

2.9 Deputy C.F. Labey of Grouville of the Minister for Planning and Environment regarding the imposition of certain conditions on the development of first-time buyer or retirement homes:

When considering planning applications for housing developments, is the Minister able to impose a condition which requires a certain percentage of the units in the development to be for either first-time buyer or retirement homes, either as part of an original application or as a new condition in the case of a revised application?

Senator F.E. Cohen (The Minister for Planning and Environment):

The H1 and H2 sites were largely rezoned on the basis of the provision of social housing at the ratio of 45:55, however, other than at the time of rezoning, there is no policy that would allow the Minister to require developers to provide a proportion of affordable homes in any proposed housing schemes as a condition of a planning permission, whether new or revised. While the need for affordable homes is accepted, there are also shortages in other sectors of the market. While it is sometimes possible to encourage and negotiate provision for affordable housing, I cannot require it in the absence of a policy for its provision. As Members know, the Island Plan Review is underway and the requirement for providing a proportion of affordable homes as a policy instrument is something we are actively considering as part of it. In the meantime, any H3 or H4 sites brought forward would be on the basis of the provision of a proportion of social housing. Furthermore, the retirement housing proposition for the rezoning of land is of course proposed to be brought forward on this basis. The results of the Housing Needs survey, which will be available soon, will give us a clearer picture of housing needs and demand and will allow us to better structure the Island Plan to deliver the appropriate forms of social housing.

2.9.1 The Deputy of Grouville:

If this action needs a policy, what is he or his department doing to develop it, and have it in place, before 60 vergées of our countryside gets covered in concrete? Surely, if we can use existing sites first to supply first-time buyer and retirement homes, that we have just heard from the Minister for Housing, that are urgently needed, these ought to be looked at first before agricultural land.

Senator F.E. Cohen:

As I have already said, the Island Plan Review is underway and we are looking at providing the necessary mechanisms to deliver affordable houses. The pressure should be to deliver affordable houses wherever we possibly can and I do intend to do that but I can only do it within the constraints of the planning law and within the constraints of previous applications and consents given in relation to specific sites that have not provided a proportion of affordable housing or social housing.

2.9.2 The Deputy of St. John:

Would the Minister agree that a contributing factor to the shortage of affordable homes is the fact that, over recent decades, insufficient numbers of second and third time purchase type dwellings have been constructed, thus creating a logjam in the current housing market? Sir, does the Minister have any policy initiatives designed to alleviate this?

Senator F.E. Cohen:

With regard to lack of supply, lack of supply is one factor that is presently driving house prices. There is also the fact that we have a very buoyant economy and with GNI (Gross National Income) growing at 10 per cent per annum, it is inconceivable, if you look at comparisons of other jurisdictions, to expect there to be no asset price inflation and the only inflexible asset we have in the Island is housing. It is not going to apply to cars, for example, because we can import as many cars as we need. So, we have these 2 issues of the lack of supply and the GNI growing at a high rate. I will do what I can to provide additional sites and additional houses in the Island, wherever

possible but largely this is down, with exceptions of course, to the Island Plan Review, which is ongoing at the moment.

2.9.3 Deputy G.P. Southern:

Does the Minister accept that his Jersey Home Buyer Scheme is simply, merely transferring housing intended for rental to the poorest, those in real social need, it is diverting them to first-time buyer incomes, those with first-time buyer incomes? Does he accept the figures produced by the Minister for Housing today that suggest that 3-bed social housing, rental housing is still in need, where he talks about 29 3-bed homes being constructed for social renting with 91 waiting to receive 3-bed social homes?

Senator F.E. Cohen:

The Jersey Home Buyer Shared Equity Scheme on the remaining H2 sites is taking a proportion of houses that would otherwise be made available for social rented. However, the reason for that is that there was an identified lack of demand for social rented accommodation. However, we are about to release the Housing Needs survey, that will more precisely identify the demand for all types of housing and of course there is no intention of bringing anything to this House for debate until the Housing Needs survey has been published and Members have had the opportunity to analyse the findings of the Housing Needs survey.

2.9.4 Deputy G.P. Southern:

Supplementary for me, Sir, the second part of the question; does the Minister accept the Minister for Housing's figures that 91 people are currently waiting for 3-bed social rental accommodation and that the key element in house price control is supply and demand?

Senator F.E. Cohen:

To repeat, I would rather wait until the Housing Needs survey is completed. We are only a few weeks away from that and we will have, at that point, a more precise understanding of demand that will update information in relation to all housing needs of all sectors in the Island.

The Deputy Bailiff:

The Deputy of Grouville. I am sorry, Minister, the Chair does have a policy on the whole to not allow one Minister to ask questions of another because they are usually rather friendly. **[Laughter]**

2.9.5 The Deputy of Grouville:

With this parallel review that is going on about rezoning swathes of our countryside and the existing timetable, does the Minister not see that we could end up losing a lot of good agricultural land about 6 months before the Island Plan is approved? Surely, with political will and policy, he could look at existing sites and, in my own parish, there are many huge sites that should be looked at first, before looking at rezoning parts of the countryside.

Senator F.E. Cohen:

We have a conundrum in this area. Very simply, we have urgent demand identified by the Housing Department in relation to retirement housing and the current proposal is a compromise proposal that is designed to deliver affordable retirement housing through the Constables. Is it ideal to be doing this now, in advance of the Island Plan Review? No, it is not but we have an urgent demand and I am responding and the Assistant Minister is responding to an urgent demand. However, it is up to this House to decide any rezoning proposals. Thank you, Sir.