

23.02.07

9 Deputy S.Y. Mézec of the Chief Minister regarding the proportion of affordable homes (OQ.20/2023)

Does the Chief Minister stand by her previous voting record in wanting the proportion of affordable homes delivered by the States of Jersey Development Company on the Waterfront and South Hill increased from 15 to 30 per cent, and if not, why not?

Deputy K.L. Moore (The Chief Minister):

I do stand by my voting record across the various propositions regarding affordable housing which have come before this Assembly. Some of those propositions have been successful and others of course have not, and I respect the primacy of the Assembly. I voted for 30 per cent of affordable homes on the Waterfront and at South Hill but that proposition was defeated. This Government has made it clear that we need to deliver more affordable housing and of course we have made that commitment clear by identifying the site at St. Saviour's Hospital as one that should be for affordable housing. That includes particularly for key and critical workers who we want to deliver services for and maintain a strong and vibrant economy. Housing is still and remains a theme of relentless focus for this Government as we seek to meet our current and our future challenges.

4.9.1 Deputy S.Y. Mézec:

That answer sounds like the Chief Minister has given up on the prospect of getting a better use out of the Waterfront and South Hill. Does the Chief Minister recall that the guidance that was issued as a result of those previous propositions stated that it was to be a minimum of 15 per cent and that in actual fact she can still act in accordance with States Assembly decisions by seeking to increase that to 30 per cent as was her preference previously? Will she therefore, as head of the Government, use the discretion she has to issue direction to the States of Jersey Development Company that they ought to come back with plans for a greater proportion of affordable homes on those sites?

Deputy K.L. Moore:

Well, that is a rather different proposition and I am sure I would have to talk to my Ministerial colleagues. I think, as I have outlined in my first answer, we have identified sites that are suitable for affordable housing and the relevant bodies, particularly Andium, are now fully focused on assisting us in achieving that. We are also in the process of identifying further sites because we do respect and absolutely acknowledge, as the Minister for Health and Social Services pointed out earlier in her answers to questions, the real need to do so.

4.9.2 Deputy M.B. Andrews:

In respect to credit lending when we have got developments where there is scale and we see there is a fixed percentage of 15 per cent of affordable housing, do you think there could potentially be elements of risk in terms of the viability of such projects being pursued if the percentage is increased to 30 per cent?

Deputy K.L. Moore:

Well, the Deputy is quite right. I think, if I think back to the time of that debate, that was one of the key points that the Jersey Development Company put to States Members. There was a vigorous pushback from particularly directors of the S.o.J.D.C. (States of Jersey Development Company) and we do have to take into account the experience and expertise that they bring to their roles on that board and we will have to listen to them. It is always about finding balance, it is about finding a

proportionate way forward but there is no point in having a body such as the J.D.C. if we do not enable them to deliver as they see fit.

4.9.3 Deputy M.B. Andrews:

In relation to the 15 per cent that is maintained, is it the belief that having this percentage can provide reinvested capital for future projects compared to increasing the percentage from 15 per cent upwards?

Deputy K.L. Moore:

Well I think that that is part of the deal. There has been an amount of money returned to the public and an amount set aside for public realm projects which we are still looking forward to seeing delivered.

4.9.4 Deputy R.J. Ward:

Can I ask the Chief Minister, what would her definition of affordable be of this 15 to 30 per cent of homes?

Deputy K.L. Moore:

Well I think greater expertise than mine might be needed and of course affordable is a difficult thing to define, particularly in light of changing circumstances and inflationary pressures. I would look perhaps to the Andium Homebuy Scheme that delivers affordable homes for sale to members of the public and we are really pleased with the progress that they have been able to make.

4.9.5 Deputy R.J. Ward:

The converse of affordable is unaffordable and what we are looking at is 70 per cent of these homes being unaffordable. Is the Chief Minister happy that we are building on States-owned land unaffordable homes that will inevitably go to buy-to-let investors because no one else can buy them?

Deputy K.L. Moore:

If we stick to the facts I think that J.D.C. have on a number of occasions shared with Members the numbers of buy-to-let investors who have purchased their sites and units to date and there is a high percentage of owner occupation as well in those units. Of course, markets always have a variety of different price levels.

[10:45]

Affordability is of course essential for our young people, for our key workers and for many other members of our community. We are, as I pointed out earlier, absolutely focused on ensuring that there are enough units of affordable accommodation to ensure that Islanders have hope for the future and see a bright future for themselves in this wonderful Island. I will leave it at that.

Deputy G.P. Southern:

Could I have a point of clarification before we ...

The Bailiff:

There are no points of clarification that arise during question time, Deputy Southern.

Deputy G.P. Southern:

How right you are.

The Bailiff:

But you have not yet asked a question and there is probably time if you want to put yourself down for a question.

4.9.6 Deputy L.V. Feltham:

Given that we are in a housing crisis and the Council of Ministers have housing as one of their key priorities, I was quite surprised to hear the Chief Minister say in answer to Deputy Mézec's question about the previous proposition in the Assembly that she would have to go and speak to other Ministers about it. Could she confirm if she has had any conversations with Ministers about increasing the proportion of affordable housing on those sites?

Deputy K.L. Moore:

I am not generally one to look backwards; I tend to look forwards. Myself and my Ministers have been looking forwards at what we can do in terms of delivery and I have outlined that this morning. It is not something that we have considered. We indeed could do that but I think that at the moment we are in a positive place in terms of identifying potential and appropriate sites for a greater number of affordable homes and we now need to get on with delivering the supply because it is all about supply.

4.9.7 Deputy L.V. Feltham:

Would the Chief Minister confirm to the Assembly whether she will instruct the Minister for Housing and Communities or not to look at increasing the numbers of affordable homes on the Jersey Development Company sites?

Deputy K.L. Moore:

I think the viability of that will most certainly depend upon where the Jersey Development Company are in terms of their planning. It is a most difficult process to plan for a major development and of course the costings of that are critical. Therefore, we cannot suddenly turn around and tell them that they have to rework those costings if they are at a certain point in progressing to delivery. I would prefer to see them deliver and use a site that is identified for development and therefore we can get on with delivering in other places which of course we are doing.

4.9.8 Deputy G.P. Southern:

The Minister in her speech not a few minutes ago referred to a list of those who bought J.D.C. properties and the types of people who bought or rented, can she state where those lists are to be found because I have not come across them before?

Deputy K.L. Moore:

I do believe that the Jersey Development Company has provided that information to States Members on at least one occasion. I do not have it to hand but I am sure we could ask for it again and recirculate it to Members.

Deputy G.P. Southern:

Will the Chief Minister do so?

Deputy K.L. Moore:

I think that is what I just offered to do.

4.9.9 Deputy S.Y. Mézec:

Is it the case from this Chief Minister that having once held a decent position when it comes to the Waterfront and South Hill that she has reverted to a position which is identical to her Alliance Party predecessor. Some better way, huh? Would this Chief Minister like to take a second look at these projects, given that not only has not a single brick been laid but planning permission has not even been given. We are talking about publicly-owned land, a publicly-owned developer and that she would be making better use of her time looking at those projects rather than telling us: "Oh, it is okay because there will be some affordable homes on the St. Saviour's Hospital site about 5 years from now." Would that not be a better way to take?

Deputy K.L. Moore:

Of course I will be happy to ask the Jersey Development Company if there is potential for that but, as I identified in an earlier answer, it very much depends on the process of getting that development ready for its planning application. I am not sighted at the moment on where they are in that process and certainly there is a better way and I think we are well on the road to delivery.