

2.13 Deputy D.W. Mezbourian of the Minister for Planning and Environment regarding building on green field sites:

Those members of the public who attended the recent Imagine Jersey 2035 event overwhelmingly rejected the idea of building on green field sites. Will the Minister please advise the Assembly whether, as a result of the current Island Plan consultation, any green field sites have yet been identified for consideration for rezoning?

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

The Island Plan 2002 reserved a number of green field sites, including glass house sites, for possible use as future category A housing. Under Policy H3 there are 15 sites and under Policy H4, 10 sites. One of the H3 sites - Longueville Road - was subsequently zoned and has since been developed. None of the remainder is zoned for development and the States would need to agree their formal rezoning prior to development. Indeed, both the Minister for Housing and I have reservations about the suitability of some of the sites, several of which were the result of private Members' late amendments in the Island Plan debate in 2002. The current consultation on sites for retirement homes and first time buyer housing contains 12 green field sites, of which 3 have glasshouses on them. The Island Plan Review, which Members will know has now commenced, has not yet formally considered any specific sites for zoning. The results of the Housing Needs Survey, together with other research, would better identify the demand for housing. I must say that my personal preference is to concentrate on town regeneration to first provide the required housing units and only to look at rezoning additional green sites over and above some of the H3 and H4 sites if the town cannot provide the required number of homes. It is imperative that we preserve our traditional countryside and any suggestion of green field rezoning must only be in exceptional circumstances. Any such exception should be in the context only of preserving our traditional parish communities. I am sorry if I sound a bit slurred but I have just returned from the dentist.

2.13.1 Deputy D.W. Mezbourian:

I thank the Minister for his response, bearing in mind that he has had dental work carried out this morning. [Laughter] Nevertheless I am sure that Members will be prepared to question him further on this. Notwithstanding the fact that my question did specifically use the word "site" and asked whether any green field sites have yet been identified, I wonder whether the Minister would be able to advise us whether any specific areas have been considered for rezoning?

Senator F.E. Cohen:

No specific areas have as yet been formally considered for rezoning. At the moment I do not know when we will get to the point of being able to produce a paper suggesting any sites, should there be sites for specific rezoning.

2.13.2 Deputy J.A. Martin:

I am not sure which Minister is misleading the House but it was under my impression that Imagine Jersey 2035 and the options given were on the understanding that every development identified in the Island Plan 2002 - especially the town ones - would be developed to its full density providing up to around 2,000 new homes. Then, obviously, the scenarios were given and this was reaffirmed at the Island Plan update meeting to States Members, Sir. My question is, which is true? Many of these are green fields. People were asked to make a decision on how many more homes were needed and where they would be built. Was it made completely clear and is it completely clear in the Planning Minister's mind that these have to be in the minimum developed to get anywhere near the amount of immigration that was voted for on Saturday, the 19th? Thank you, Sir.

Senator F.E. Cohen:

I can assure Members that I certainly am not misleading the House and neither are any other Ministers. The position is relatively simple. It is for the States to decide whether or not they wish to accept the rezoning of the H3 and H4 sites. The Housing Minister and I have looked at these

sites. Some of them are not particularly suitable for housing. If any particular Member has a particular site that they wish to discuss with me or the Housing Minister, we are more than happy to do so but it is down to the States, at the end of the day, to decide whether or not they wish to rezone these sites. They are not formally rezoned as yet.

2.13.3 Deputy J.A. Martin:

Sorry, Sir, a supplementary, it is about policies that the Chief Minister is making under his department, which is to say that these sites will be presumed to have the yield of homes put on them and then the Planning Minister - and it will happen, Sir - will then come back to the House or the States will decide, we cannot have even this amount of homes. So, I am sorry, Sir, I am not happy with the Minister's answers and he has really got to agree that if it is not these sites, there will be other green field sites. They will have to be built on to provide the number of homes because they cannot all be built in St. Helier even if everybody in St. Helier was wishing them. There is just not the space.

Senator F.E. Cohen:

I am not suggesting that all the homes that we need may, with certainty, be created in St. Helier. What I am saying is that some of the H3 and H4 sites may not be suitable for housing and may have been included in the Island Plan simply for the purpose of expediency at the time. It is possible that they may not provide suitable housing and I would not expect that the States would, at that point, wish to rezone unsuitable sites but I will bring them to the States, for the States to decide. Thank you, Sir.

2.13.4 Deputy J.A.N. Le Fondré of St. Lawrence:

Policy BE5 is almost a presumption against buildings taller than 5 storeys. Given the views expressed by the Minister towards continuing to protect green fields and also the views expressed in Imagine Jersey 2035, does the Minister feel that now might be the time to review that policy in order, for example, to further encourage regeneration of St. Helier or other urban areas within the Island? Finally, would the Minister be prepared to commission, perhaps, a small working party to specifically consider that matter?

Senator F.E. Cohen:

I think the suggestion of a small working party is a very good idea. I am very happy to do that and, personally, I think that there is a case for taller buildings. I have always made that clear, providing they are excellently designed and provide excellent, quality accommodation. I do not think that there should be a presumption of a particular height. Thank you, Sir.

2.13.5 Deputy G.P. Southern:

Does the Minister accept, because he was there on Saturday at the Imagine Jersey 2035 event, that the impression was given that the low numbers of immigration could be catered for and would be catered for by H2, H3 and H4 sites, that were already in the pipeline and that this was presented as a *fait accompli* with no further expansion?

Senator F.E. Cohen:

I am not quite sure what the Deputy is getting at. I have made the position very clear that it is my intention to, in conjunction with the Housing Minister, further review the H3 and H4 sites and to bring those sites to the States for the States to consider their rezoning. We do not know the final housing numbers that will be required until the Housing Needs Survey is completed. We need to have the most up to date and accurate information. When we have that, we can match supply to demand. Thank you.

2.13.6 Deputy G.P. Southern:

If I may, the Minister professes not to understand my English. I do not understand what his problem is but nonetheless, I will try again. Does the Minister accept, because he was there, that the presentation given to 130 participants at Imagine Jersey 2035, gave the assurance that the numbers in the H3 and H4 sites could cater for the small number of immigrants at the low end of the scale, of the options. Does he accept that that presentation was given?

Senator F.E. Cohen:

No, I do not. I do not, Sir. The position is very simple. It is that until we have the Housing Needs Survey completed and other information, we do not know the exact demand numbers. Once we have done that, we can feed all those numbers in and come out with a proposal to adequately match supply to demand but we are not at that point yet.

2.13.7 Deputy D.W. Mezbourian:

I do have a final question, thank you, Sir. When the decision about the H3 and H4 sites has been made - and I gather from what the Minister said this morning, he believes that some of those already designated may not be suitable for rezoning - I am sure that we will be looking to rezone green field sites and I wonder whether the Minister will tell us how much influence a willing seller will have on the decision to rezone when measured against public rejection of proposed green field sites?

Senator F.E. Cohen:

In relation to the current proposals for the provision of retirement housing, I am sure that willing sellers have been a major part in the sites that have been put forward by the Connétables but, in general principle, I think that we should be trying, once we have identified more accurately the demand, we should be trying to deliver the best sites and to encourage the owners to make those sites available for housing. I do not think we should compromise ideal housing sites by the question of willing seller in most cases. Thank you.