



Environment, Housing and Infrastructure Scrutiny

Panel

Quarterly Hearing

Witness: The Minister for Children and Housing

Tuesday, 15th September 2020

Panel:

Connétable M.K. Jackson of St. Brelade (Chair)

Connétable J.E. Le Maistre of Grouville (Vice-Chair)

Connétable S.A. Le Sueur Rennard of St. Saviour

Deputy I. Gardiner of St. Helier

Witnesses:

Senator S.Y. Mézec, The Minister for Children and Housing

Mr. A. Scate, Acting Director General, Growth, Housing and Environment:

Mr. J. Norris, Policy Principal, Chief Minister's Department

[11:30]

Connétable M.K. Jackson of St. Brelade (Chair):

-- more general matters. The bridging Island Plan review, other than discussions through C.O.M. (Council of Ministers) what collaboration and regular discussions are you having with the Minister for the Environment on the proposed bridging Island Plan?

The Minister for Children and Housing:

I had a meeting with him just yesterday about this. That is not the first I have had with him. I cannot recall off the top of my head exactly how many there have been but John and I work closely usually anyway, as there is obviously lots of crossover in our portfolios, but he, I understand at the moment, is trying to have some specific engagement with other Ministers. I do not know in what form that is

taking or how far along the process he is at getting round to seeing them but my last meeting with him was just yesterday on this, and that included officers as well.

The Connétable of St. Brelade:

Do you think the delay in the Island Plan process and the decision to proceed with an interim plan will have a positive or negative effect on the timely provision of affordable housing developments?

The Minister for Children and Housing:

It depends what we get really. It depends what ends up in that initial first part of the Island Plan. I think the concerns that I have expressed, not just to the Minister for the Environment but more broadly as well, are that we leave some of the policy issues to the second part and leave out some of that from the initial part. If the first part of the Island Plan is too thin on some of those issues then we do risk having a few years of either not as much progress as we ought to or getting some progress in terms of building new homes, approval of building of new homes, but that not be the right type of homes or not built under the wider sorts of policies that we think are important for that whole 10-year period. So it remains to be seen, until we have got that document in front of us, whether it will meet the aspirations certainly I would like to see it have for that first initial part of it. I am making the case to the Minister for the Environment that some of the policy issues we still ought to try and get some of those in that first part so we can hit the ground running on those, rather than wait a few more years after that to have only part of that 10-year period covered by some new policies.

The Connétable of St. Brelade:

That is in fact on to my next question, referring to the in-committee debate on 17th July where you stated that a shortened version of the Island Plan should not be an excuse for that 3-year version lacking ambition. So how would you envisage it could be addressed ambitiously in such a short period of time? Do you think that is achievable?

The Minister for Children and Housing:

I think it is. I would say that some of the policies that I would like to see incorporated into it may be things that there is not a political appetite for and that is the biggest risk. Sorry for my language on this but when it comes to the use of certain plots of land there will end up being a bloodbath in the Assembly as there will be a million amendments come forward and we will argue over this field, what should be on that or save this field or no building at all in this Parish, blah blah blah, and all of that is going to be unpleasant and we may end up, in terms of the distribution of land for development, somewhere very different at the end of that part of the process from what was lodged. What I am more interested in are some of the underlying principles of that development. One thing I am particularly keen to see is a principal that for developments over a certain size that there ought to be a compulsory requirement for a proportion of homes built there to be either for affordable

purchase or affordable rent. That is my position but some might find that controversial and I think that will ultimately end up being a political question. So it depends what our appetite in the Assembly ends up being, but I know which way I will be pushing.

The Connétable of St. Brelade:

I suppose given that the Future Housing Needs report from March 2019 revealed there was an anticipated short fall of 2,750 dwellings between 2019 and 2021. Do you think this is likely the shortfall could be met by the time the bridging plan for 2022-2024 takes effect?

