

3.5 The Deputy of Grouville of the Minister for Planning and Environment regarding a social housing needs planning policy:

Given that on 2nd April 2008, the Assembly agreed that the Minister should bring forward a policy that requires planning applications over a certain size to provide a percentage of their build for social need, whether that be for social rented, first-time buyer, retirement, sheltered housing or a mix, whichever is the most appropriate to the site, could the Minister confirm when such a policy is likely to be published?

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

I have on numerous occasions stated my view that an element of affordable housing should be delivered on most large housing sites, not just on rezoned sites. As a result of the States decision in April and my earlier comments on this matter, I commissioned Kelvin MacDonald Associates to investigate the local housing market and make recommendations to me on how best to deliver affordable housing in Jersey. Mr. MacDonald is a specialist in the area of affordable housing mechanisms. As Members will be aware, there have been recently significant changes in the housing and mortgage markets. Mr. MacDonald is now finalising his report to take these changes into account, and I expect to receive his report within 6 weeks. If any Member wishes to see the terms of reference for Mr. MacDonald's appointment I am happy to provide this. Once I have the report I will be able to recommend the best option to deliver this most key objective.

3.5.1 The Deputy of Grouville:

I believe it most certainly is a key objective and it is a very, very urgent one. There are applications in Planning at the moment for which that could be a requirement, just as there is in the U.K. Section 106; the template is there, so it is not rocket science. Could he please ensure that this policy that his department was charged 9 months ago to bring forward, is in place in the next 2 months?

Senator F.E. Cohen:

I would love to be able to give that commitment, but unfortunately the matter is quite complex. It could be a case that we need to consider the legislation and changes to the legislation. While I appreciate the Deputy is genuine and most enthusiastic in this area, as I am, I would urge her just to wait a little. We will get the report within 6 weeks. As soon as I get it I will share it with her in confidence and I will then bring forward the best mechanism to ensure that we deliver this robustly.

3.5.2 Deputy R.G. Le Hérissier of St. Saviour:

Notwithstanding the report that is imminent, could the Minister identify how he comes to the view that there is, for example, insufficient or sufficient over-55s housing? Is he finding that by default he is having to take housing decisions?

Senator F.E. Cohen:

Naturally I take advice in a number of areas from the Housing Department and the Housing Minister, but the Deputy will remember that there was an extensive report produced last year, and a very significant sample size with a very high return rate was used to enable my department and other States Departments to assess the likely need both for over-55s and other forms of affordable housing.

3.5.3 Deputy J.A. Martin:

If the Planning Minister cannot do this very quickly, could he at least assure the House that any rezone sites will not be passed, and also, going back to the previous question to the Deputy of Grouville, will not be passed until there is a consistent area for people who are on the waiting list for these homes? How long does he think this will be?

Senator F.E. Cohen:

The issue is not rezone sites. We do not have the problem with rezoned sites because, of course, they are rezoned on the basis of an affordability criteria. The issue the Deputy of Grouville has raised quite properly is how we deliver affordable housing on other sites that are not rezone sites - brown field sites, white zone sites and other sites. My intention is to do whatever I can to find a mechanism to ensure we deliver affordable housing on these sites. But it is not an easy thing, and you are significantly affecting the value of these sites, so you have to make sure you do it properly. If you do it in haste, I would suggest we could end up in a very difficult position with legal actions, and I want to do it properly and carefully. I think a few weeks' delay is well worthwhile if we get it right in the end.

3.5.4 Senator A. Breckon:

I wonder if the Minister could tell the House why he brought forward rezoning plans ahead of the 2009 Island Plan and now is seeking some experts' report on how this should be done and how it should be affordable?

Senator F.E. Cohen:

The Senator, with respect, is confusing different issues. The reason we brought forward the retirement rezoning proposition was because we were advised that there was an urgent need to provide retirement housing for many Islanders. As Members will see, the time between rezoning and actual delivery of units on the ground takes some time. So, I am afraid that the view was that we could not wait for the Island Plan review and that there was a case to consider retirement rezoning as a discreet measure, and the House supported that.

Deputy J.A. Martin:

Sir, could I ask a supplementary?

The Bailiff:

No. We are moving on, Deputy. Sorry.