

4.6 Deputy R.J. Rondel of St. Helier of the Minister for Treasury and Resources regarding proposed developments for social/affordable homes for purchase:

Would the Minister, or possibly the Assistant Minister, provide an update on the proposed developments for social and affordable homes for purchase on the former Norman's timber yard, the Jersey College for Girls' site and the South Hill site?

Deputy E.J. Noel of St. Lawrence (Assistant Minister for Treasury and Resources - rapporteur):

The Norman's timber yard site was included as a potential development site in the previous Fort Regent Political Steering Group Interim Report, R.134/2011. The current steering group undertook an outline assessment of the development potential of the site as a possible extension to the Housing Department's estate. Ministerial decisions were signed by the Minister for Housing and myself to transfer the site into the Housing Department's administration. Before the actual transfer of the site and committing significant funds, J.P.H. (Jersey Property Holdings) sought the advice of the Law Officers' Department with regard to ownership. The advice received on 7th January this year is that the majority of the site is not in public ownership and therefore further work on the site has ceased.

[10:30]

Submission of revised planning application for the former J.C.G. (Jersey College for Girls) site has been delayed while a solution to improved parking for staff and parents at Janvrin School was progressed. I am pleased to advise that the proposal has now been agreed with the school and the Education Department. Subject to approval of the revised planning application, the development of the site will be for 75 social and affordable homes, 40 of which being social rented housing and 35 key worker shared equity homes, and a further 108 open market properties are expected. This site is expected to commence in early 2015. The South Hill site will be available for alternative use when the current functions are relocated. Although no scheme has been developed for the South Hill site, it is likely that it will comprise mainly of open market residential development to maximise the financial return to the public for reinvestment in further capital works.

4.6.1 Deputy R.J. Rondel:

I thank the Assistant Minister for that detailed reply. Could he advise how will any delays impact on the Treasury in terms of capital spending, as advised by the Fiscal Policy Panel in 2014 and their recommendation that the effectiveness of fiscal stimulus through capital spending depends on bringing forward capital projects and making sure the expenditure takes place on time?

Deputy E.J. Noel:

Treasury, along with other departments, are actively working at bringing forward as many of the capital programmes as we can. Sometimes, outside of our control, there have been delays but I can assure Members that all capital programmes - not just the provision of social housing - are being fast-tracked as much as possible.

4.6.2 Deputy J.A. Hilton:

The Assistant Minister told Members that the J.C.G. site was going to produce 108 'Category B' homes, which is open market homes. Does not the Assistant Minister think, in light of the fact that we have 700 families waiting in the Island to be rehoused with social and affordable housing, that they should relook at those plans with the intention of bringing back more social and affordable housing?

Deputy E.J. Noel:

In all these things we have to have a balance because at the end of the day the schemes that we develop have to be affordable. We have in fact already increased on that site from 40 units to a total of 75 units for social and affordable homes, so we are trying to push the boundaries. These are in addition to the 150 homes that, under the Island Plan, we were tasked to provide; 152 of those are on the Summerland and Ambulance Station site. These 75 homes on the J.C.G. site will exceed the total required. We are also working on other sites to see if additional social housing can be provided, such sites as the remainder of the current Police Station site once the Fire and Ambulance Service has been reconfigured; the Le Bas Centre; and we have also identified sites at the bottom of Bellozanne where Beresford House is. So we are testing departments and ensuring that wherever possible we can find additional social housing and affordable housing sites on States land, but I am afraid that, as we will probably be debating later this year, we will probably have to consider rezoning other suitable parcels of land on the Island.

4.6.3 Deputy J.A. Hilton:

That is not good enough in my opinion. There are 700 families waiting to be housed and 225 units, as the Assistant Minister has just relayed to Members, in the offing. This is a site in States ownership and is shovel-ready. Why are we not providing much needed homes on this site rather than looking at greenfield sites or glasshouse sites that are going to take 2 or 3 years to deliver? When are the Council of Ministers going to put their money where their mouth is and provide housing for families on this Island? **[Approbation]**

Deputy E.J. Noel:

I think the Deputy is being a bit disingenuous there because these are additional sites in addition to what the Housing Department are currently providing. The Housing Department themselves have got an ambitious programme to deliver affordable homes for Islanders on their existing sites, the bottom of Green Street for example, the La Collette sites there. They are looking at increasing the density there. They have done a marvellous job and are continuing to do a marvellous job on Le Squez. In the round, the public are providing a significant number of increased units. Yes, we do need to do more, yes, we need to get them to the marketplace quicker, which is exactly why we need to think outside the box and consider using other sites that are suitable.

4.6.4 Deputy J.H. Young:

The Assistant Minister has told us that the 3 sites that the Deputy has questioned have been in the Island Plan for a number of years. Of those sites, the first one we have now found out we do not own. The second one, at South Hill, is still a dreamland scheme. There is no viable option or even proposal to produce it. On the last one, the J.C.G., we might see some housing by 2017, which to my way of thinking it is about 20 years since the girls walked down the road to the new school. With that background, he has mentioned a number of other sites. Is it not time now he brings back a revised plan to this Assembly? Those sites that he has mentioned, which I think his ...

The Bailiff:

A concise question if you would please, Deputy.

Deputy J.H. Young:

Would he bring back a plan telling us if these sites cannot work how he is going to meet the housing needs from States-owned sites as soon as possible?

Deputy E.J. Noel:

Just to correct Deputy Young, the Fort Regent site was not in the Island Plan. That was an additional site that was identified by the steering group. With regard to the other sites, these things take time. I cannot take responsibility for previous States decisions with regard to J.C.G. but Treasury, in conjunction with S.o.J.D.C. (States of Jersey Development Company) and the Regeneration Steering Group, are pushing forward on that site. The bulk of the social housing need is being provided by the Housing Department and their newly-incorporated company in the summer, and they will be providing the bulk of the need.

4.6.5 Deputy M. Tadier:

Would the Assistant Minister advise whether the Treasury Department is susceptible to lobbying from groups who have a vested interest in keeping prices high by ensuring that demand exceeds supply and that there is a tension between that group and those who want to see prices come down and see truly affordable properties in Jersey, which we know we can deliver and we know we can start to deliver now on shovel-ready sites? Will the Assistant Minister acknowledge that that is definitely a factor in the consideration and that the Treasury are being lobbied hard from those who want to keep house prices high and even soaring in this Island?

Deputy E.J. Noel:

I can quite clearly state that we have not been lobbied to keep prices high. In fact, the Treasury Department are doing exactly the opposite. We are trying to increase supply to the market with our colleagues at Housing. At no time in my 5½ years in this Assembly have I been lobbied by the industry to keep prices high. It is exactly the opposite of what I personally want to see in this Island.

4.6.6 Deputy R.J. Rondel:

There certainly does seem to be a strengthening in the marketplace at the moment in prices for homes, but would the Assistant Minister please provide Members with an updated list of all States-owned sites proposed for development, together with the number of units, the category of unit and the year in which they hope to deliver the badly needed homes for both young and old Islanders?

Deputy E.J. Noel:

I am happy to do that. The information is already in the public domain. It is already in our business plan, but I am happy to provide Members with an update.