

2016.03.22

3.13 The Connétable of St. Helier of the Minister for Housing regarding whether there would be merit in restarting the Housing Forum:

Does the Minister think there would be merit in restarting the Housing Forum?

Deputy A.E. Pryke of Trinity (The Minister for Housing):

The Housing Forum was set up in 1997. It involved the main States committees, departments, agencies, professionals and other bodies and groups associated with a housing provision. Its purpose was to provide industry-wide feedback to the States of Jersey on a wide range of housing matters. This group, useful in its day, was disbanded as it was considered to be rather unwieldy and difficult to administer. However, I do believe that there is merit in the concept of using a Housing Forum to provide some expert and specialist feedback to help me, my officers, the States of Jersey on the policies that are coming from the Housing Strategy. Indeed, some feedback has already been provided by some focus groups.

3.13.1 The Connétable of St. Helier:

I perhaps should have been more direct in my question to ask whether the Minister would consider restarting the Housing Forum, given the fact that several obvious sites have either taken many years to progress: J.C.G. (Jersey College for Girls) what, 15 years?

[11:15]

No progress on South Hill that we are aware of. Will she commit to restarting the Forum so that we can keep everyone's feet to the fire, knock heads together as necessary, and try and get some of these sites into building?

The Deputy of Trinity:

Yes, and I am happy to discuss the makeup but also I am aware that the Constable is on the Future St. Helier Group and he is very well within his right to press forward. I indeed will be giving him that support to press forward with sites that need to come forward for housing because, as we all know, there is a great need for housing, especially 2-bedroomed owner-occupier affordable housing.

3.13.2 Deputy M. Tadier:

Does the Minister agree that a Housing Forum would ultimately be a waste of time because if Andium, the largest social housing provider in Jersey, and the Minister herself, will not even listen to the democratic will of this Assembly? I give as an example the democratic decision in favour of Deputy Russell Labey of St. Helier on La Collette, which is currently on the Order Paper. If that cannot even be listened to, what is the point in the public having a forum and then expecting notice to be taken of that? Does the Minister agree?

The Deputy of Trinity:

I do not, and we will have the debate on La Collette later so I will not go into that, but housing is needed. As the Housing Needs Survey came out last week and everyone received a copy, you can see there the great need for affordable housing. A forum is desirable but it needs to be focused on specific issues which have really worked that are set out in the Housing Strategy.

3.13.3 Deputy G.P. Southern:

What specific measures will the Minister be taking to guarantee that the rate of building, particularly social rental homes, is increased and that the waiting list for priority 1 and 2 comes down markedly in her time?

The Deputy of Trinity:

The Housing Needs Survey which was done and fed into the Island Plan saw that 1,000 homes were needed and some of the sites were rezoned but also to make full use of States-owned property, and that feeds in well. Where we are where the housing has been delivered is a report that is going to come out in the next couple of months so Members will be able to see that. But, as I said, housing is needed. We know with the Housing Needs Survey that came out last week that 2-bedroomed owner-occupier affordable housing is very much needed. In the Island Plan, all the sites there and the States-owned sites and Andium Business Plan it sets that out.

3.13.4 Deputy G.P. Southern:

What measures specifically will the Minister take to bring down the waiting list for category 1 and category 2 urgent cases in the next 12 months?

The Deputy of Trinity:

I cannot make houses happen overnight. I wish I could but we need more supply; it just comes down to that.

3.13.5 The Connétable of St. Helier:

I am still slightly unsure about whether this sub-forum does receive the support of the Minister. She referred to the Future St. Helier Group but clearly not all of the housing that we are going to see is going to be in St. Helier. Does she not think that the smaller developers, in particular one who approached me on this matter, deserve to have their voices heard? Andium is not the only game in town; there are some small developers of excellent residential developments wanting to get more involved and will she give serious consideration to convening a meeting of the Housing Forum to see whether we can knock some heads together and get some building started on certain sites?

The Deputy of Trinity:

Yes, as long as it is a small focus group or Housing Forum and I am very happy to listen to anybody as long as we have an outcome to that and can really get things moving and get houses built.