

2.13 The Deputy of Grouville of the Minister for Housing regarding the 65 units of self-catering accommodation proposed in the Hopkins Plan:

Given the demand for first-time buyer and retirement homes among Jersey residents, is the Minister satisfied that 65 units of self-catering accommodation, proposed in the Hopkins Plan, represents an effective use of a housing development opportunity while demand for accommodation for local people remains unmet and if so, what steps will he take to ensure that such accommodation is occupied by genuine tourists as opposed to unqualified tenants?

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

Yes, Sir, no new compliance issues are presented by the development of self-catering accommodation on the Waterfront. Self-catering accommodation will be registered with the Economic Development Department as tourist accommodation and any suspected infractions of that registration will be dealt with by the compliance officers of Economic Development and the Population Office in the normal manner. As to housing supply, I again reiterate, I place reliance upon the Minister for Planning and Environment to deliver sufficient housing supply within the constraints under which he operates. I view the Hopkins Plan as one of a number of initiatives around land use currently in progress. In particular, I look to the Minister for Planning and Environment to provide an effective Island Plan which will both protect our environment and also deliver the housing supply we much need. As to the Hopkins Plan, it also includes 316 units of residential accommodation which is an important contribution to the overall housing supply as a part of a mixed development, and will also provide housing and regeneration opportunities as officers migrate from other parts of the town.

2.13.1 The Deputy of Grouville:

Could the Minister confirm who agreed to the terms of reference for the Hopkins Master Plan and, in particular, how the new accommodation was to be allocated and what input he, as Minister for Housing, had?

Senator T.J. Le Main:

I have not had any input in this at all and the issues are being dealt with, obviously, by the Minister for Economic Development and/or the Minister for Planning and Environment.

2.13.2 Deputy P.V.F. Le Claire:

The Housing Needs survey, which the Minister for Planning and Environment referred to this morning as something that will give us a greater indication as to the housing supply demands and requirements for the future is a straw poll and elements of that Housing Needs survey, albeit a straw poll, will be accurate and elements will not be. It will give us a stronger indication but it will not give us an accurate picture. What is the current practice, in terms of keeping information, when people who have qualified under the current regulations, for a set period of years in the Island, being kept at the moment in housing? For example, somebody who has been here 12 years, they get 2 letters to confirm that they have been here 12 years. They send it to the Housing Department. The Housing Department grant them their qualifications and where are the numbers of how many of those people are qualifying on a monthly or annual basis? Are they kept in housing? If they are, can the Minister for Housing bring those forward because, among rezoning, which is very important, that we need to do, this is also a need that we have, to understand the qualifying people?

Senator T.J. Le Main:

Yes, Sir, I am given those figures on a regular basis, and if Members want the figures I am very happy to give them, but we have them on a regular basis.

2.13.3 Senator S. Syvret:

Senator Le Main did not answer the original question. He was specifically asked whether he was satisfied that 65 units of self-catering accommodation represents an effective use for the Island,

given the needs of housing opportunities and he simply has not answered that question. Could he just reconfirm, because I understood him to say that the usage to which the self-catering accommodation would be put would be determined by the Economic Development Department and the Population Department, which I find somewhat strange given that I understood that all residential accommodation or housing in the Island came under the control of the Housing Department?

Senator T.J. Le Main:

The first part of the question is, I am satisfied. I am a corporate player, as one of the Ministers and a Member of this Assembly, and I am totally satisfied that within that development, in view of the loss of many hotels and guest houses over the years which have increased the supply of affordable housing in this Island, and I am more than happy and comfortable with the 65 units of self-catering accommodation. In relation to the compliance issue raised by Senator Syvret, the issue is that it was similar to the previous committee system, whereby Tourism registered the premises and licensed the premises and if there was any issue in relation to housing and people were using them for other issues, it was dealt with under the Housing Law and Loans. Similarly, the accommodation and the permit is given under Economic Development but there are strict conditions attached to that permit, which has to be dealt with the Population Department.

2.13.4 Senator S. Syvret:

The Senator referred to the old Housing Law and Loans system. I take it from that that he is confirming that if there were questions of proper usage of these properties, abuses or whatever, that in fact that power still does, in fact, reside with the Minister for Housing. Would he confirm that that is the case?

Senator T.J. Le Main:

Yes, that is the case.

