

3. Questions to Ministers without notice - The Minister for Housing

3.1 Deputy G.P. Southern:

In his written answer to question 11, circulated today, the Minister talks about a number of new housing to be built, but he refers to them always as affordable and social properties. What proportion of the numbers he has produced today are social rented housing, because I believe that that is where the greatest and most urgent demand is?

Deputy A.K.F. Green of St. Helier (The Minister for Housing):

Just give me a minute to find my place, I can go through exactly where we are on social housing. We have projects for social housing planned for Lesquende. We have projects to increase social housing by 3 units - it is under discussion at the moment - at Osborne Court in First Tower. We have almost concluded negotiations - hopefully successfully - with Dandara at St. Saviour to have a proportion of social housing there. I cannot remember the exact figure there, I am still desperately looking for it, but it is something like 45 homes that we have planned there. We are on phase 2 at the moment of Le Squez. I cannot disclose too much, other than we are out to tender on that at the moment, and we have other plans for, let me see ... it depends how long you want me to go on for? La Coin, Pine Ridge, La Collette...

The Bailiff:

No longer I think, Minister, because it needs to be a concise answer.

Deputy A.K.F. Green:

Yes, well it is difficult to be concise because there are a number of sites where we are going... but the Deputy did ask about affordable homes as well. That is something that we are short on and I will come back to that in another answer if somebody wants to ask about that?

3.1.1 Deputy G.P. Southern:

If I can help the Minister be more concise, of the 268 houses, new homes he refers to in his answer in question 11, how many of those are social rented housing? Not affordable, social rented.

Deputy A.K.F. Green:

The majority of them. I am sorry, I can be more precise later and I will advise the Deputy, but the majority.

3.2 Deputy T.M. Pitman:

Could the Minister please explain what process he will be following to keep residents of La Collette updated of current problems in proposals with the refurbishment of the estate?

Deputy A.K.F. Green:

For the sake of the other Members I ought to explain that, as you know, we are renovating the high rise of La Collette and regrettably we have found we have significantly more problems than we expected and it does mean that tenants will unfortunately be relocated to other housing sites, initially on 5 floors at a time. It will be impossible for us to carry out the work that we had planned to carry out while the residents are still in place. To answer the Deputy's question exactly, we have visited - rather than writing we thought it was better when we realised the significant problems there - the tenants of La Collette and explained to them what we need to do. I will not say they were not worried, they were, but the arrangement we intend to make is that we will vacate the premises 5 floors at a time and relocate those residents to other accommodation. Obviously we will pay for that relocation. We will assist people that need assistance and those residents will be given the option, if they like where they have moved to, of staying there. If

they want to move back to La Collette when it is renovated they will have the right to do so. We will be as helpful as we can to them, but while we are having to... sorry, Sir.

The Bailiff:

I think, Minister, that is probably sufficient.

3.3 Deputy T.M. Pitman:

Could - and I think I know the answer anyway - the Minister just give those reassurances that any persons with mobility problems, *et cetera*, will be fully considered in wherever they go and where they come back to?

Deputy A.K.F. Green:

Absolutely.

3.4 Deputy J.H. Young:

A few weeks ago the Minister for Planning and Environment told us that the H3 Policy was effectively no more for affordable housing for first-time buyers, and that he was working with yourself, as Minister, in finding a new solution. Could the Minister tell us how he is getting on with this, please?

Deputy A.K.F. Green:

Well, that is interesting because I have not had a discussion on this at all. But I am concerned, seriously very concerned that when we debated P.48 in June 2011, it was agreed to that, in order to provide affordable homes, a number of States sites would be made available and to date - I could list them, but I will not because you would be telling me to get on and be concise - we have not got those sites. It was also agreed as part of that debate that if we did not have planning permission for 150 affordable homes within 12 months of the adoption of that plan or... sorry, planning permission was in within 12 months of the adoption of that plan, or indeed planning permission was not given within 18 months or 2 years of that plan, from memory, we would bring back other sites. Sites such as Longueville Nurseries, sites such as Samarès Nursery, sites such as... well there are a number but again I will not list them all. Unless I am convinced fairly soon that we have not got these homes then...

The Bailiff:

At the moment I think we are going to have about 3 questions.

Deputy A.K.F. Green:

Sorry, Sir, but they are complex questions.

The Bailiff:

I appreciate that.

Deputy A.K.F. Green:

Unless I am convinced fairly soon that we have plans for affordable homes - and I could talk about that for the whole of question time, but I will not - then I am considering bringing a proposition back after the break to ask the Minister for Planning and Environment to rezone those sites.

