed, they no longer need social housing but it is too late for them to get out into the open market. Very often when you sell that house to them they remain there, as they would have done in rental anyway and the capital from that develops 2 more homes for people on the waiting list.

3.7.6 Deputy R.G. Le Hérissier:

Notwithstanding the excellent service which I have found from the Housing Department, I am very worried about housing for larger families. Has the Minister for Housing not considered selective purchasing, as there are people who are years on the list because of family size or inability to fit into an estate environment, *et cetera*? Has he not considered selective purchasing?

Deputy A.K.F. Green:

In a very - how do I put it - restricted way, and so far I have to say I have found nothing that works. I have looked at different opportunities at houses for sale that I thought might fit the social housing needs, but I regret to say that for a number of different reasons, and if the Deputy would like to know the sites I will tell him afterwards, they just did not fit the criteria.

3.7.7 Senator A. Breckon:

Back to the original question about whether the Housing Department still needs more homes for States rental, the Minister said in answer that there are over 700 families waiting, so the question is: would not 200 homes at Ann Court be of benefit for the Housing Department and States rental?

Deputy A.K.F. Green:

Absolutely. That is why the Housing Trust and the Housing Department now take their tenants from the Affordable Gateway so those 200 homes are going where they are needed.