

3.5 Deputy J.A. Hilton of St. Helier of the Minister for Planning and Environment regarding vacant glass-house sites and their use for social housing:

Can the Minister explain whether any discussions have taken place between him and the Minister for Housing on the vacant glasshouse sites and their use for social housing? And, if so, can he explain the outcome of those discussions?

Deputy R.C. Duhamel of St. Saviour (The Minister for Planning and Environment):

The Minister for Housing in a recent letter to me did suggest that vacant glasshouse sites might be used to provide social housing. This is not a new idea and was thoroughly investigated and rejected by this House as part of the Island Plan review. My department continues to monitor the situation with regard to housing supply and demand and is presently reviewing the latest information from various sources to ensure that the Island Plan remains able to respond to the Island's needs. In this respect it is my intention to bring forward a proposed amendment to the Island Plan to review policy H3 of that plan during this year. In doing so, however, I will be seeking to ensure that the spatial strategy of the plan that has been approved by the States is upheld and that we continue to meet the Island's development needs through the regeneration of the built-up area while protecting Jersey's countryside and coastline. I will also be working with other Ministers to ensure that all avenues for the delivery of affordable housing, such as the use of States-owned land and the regeneration of existing States housing sites are explored and pursued as appropriate to meet the need.

3.5.1 Deputy J.A. Hilton:

This all sounds very good and we went through a very lengthy debate in 2011 when we debated the Island Plan. One of the reasons the glasshouse sites were rejected on that occasion was because I believe Members wanted to give the Minister for Planning and Environment a chance to deliver the homes that are desperately needed on States-owned sites. I am not convinced we are going to do that. As far as I am aware there are very few applications coming forward for social housing, in particular, and affordable housing. I am not convinced that this Minister is doing enough. Those ...

The Bailiff:

You are coming to your question, Deputy?

Deputy J.A. Hilton:

Yes, the question is: the Planning Inspector at the time said those glasshouse sites that were removed from the Island Plan were perfect sites for social housing. I understand exactly why that did not happen but what I want to know from the Minister is when is he going to take action and bring forward sites, for the desperately needed social housing that we require, to be actioned?

Deputy R.C. Duhamel:

The planning amendments that I am hoping to bring forward are due to be discussed by the Council of Ministers on 20th February.

[10:00]

3.5.2 Deputy J.G. Reed of St. Ouen:

Could the Minister advise us what progress has been made in advancing the development of States-owned land in order to meet the rising demand for social housing?

Deputy R.C. Duhamel:

As I said, the policies that were relating to the States housing land are clearly defined under policy H1. The States at the time, when we discussed the Island Plan, considered that it was a

sensible course of action to allow this Minister to bring forward amendments in order to define affordable homes and to bring forward a mechanism to ensure that we had a sensible plan for delivery. This is what I am undertaking to do, I have been in lengthy discussions with the industry and with other parties, but there is light at the end of the tunnel and, as I mentioned, we are approaching the final hurdle.

3.5.3 The Deputy of St. Ouen:

I thank the Minister for his answer but has the Minister had specific discussions with the Minister for Housing and the Minister for Treasury and Resources to ensure that we utilise the States-owned land for social housing?

Deputy R.C. Duhamel:

There have been such discussions but there need to be more discussions and, as I said, at the meeting that is to take place with the Council of Ministers very shortly, all these issues will be properly aired.

3.5.4 Deputy J.H. Young:

Would the Minister explain why he has not brought forward the reserve option identified in policy H1 in the Island Plan and which said in the event of affordable housing not being delivered within the timescale set out in that policy, that those glasshouse sites would be included in a further review. Would he please explain why he has not done so and would he also just confirm or advise the Assembly whether it is correct that he has advised the Scrutiny Panel in March 2012, in June 2012 and in September 2012 that this policy was coming very, very soon?

Deputy R.C. Duhamel:

In dealing with the last parts of the question first: yes, I did advise that but the Deputy will know - as indeed other Members of this House will know - there has not been specific support or great support for the policies that were being mooted at that time by the construction forum. It is only right and proper that any Minister carrying forward his portfolio brief engages with the public, particularly on their land, in order to determine what might or might not be possible and these discussions have taken place. In respect of the fall-back situation, in a review of the glasshouse site, it quite clearly was decided that these sites feature in Policy H1 of the approved Island Plan, which provides for their potential rezoning if planning permission for 150 homes on States-owned land has not been granted and the sites are released before 29th June 2013. Any rezoning would remain to be considered by the States as an amendment to the Island Plan. I do have within the department a planning application for 150 homes on one of the States-owned sites and indeed consideration of that site will take place, I would assume and hope, before 29th June this year. If indeed that takes place and there is a favourable outcome, then I would consider that the tripping of the condition to bring about a reconsideration of the glasshouse sites would not be met because we would have found the original tranche of houses from States-owned land that was originally agreed when we discussed the Island Plan.

3.5.5 Deputy J.A. Hilton:

Even if the police station is agreed when we debate it in a couple of weeks' time, that means there is absolutely no chance of housing being delivered on that site for people who are in desperate need at the present time for a good 3 or 4 years. I am not convinced that enough is being done; 150 houses on the Summerland site is not enough. Can the Minister do more?

Deputy R.C. Duhamel:

Indeed, this Minister is doing more but, as the Deputy will know, Rome or indeed Jersey or St. Helier, was not built in a single day. It took at least a week. I have had quite a few weeks so far but indeed we do have hiccups. There will be policy changes, as I have suggested to the House,

that will be brought for States consideration and part and parcel of those considerations is exactly what the Deputy is suggesting, which is to increase the number of houses that might be built on States-owned land as a mechanism for bringing forward the much needed affordable homes.