

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

The Bailiff:

Very well, then that brings questions on notice to an end. So we move now to questions of Ministers without notice and the first period is to the Minister for Housing.

4.1 Deputy M. Tadier

On the subject of over-occupancy: can the Minister comment whether he is sympathetic to those individuals who are currently, for example, in a 2-bedroom size when they only need one and therefore being charged the full 2-bedroom rate but similarly at the same time cannot get a 2-bedroom rate from Income Support to cover their rent? Does the Minister have any advice for what can be done in this situation?

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

The Deputy asked me initially was I sympathetic and I am sympathetic and I know that the Minister for Social Security is sympathetic and if somebody is prevented from downsizing there is an initial arrangement with Social Security that they continue to receive the support that they have always received. I am working very hard with my officers to get the appropriate sized accommodation so that people can move. Of course, there are always some people who wish to retain the 2-bedroom for medical reasons and we make allowances for that as well. It is not an easy solution but I am sympathetic and we are working very hard to solve the problem.

4.1.1 Deputy M. Tadier:

I thank the Minister for that useful answer. Can he just confirm then, if somebody's situation has changed and they have been waiting for a long time to move from a 2 to a one-bedroom property, then Social Security should be able to increase their allowance to that of a 2-bedroom property or similarly the Housing Department could only charge them for a one-bedroom?

Deputy A.K.F. Green:

The best thing to do if the Deputy has a particular case in mind is to ask that case to that person so that I can hear the case. Come and see us because there is more than one way of skinning the cat.

4.2 Senator A. Breckon:

Can the Minister tell the Assembly what is the actual cost of building a pair of semi-detached 3-bedroom houses, the actual cost?

Deputy A.K.F. Green:

I can but I cannot at this moment. I will make sure that we get that information out to Members.

4.3 The Connétable of St. Brelade:

Could the Minister for Housing inform the Assembly if there has been any delay to the development of housing? It is, in fact, very important, over-55s housing at Lesquende, at Les Quennevais, and what have been those causes?

Deputy A.K.F. Green:

I have some good news and some bad news for the Connétable. The good news is that I signed a Ministerial Decision to build 35 homes and awarded the contract today, 35 homes on what was known as developing site. The bad news is that we are in the breeding season of the slow worm and therefore we are not allowed on site until September.

4.3.1 The Connétable of St. Brelade:

Does the Minister have any idea of how long this delay might take?

Deputy A.K.F. Green:

As I said, we will be on site in September.

4.4 Deputy S. Power:

The Minister for Housing has just answered part (a) what was going to be my question as well, so I will ask him part (b) and that is: can the Minister remind the Assembly as to what plans the department now, as it evolves into its new status, has for increasing the stock of social housing for those that are in retirement in the western Parishes. I think it is a really important question.

Deputy A.K.F. Green:

We have a number of plans using our own land and working with the Minister for Planning and Environment. We hope very shortly, in fact, I was hoping to see in the next couple of days the new housing chapter of the Island Plan which has to go through the normal legal processes. Belle Vue phase 1 is one of those that will give us 35 sites. Belle Vue phase 2 is close to completing the design and hopefully we will get on with it before the breeding season of the slow worm, again. Then we have got work going on for more homes at ... sorry; in town anyway. Sorry, not Clearview Street, no. We have got all sorts of work going on in small areas, for Le Coin and other areas. There is lots of work going on but it is not enough. We will need to have some more sites. We will have exhausted all the States-owned sites fairly soon and we will have to have those new sites. I know the Minister for Planning is working hard on getting the chapter out so that we can start to go through the legal process.

4.4.1 Deputy S. Power:

Can I just ask him to clarify a point? I asked about the west of the Island. I am talking about principally St. Brelade, St. Peter and St. Ouen. Is there a plan within the development to increase and to supply further sites for the over-55s in the western Parishes, including his own?

Deputy A.K.F. Green:

I must have missed the “west” bit. I thought it was just over-55s generally. Well, the Deputy knows that we have Belle Vue phase 1 and phase 2. I know the Constable of St. Ouen is coming forward with a proposal of his own and I would encourage all Constables that have over-50s sites land in their Parishes that is not being used to come forward. But those are the only firm plans that I know of at the present time.

4.5 Deputy J.H. Young:

My question is partly covered but will the Minister advise the Assembly whether he is satisfied with the rate of progress on this essential review of Island Plan housing policies and whether he can confirm he has been adequately involved and when does he now expect to get this document?

Deputy A.K.F. Green:

I can confirm that I am adequately involved and, as I said, the plan hopefully will come out in the next day or so. But I am incredibly frustrated that we are bound by this long legal process in order to get sites which are described by the independent inspector as “the best housing sites in Jersey”. But, nevertheless, we are confined by this legal process which takes months. But that is where we are.

4.5.1 Deputy J.H. Young:

Can I ask a supplementary on that? The best housing sites, is he able to tell us where they are?

Deputy A.K.F. Green:

Ones that were described in the previous Island Plan public inquiry by the inspectors were the ones in St. Clement: the Samarès Nursery, the ones at Longueville Nursery and I cannot remember the third one now but they are well known.