

3.8 Deputy J.A. Martin of the Minister for Housing regarding H2 sites purchased by Housing Trusts:

Would the Minister inform Members whether any H2 sites have already been purchased by Housing Trusts under the assumption that they will be given financial support by the Housing Development Fund to develop these sites and, if so, how many?

Senator T.J. Le Main (The Minister for Housing):

I am not aware of any purchases which have already taken place on the basis of the Deputy's questions.

3.8.1 Deputy R.G. Le Hérisier:

Would the Minister state whether he is aware of any imminent purchases?

Senator T.J. Le Main:

No, Sir, I have written to all the Trusts' chairmen. This Assembly will know very well that we will very shortly be concluding a full review of social housing, Trust subsidies, everything pertaining to housing and social housing in Jersey. I have written, on 8th May, to all the Trusts' chairmen explaining that I would want no further purchases or agreements without my express authority while this survey is in place.

3.8.2 Deputy G.P. Southern:

Can the Minister assure the House that, should any Trust approach him with a scheme involving a purchase by that Trust of the land, as well as development of that land, he will reject such a proposition?

Senator T.J. Le Main:

I have explained that I have written on 8th May to all the Trusts' chairmen explaining that they must not enter into any purchases or deals or otherwise on H2 sites without referring the matter to myself.

3.8.3 The Deputy of St. Martin:

Could I just ask just for absolute confirmation that also includes Field 690 in St. Martin?

Senator T.J. Le Main:

All sites - including H2 sites - until this Assembly has had a proper look and proper debate on the needs of social housing in this Island, which includes the whole manner of the relationship between the Trusts, the public sector and everything else.

The Deputy of St. Martin:

The answer is yes, 690 has been included. It will not be sold until the report has come from you.

That is what I was asking.

Senator T.J. Le Main:

Regarding 690, there has been no approach to my department on the social aspect of it.

3.8.4 Deputy I.J. Gorst of St. Clement:

Just asking the Minister for clarification in regard to his last answer; he said that he has written to all Trust chairmen asking them not to undertake any deals without notifying him. He also insinuated that any that he was notified of he would then bring to this House for discussion. Is that the case?

Senator T.J. Le Main:

It might be easier, Sir, if I had your approval to read out a short letter that I wrote to the Trust chairmen which will clarify the issues. It is titled 'Review of Social Housing Need in Jersey': "As you will be aware, my department intends during the course of this year to carry out a fundamental review of social housing in Jersey. The ultimate aim will be to take a report and proposition to the States which would make recommendations on the future provision of social housing in the Island. The review will examine, among other things, the level and indeed the definition of social housing needs in the Island. It will also seek to settle recurring questions relating to the cost of subsidy, the level and the form of any regulation and the future roles of the States, Trusts and the Parishes as social landlords. Naturally, as key partners in the provision of social housing, the Trusts' input will be invaluable, particularly in the development of an overarching social housing plan to which we will all work. In view of the fact that this major review is imminent and that States will be asked within a relatively short period to make far reaching decisions in this sphere, you may feel as I do that it would be wise to hold in abeyance any new schemes beyond what has already been agreed, pending the outcome of that debate. In the interim it would clearly be unwise to enter into any firm commitments for additional developments. I intend to call a meeting of the Trust chairmen in the very near future to discuss the issue of individual negotiations on rezoned sites and how I feel this ought to be conducted." That is the basis of my letter.

Deputy I.J. Gorst:

So the answer to my question is yes, there will not be any deals undertaken before the proposition is brought to this House?

3.8.5 Deputy J.A. Martin:

I am sorry, I totally have a different interpretation of that. It was a very nice letter written to the Trusts, but does the Minister not agree that he has no authority whatsoever over any Jersey Housing Trust and if they wish to go out and purchase any land they can do so, and if they get there first we are held that these sites have been rezoned for first-time buyers and social housing and there is nothing the Minister can do under the laws at the moment to stop Housing Trusts going out and purchasing? Is that not correct?

Senator T.J. Le Main:

The Housing Trusts could purchase but they would not get my blessing for any subsidies or any agreements. The position is quite clear that the social landlord, should a Trust decide to purchase without the hands of comfort of the States in subsidies, then of course I would believe that you are correct. But, at the moment, all Trusts are seeking letters of comfort and some form of comfort over the interest rates that they borrow at the banks. So the issue is that at the moment I do not believe that the Trusts would in fact go against my advice.