2.13.5 Senator S. Syvret:

That is the case. Great, thank you and will he then answer the second part of the original question and say what steps he will take to address the potential abuses of this self-catering accommodation if it is not being occupied by genuine tourists but is instead being used as an easy way of housing unqualified labour?

Senator T.J. Le Main:

I think I have answered that question. The issue is quite clear that if the terms and conditions of the self-catering permit are breached in any way, then the Population Department, under the current Housing Law will prosecute. Simple as that. Strict tourism only conditions attached to the permit.

2.13.6 Deputy S.C. Ferguson:

Given that the company leasing or renting this particular hotel from the developer is a company specialising in short and long term leases to companies for their professional staff who may visit on a short term basis, like sales representatives or auditors, perhaps, is he still happy with the occupancy of the accommodation? Can he really regard these people as genuine tourists?

Senator T.J. Le Main:

Now that, Sir, is a question with a question mark on it **[Laughter]** because I know, Sir, that a large part of our tourist income is people that have either investments in Jersey or come to Jersey and may stay for a few days or otherwise, or are associated with financial institutions. But, Sir, you know, I have to say, again, and I can only work within the law and there is going to be put into place in these 65 units specific conditions of use, agreed by the Minister for Planning and Environment and by the Minister for Economic Development. Once those issues have been finalised, if they are finalised, once they have been finalised, then if there are any breaches under

the housing regulations or population, then it will be myself or my department that will have to deal with it.

2.13.7 Deputy S.C. Ferguson:

But surely one of the problems originally with self-catering was that people were concerned that companies in the U.K. or elsewhere would in fact be taking out leases and using this accommodation for unqualified people. Is the Minister satisfied that sufficient safeguards are in place?

Senator T.J. Le Main:

I have asked my department the same question but I will ask it again, just to make sure that I am absolutely correct. I am given to understand that the permit will say for the tourist or what we are talking about now, accommodation, but if it comes out of self-catering, then it would have to go for (a) to (h) because the Deputy, Sir, is quite right. In the past cases have been made in considerable parts of Jersey for self-catering accommodation and within 2 or 3 years they were taken out and used as lodging houses. Absolutely right and I intend to make sure that this is quite tightly controlled and, in future, any accommodation that comes for letting to tourists as self-catering should be on that basis as well.

2.13.8 Deputy G.P. Southern:

The Minister referred to the 300 units of accommodation planned for this site. Does he believe that this is good use of accommodation, of the supply of 3-bedroom accommodation which is the area where supply is most needed?

Senator T.J. Le Main:

I am unaware of the make-up of the 316 units and perhaps the Deputy may tell me that they are 3-bedrooms, are they?

Deputy G.P. Southern:

I believe the majority are one and 2-bedroom flats, again.

Senator T.J. Le Main:

Well, the issue is, Sir, that I believe very much that there is still a great need, particularly in one-bedroom flats at the moment. The 2-bedroom units, well, the Deputy is pulling faces, but it is quite clear that the market at the moment, Sir, that 2-bedroom units are fairly static but just rising a bit but the one-bedrooms, there is still a huge demand for one-bed, decent size apartments in St. Helier.

2.13.9 The Deputy of Grouville:

Does the Minister not consider this process of developing new accommodation for the Island to be remiss and lacking, in the extreme, not to have included the Minister for Housing, so instead the Minister turns to the Comité des Connétables to rezone parts of the countryside?

Senator T.J. Le Main:

No, Sir, this is a totally different kind of issue. What we are talking about for sheltered lifetime homes is not into a development such as, going on the Esplanade Quarter. Sir, the Esplanade Quarter is going to be the business quarter, predominantly, for Jersey and in my mind, to put in elderly people in that quarter is quite wrong.

Senator F.E. Cohen:

A point of information, the mix of the 316 apartments is by no means fixed yet. The matter will be the subject of some discussion with States Members and I can assure the House that the mix will meet perfectly, the results of the Housing Needs survey. Thank you, Sir.

2.13.10 The Deputy of Grouville:

Should this process have not included the Minister for Housing in the first place?

The Deputy Bailiff:

Well, I am sorry but I do not think you can start asking questions of the Minister for Planning and Environment now. That in fact brings oral questions on notice to an end.

Senator F.H. Walker:

I did have 2 questions to answer right at the end. I make it clear, I will make the written answers available to the questions.

The Deputy Bailiff:

Yes, I think it is helpful that all Ministers who have outstanding questions, if they would give written answers, I am sure that is appreciated by Members.