

3.12 Deputy R.J. Rondel of St. Helier of the Chief Minister regarding the proposed delivery of affordable homes:

With reference to a written question I asked of the Minister for Housing at the last Assembly on 15th January 2013, is the Chief Minister satisfied with the present proposed delivery of just 51 affordable homes for purchase over the next 5 years? Furthermore, is he content that all of his Council are working satisfactorily together in order to deliver an appropriate level of affordable housing as quickly as possible?

Senator I.J. Gorst (The Chief Minister):

We absolutely need to increase the affordable housing provision and the Council will consider in February a range of policies for presentation to the Assembly as a matter of importance, including a Strategic Housing Unit, to co-ordinate housing policies, the Housing Transformation Programme, H3 Island Plan policies and other Island Plan policies, the development of a housing strategy for the Island. This reflects a collective and firm commitment as a Council of Ministers to putting in place measures to improve housing affordability and conditions in our Island.

3.12.1 Deputy R.J. Rondel:

Thank you, Chief Minister, for that sort of answer but the identity of States-owned sites for affordable housing was extremely urgent during the last Island Plan debate and indeed the Strategic Plan which we all signed up to, states that: "Identify opportunities for using States-owned sites to provide more housing is a priority" and the States said in the Strategic Plan that we would bring forward schemes to support first-time buyers. Does he not agree that we are not doing this?

Senator I.J. Gorst:

I agree absolutely with the Deputy that more needs to be done and that is why I have been saying to colleagues that February will be a month of housing and Deputy Hilton made some very important points earlier today about the provision of housing on States-owned land and the length of time that it would take to deliver housing on the Summerland site. Of course, we are slightly more advanced in the Girls' College site but more must be done. We have got to recognise the decisions in this Assembly and deferral, for example, of the police station means that those houses on the Summerland site are taking longer than we would have wished. There are also some other unintended consequences which are now coming to light from the Island Plan debate.

3.12.2 Deputy J.H. Young:

Would the Chief Minister confirm that the discussions that the Council of Ministers are going to have in February that he has just advised us of will address the Island Plan target, which is 4,000 affordable homes over the plan period of 10 years and will he also be addressing the shortfall, bearing in mind the answer that Deputy Rondel referred to showed that of the 51 homes which are planned in the next 5 years, at present 2 of them have no applications in and the other has not started. So would he confirm that he will be looking at those matters in his review?

Senator I.J. Gorst:

Absolutely. When we debated the Island Plan, the department had initially brought forward sites for rezoning and said that those rezoned sites would deliver affordable and social houses in the short-term period while the department could work with industry to deliver the new H3 policy. Of course, what this Assembly decided at that point was that we take out those rezoned sites and we work on the H3 policy and therefore delivery in the short term has not happened and we perhaps need to consider whether that should be addressed.

[11:00]

3.12.3 Deputy J.A. Hilton:

As the Chief Minister has said, the 150 units on the Summerland site cannot be delivered within the next 3 or 4 years. The earliest it can happen is 3 or 4 years' time. The question I wanted to ask was is the Chief Minister in agreement with the shortfall of social housing that we are experiencing at the current time - I am talking about social housing - should be delivered on vacant States-owned sites in the immediate term?

Senator I.J. Gorst:

I think we need to have some difficult debates because there are problems, as I have just outlined, with the timing of delivery on those sites although Girls' College is coming forward and we are going to have to perhaps revisit and re-discuss whether there needs to be some zoning changes to the Island Plan in the short term until those other sites come on line and they are not going to be easy decisions, but we absolutely have to do that because we are aware of a rising waiting list and we are aware of people who want to buy homes but cannot afford to and Government should be helping.

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

To follow on from Deputy Hilton's point and given the problems with timing, are any efforts being made to look at other alternatives that can achieve very short-term objectives?

Senator I.J. Gorst:

Yes, I hope and know that that will be part of our conversations during February, although I would just be wary that it does not always seem that Government's short-term is quite perhaps what might be considered by the public at large.

3.12.5 Deputy R.J. Rondel:

Would the Chief Minister ensure that he will come back to the House as soon as possible once those talks have taken place in February with a clear strategy on identifying sites and how many units of sites for the next 5 to 10 years because this has been the problem? There is no clear timeline on what is going to be delivered.

Senator I.J. Gorst:

Yes, a number of work streams will be lodged in this Assembly for debate as well and I would imagine that we would be able to put a timeline and delivery of numbers when we bring forward those propositions.