3.4.1 Deputy J.H. Young:

I thank the Minister, but could he just tell us, is this a subject he is going to raise round the table at the Council of Ministers to try and break this impasse?

Deputy A.K.F. Green:

I did write to the Minister for Planning and Environment with my concerns on the residential land availability on 1st November. I am still waiting for my reply.

3.5 Deputy K.L. Moore of St. Peter:

Could the Minister inform the Assembly how many new units of social housing will be provided as a result of this Housing Transformation Programme, please?

Deputy A.K.F. Green:

As the Deputy knows the business plan that we have put together will result in a similar number of social housing as we have today, except that they will all meet the decent homes standard. But what that will put us into a position to do is that, site by site, business plan by business plan, provided we can get the sites, we will be able to borrow the money, mortgage that particular site and build as many as are needed. But it has to be sustainable, it has to be affordable and it has to be on a proper business plan.

3.6 Deputy J.M. Le Bailly of St. Mary:

The term “affordable housing” is not realistic with current properties starting in the region of £450,000. What is the Minister doing to achieve realistically affordable housing for the lower income sector who wish to buy, which we both know is achievable at about £250,000?

Deputy A.K.F. Green:

The Deputy asks a very good question. Of course I need a site on which to build and it is something that I will have to discuss with the Minister for Planning and Environment. My vision is if we build affordable housing, what is affordable? Probably somewhere in the region of £240,000 to £300,000, and even that will not be affordable for many families, but at least that will be affordable to a great deal more than it is presently. My vision there is we need to build those on sites that we have acquired for that and that if the States agree that my Housing Association should be formed, that they be sold by the Housing Association and in essence that they be sold back to the Association. The mistakes we have been making in the past, is that affordable houses are only affordable for the first time and then they become unaffordable when they are sold on in the general market. We need a system that takes that heat out of the market.

3.7 The Deputy of St. Mary:

When is this likely to happen?

Deputy A.K.F. Green:

All I can say is it is one of a number of things I am working on, but we need to get through the Housing Transformation Programme first. We need to form the proper Housing Association and that will be down to this House.

3.8 Deputy R.G. Le Hérissier:

What are the precise details of the hold-up on the La Collette low rise site?

Deputy A.K.F. Green:

I have a vision for the low rise site and very quickly that is to bring a new development on the front, on the green there, and drop the development behind. That allows for easy transfer because that accommodation is not up to standard and not repairable. The hold-up is that we are waiting for the masterplan before we can get our planning permission.

3.9 Deputy T.A. Vallois:

Could the Minister be kind enough to explain what his definition of the differences between affordable housing and social housing are, and what his actual responsibilities are?

Deputy A.K.F. Green:

A very interesting question. Affordable housing is about both social and houses to purchase and I see my role really, although it concentrates a lot on social housing, as providing - when we get it right - a number of options for householders in Jersey. So those options will be affordable rental, social rental. My job is to provide homes. It is Social Security's job to provide the support to families that need to get into those homes, but I would like options for people when their circumstances improve, and that they could then move into the affordable purchasing or even shared equity. Some people do not like shared equity. There is a very good scheme in Guernsey where people can buy 20 per cent shared equity at a time, up to a maximum of 80 per cent, and it gives people options and keeps them out of the social housing in some cases.

3.10 The Deputy of St. Ouen:

With a real need for significant additional social housing, could the Minister explain why more units are not being provided on the Jersey College for Girls site?

Deputy A.K.F. Green:

I think that is one that you need to ask Property Holdings. I have made my case, I have got my allocation. Of course I would like more, but this is the thing. It has to be financed and the sums have to stack up.

3.11 Deputy J.A. Martin:

Could the Minister for Housing please explain how he thinks he can come back and convince this House to change their mind on Longueville Nurseries, Samarès, *et cetera*, all brown-filled sites when the Minister today is going to vote to not build on a brown-filled site at Plémont? Thank you.

Deputy A.K.F. Green:

The market these are aimed at would be totally different. We are talking about affordable homes for ordinary people.

3.11.1 Deputy J.A. Martin:

The Minister is misleading. They started the...

The Bailiff:

Inadvertently misleading, Deputy.

Deputy J.A. Martin:

Sorry, inadvertently misleading. The Deputy said affordable and not... I said affordable and they start at just over £500,000. What is the difference between £450,000 for a first-time buyer?

Deputy A.K.F. Green:

Perhaps the Deputy was not listening to my first question. I was saying I was aiming for houses around £240,000. They are affordable.

3.12 Deputy M. Tadier:

Does the Minister know whether the mooted land swap or land sale to fund Plémont would affect his portfolio? Would that land be coming out of land that could potentially be used for social or affordable housing?

Deputy A.K.F. Green:

No, I do not know that.