

2018.12.03

7 Deputy M.R. Le Hegarat of St. Helier of the Minister for Children and Housing regarding the Minister's position in respect of the delay of the Andium Homes project on the Ann Court site: [OQ.210/2018]

What is the Minister's position on whether the Andium project at Ann Court should be delayed?

Senator S.Y. Mézec (The Minister for Children and Housing):

I have been clear, both in public and in private conversation with the Chief Minister and the board of Andium, that I do support the development of social housing on that site because I think the scheme that Andium have come up with is excellent and it will help get waiting lists down. As the Chief Minister has just said, this will be discussed by the Council of Ministers next week and of course I will abide with whatever decision the Council of Ministers does make. But I am determined that we need to deliver more social housing for the Island and I hope that this review can be concluded as quickly as possible so that there is no further delay and I would not support any further delay.

3.7.1 Deputy M.R. Le Hegarat:

How does he think that this delay will impact on the pledge to children and putting them first?

Senator S.Y. Mézec:

I do not envisage that many properties that will be built on this site will go to families with children I think the larger proportion of those would more likely go to retired people. But I think that when it comes to fulfilling our pledge to Jersey's children and young people to make sure that they all live in the best possible home environment and have access to decent and affordable accommodation we need to take a wholesale look at it. This is not just about the Ann Court site, it is about what we do, as a whole, as a Government, in providing affordable housing and that is certainly a cause that I am more than prepared to champion even when, from time to time, there may be disagreement on the specifics.

3.7.2 Senator S.C. Ferguson:

In view of the possible loss of social housing at Ann Court, will the Minister withdraw permission for hospital staff to live at Convent Court?

Senator S.Y. Mézec:

No, we have had back and forth on this subject previously with the Senator. I do not agree with her outlook on this but I would say that if there was to be a change in decision I would want to argue very robustly to make sure that other sites are made available as quickly as possible and that further areas can be developed into social housing, and on that question I certainly will not take no for an answer.

3.7.3 Deputy K.G. Pamplin:

I think I might be unique here in saying that I, as a child, grew up in Ann Court, in the previous flats that used to be there. I had a great time growing up and I know a lot of my friends and family were lucky to go to great schools in the area; Janvrin School, which is now Springfield School. My question to the Minister for Children and Housing is could he explore and report back to us why there has been a delay in returning houses and flats to people in that area? It seems like a long time since my former flat was brought down; it is a long time to wait. Will he investigate what the delay has been in returning affordable houses to that area?

Senator S.Y. Mézec:

I had a best friend who grew up on Ann Court as well and I remember spending many happy hours down there with my friends. I agree it has felt like a very long time and obviously this is adding a bit of extra time to that. Whether I can have a full review on the ins and outs of what has gone on here, I do not necessarily know if that would be a useful use of my time because I prefer to look forward rather than backwards.

Deputy K.G. Pamplin:

I appreciate the Senator's comments that he used to share time with us as well. It probably was you that used to cause all the trouble around there, not me. But I disagree with him slightly in the sense that, yes, I think we all should look forward, absolutely. But sometimes you can look back and not make the same mistakes over and over again. So would he ...

The Deputy Bailiff:

Deputy, we really have to be disciplined about asking a question.

3.7.4 Deputy K.G. Pamplin:

Of course. So will he recommit to having a look, maybe in smaller detail, at what the delay is so we do not have delays in the future?

Senator S.Y. Mézec:

When I spent time in Ann Court I was impeccably behaved. It was my friends who were the problems obviously. **[Laughter]** If I do not commit to having a full review I am certainly happy to raise that question with the board of Andium when I have a discussion with them and find out why they think things have taken as long as they have and what lessons can be learnt in the future so that we do not have this on other sites.

3.7.5 Deputy K.F. Morel:

Given that, in my view any delay when it comes to housing - because we all need to live today, we need to be housed today - any delay is too long. Could the Minister for Children and Housing confirm whether Ann Court is in fact designated in the Island Plan as being for housing and therefore any change of use to offices would require a planning inquiry and subject it to much longer delays?

Senator S.Y. Mézec:

The honest answer to that is in terms of the Island Plan, I do not know for definite what it says in that but what I do know is that in the North of St. Helier Masterplan it was very clear that this was to be used for residential purposes. I happen to think that the North of St. Helier Masterplan is a very good document and I would like to see much of the proposals in that plan progressed as quickly as possible.

3.7.6 Deputy M. Tadier:

Does the Minister agree that facilities and infrastructure are going to take up a big part of the next 3 or 4 or 5 years about development? Does he also consider that it is not just Ann Court but questions like the hospital, the future of Fort Regent and States offices that will ultimately have an impact on where housing can be freed-up? What talks have taken place between the Minister for Planning and Environment, for example, and the Council of Ministers about what role he might have when it comes to reviewing and having input into the future Island Plan?

Senator S.Y. Mézec:

In discussions that I have had with the Minister for the Environment, I have picked up on the vibe that I know he is passionate about urban regeneration. As a former St. Helier Deputy and

current St. Helier resident, I am very keen that we take a much wider view of developments in St. Helier so we do not just cram housing in areas, we do make sure we get the infrastructure right: the parking, the access to open and green space. I have said to the Minister for the Environment that I would want to be involved in those discussions to make sure we do things properly for the benefit of the people who are going to live in those areas.

3.7.7 Deputy M.R. Le Hegarat:

Accepting that it will not be our families going to Ann Court however, one assumes that the people that will be moving to Ann Court will be moving from somewhere so, therefore, ultimately any delay will have an effect on children and young people. Would the Minister confirm that?

Senator S.Y. Mézec:

I certainly do and that is why I have said throughout this that we can look at this one scheme, a scheme that I happen to think is a good scheme and want to support. But of course we have to have a wider look, not just at this but this is a good day to be talking about social housing as we have had the press release out from Andium Homes about the gasworks development, another excellent project that I hope to see go ahead as soon as possible. We have to take a wholesale look at this and I certainly do agree that we have issues in our appropriate allocation of housing in all sectors, not just social but private as well. That is something, over the next year when we have our housing policy development board up and running and in action, we will be looking at making sure that we can have a decent plan to make sure we get the best out of our housing stock in Jersey.