

2.4 Deputy S. Pitman of the Minister for Housing regarding plans to re-house tenants of Convent Court, St. Helier during reconstruction work:

Would the Minister inform Members what plans, if any, have been made to re-house existing tenants of Convent Court while it is being reconstructed and, in particular, would he inform Members whether all tenants' temporary homes will be equivalent to their current accommodation and whether they will be given accommodation equivalent to their current accommodation once the reconstruction has been completed?

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

All residents of Convent Court will be visited to assess their needs and requirements. These visits will take place this year. Those tenants wishing to return to new developments will, where possible, be able to do so. However, a number of new sheltered housing developments will be commencing soon, hopefully, when planning decisions on some of the issues regarding land availability are made. These should be wonderful bungalows similar to those of the department at Don Farm. These would provide excellent homes for an aging population and, therefore, residents of both Convent Court and Caesarea Court will have plenty of choice available to them. The department will do its very best to ensure that tenants currently enjoying an additional bedroom, as the result of living in Convent Court or Caesarea Court, will have the same benefits in a new home. However, understandably much will depend on what is available at the time and the numbers of people involved. All options will be discussed with the tenants at the time and I have given a categorical assurance again last week to a public meeting that I will personally visit - my Assistant Minister or myself - any tenant to clarify the situation. We are going to give them assurances that they will be treated with total respect and, as I say, just as if I was treating my mum and dad.

2.4.1 Deputy S. Pitman:

Convent Court when reconstructed by the States will include 9 3-bedroom units being put up for sale. Has the Minister any indication of current residents wanting to buy, given that no residents live in or currently require accommodation of this size? Further still, Sir, if the Minister is informed that no current occupant wishes to buy, what then would happen to these 3 bedroom units bearing in mind that the Minister has promised that no tenants will be evicted?

Senator T.J. Le Main:

No, Sir, I cannot give you information to that question because I do not know the answer. But, yes, the question is quite clear that no tenant will be evicted and we hope that over the period of a time that the residents and attendants will work with my department and my officers with the high-rise tenant groups to make sure that we can work with them to move them to more appropriate and far better accommodation.

2.4.2 Deputy R.G. Le Hérisier:

Would the Minister accelerate the re-housing given his statement that people are in mortal danger of being hit by concrete falling from up top and given that it will not be 2009 until the next proper report is done on this particular issue?

Senator T.J. Le Main:

I can only reiterate that we are in the hands of this Assembly at the moment. We are desperately waiting to see that the Scrutiny Panel includes... and work through the scrutiny process on this, and we hope that the Assembly will see the benefits overall of the property plan. There are huge benefits to people wanting to buy their own homes - home ownership - and there is also a huge amount of people... the 18 or 20 per cent of people that are living in homes that need refurbishment. It is a huge win-win situation and we will be working with all the tenants to make sure that this is the case. I can give a categorical assurance that if Deputy Le Hérisier is concerned about the concrete falling on to residents, that is not the case at all, Sir.

2.4.3 Deputy G.P. Southern:

May I congratulate the Minister on better informing members of the public than he does this House. He said previously he had no figures on Convent Court and yet in the community newsflash of 16th January 2007 he puts a figure of as much as £5 million to refurbish high-rise building at Convent Court to acceptable standard and then goes on to say: "We will instead demolish and replace them with sheltered housing. We will spend less money than we would refurbishing them." Is he seriously asking members of the public to believe that he can build decent sheltered housing, low-rise housing for under £5 million on this site?

Senator T.J. Le Main:

Yes, Sir.

2.4.4 Deputy J.A. Martin of St. Helier:

It follows on in the same vein. In his first answer, the Minister for Housing said that some of the tenants would not obviously be re-housed because there would be some super new sheltered housing coming on line soon. Could he please identify where, how many units and in which parish particularly these are coming on line, because he identifies 400 needed over the next few years, so I hope this is on site? Is he anticipating the Sunshine site at the moment?

Senator T.J. Le Main:

The Sunshine site I do not believe is a goer for a start because of the conditions placed upon it for underground car parking by the Planning Department. It is anticipated that the cost of the Sunshine sites as units of sheltered accommodation could be as much as £200,000 plus. I do not see it as viable site at all and I would suspect that the best interests of the States of Jersey would be to sell the site on the open market and putting the money back into Senator Le Sueur's coffers. My view is that there are some developments coming on line. The Aquila sheltered housing site is on line with one of the Trusts and only this last week the Planning Minister and myself and our officers and our Assistant Ministers have met and we have agreed that in the next 4 or 5 weeks some land will be coming forward to this Assembly for rezoning and we have identified in those plans currently something like over 200 units of accommodation for sheltered housing. We are quite excited. At long last there are some very, very positive moves coming forward by the planners and by the Housing Department which will identify... and hopefully this Assembly will totally support the need and give the green light so we can get on with this work.

Deputy J.A. Martin:

I did ask which parishes. Could he identify which parishes these 200 sheltered housing are going to be proposed in?

Senator T.J. Le Main:

The Deputy will be advised very soon of the parishes but, yes, there are several parishes that are... well most of the Parish Constables- in fact all of the Parish Constables, I had better be careful what I say here - are very, very keen [**Laughter**] to support the issue of sheltered housing. Now, there are some political difficulties at the moment, as people are aware, but I am very, very confident that the Constables are working hand-in-hand with the need that is currently identified for sheltered homes.

2.4.5 Deputy C.J. Scott Warren:

For many tenants, Sir, this may involve 2 moves. Can the Minister confirm that there will be safeguards so that no tenants will be financially worse off?

Senator T.J. Le Main:

Yes, Sir.

The Bailiff:

Final supplementary, Deputy Pitman.

2.4.6 Deputy S. Pitman:

Currently at Convent Court there exist bed-sits, one-bedroom flats and 2-bedroom flats. I ask the Minister what sense is there in offering 3-bedroom units to residents while there is no indication that residents will want to buy these units?

Senator T.J. Le Main:

There are numerous bed-sits. In fact, the housing stock carries about 80 bed-sits in all its stock at the moment and bed-sits just do not meet the needs of anyone today, even those difficult tenants we house under rehabilitation schemes and what have you; it is just is not the kind of accommodation we want to offer in this day and age. I did not quite understand the question about the 3-bedrooms and the purchase on this. I am sorry, I might be a bit...

Deputy S. Pitman:

Can I clarify? I am asking the Minister if it makes sense if, currently, Convent Court consists of bed-sits, one bedroom flats and 2-bedroom flats... why is the department going to be offering, once reconstructed, 3-bedroom units?

Senator T.J. Le Main:

The department will only offer 3-bedroom units if there is a need for a 3-bedroom unit. They will not be offering 3-bedroom units to people that do not need 3-bedroom units. That is quite clear. There always has been a shortage of 3-bedroom units, there still is a shortage of 3-bedroom units, although not as great as has been in the past and the issue is that we have to use the stock to the best we can to manage.