The Minister for Children and Housing:

I think that is inextricably tied to some of the other things that we need to be doing though. So that report you referenced was really helpful in that it not only gave a number on what the shortfall of homes they worked out was but they also gave a breakdown of the size of homes and the tenure of homes. They even gave a breakdown of what they saw as the need for social rental homes versus private rental homes, for example, which is quite a helpful prediction for them to make. So if we are going to build 2,700 homes in that space of time and 2,600 of them happen to be luxury apartments, then that will be a failure because we will not ... even though the absolute number may be right the breakdown will not meet the needs of the people. It is tying all of that together and making sure that in the delivery of those homes we are delivering the right homes and that we are making particular types of tenure in homes secure for people so that they are in the best place for them to be. One issue we have spoken about previously has been the amount of empty bedrooms there are in homes of what were large families but now the children have grown up and moved elsewhere, and trying to encourage some of those people into smaller homes for them to enjoy so other families can move up. It is not purely a question of development. It is also a question of better utilisation of what we have got and that can help make the delivery of the bottom-line number much easier.

The Connétable of St. Brelade:

Are you having conversations with the Minister for the Environment, and probably the Stats Unit, to see if the Future Housing Needs report 2022-2024 could be fed into the bridging Island Plan?

The Minister for Children and Housing:

I think that is what is happening. When we were discussing this just yesterday it started off with a presentation from officers and in the meeting there were references to that report and I am sure that the officers, certainly when I have been speaking to them, have been very cognisant of that and knowing that it is not just about a headline figure. There is important detail in the breakdown underpinning it too.

Deputy I. Gardiner of St. Helier:

I have a question. Minister, you mentioned in your answers for the first 3 questions new policies that might not be possible to bring forward because of the bridging Island Plan. Can you please expand to give us an indication what type of new policies you would like to see to be brought forward?

The Minister for Children and Housing:

I said that it is a risk and it is a political risk because there just may not be the appetite. I think it is possible to bring those policies forward but ...

Deputy I. Gardiner:

Can you give the extent of what policies?

The Minister for Children and Housing:

Yes, I was just about to do so, Deputy. One of the examples I have already given has been my desire to have a compulsory requirement for developments over a certain size to deliver affordable homes in some form or another as part of those developments. For example, if you are building a development of 100 homes we should be able to state 50 of those homes must be for first-time buyers rather than 100 luxury apartments, or what have you. That may well be controversial. That has been proposed in Jersey before and there will be developers who will hate the idea because it will affect potentially the profitability of certain of those sites and there will be some politicians who will side with them on that, on the basis of being worried about their profits. But that is not my position. So there are political risks there that we just might not have the guts to stand up for what we ought to be standing up for and that is down to the whole Assembly to make that decision. But it remains a risk that we could squander the opportunity in the first part of the Island Plan and if we do squander that opportunity we will then have to wait for the next part of it to try and salvage that, and that is not an ideal situation.

Deputy I. Gardiner:

I understand but this is one of the policies, what other policies do you have in mind which might be in risk with the bridging Island Plan?

The Minister for Children and Housing:

We are getting into the territory of Housing Policy Development Board stuff that we have also been trying to feed into those that are working on the Island Plan. I am keen that there be more flexibility in our compulsory purchase rules as well to address land banking. It is possible to get planning permission for a development and do nothing for a very long time because of it. Not do nothing because you cannot get the contractors in but do nothing because you are waiting for the right moment to maximise your profits, meanwhile you have got land ready to be used and people

desperately needing homes and not getting those homes delivered because of land speculation. So I would like to see some policy in there that helps mitigate that to make sure that land does get used. A sort of use it or lose it principle that I think would encourage not just get approval for land to be used appropriately but get encouragement for it to be used appropriately at the right time rather than waiting. So it is things like that. That is not to do with on that piece of land we are going to build 10 houses or we are going to build 20 houses. It is a policy issue that could apply to any piece of land.

The Connétable of St. Brelade:

Can I just go back to the question about the policy whereby a developer would have to provide some affordable housing, alongside a development he was doing for the open market? That was the policy in 2011 and it did not work because sites did not come forward as quickly as we had hoped. But we are desperate for houses. If we go back to that situation we are going to have an even bigger shortage of housing.

The Minister for Children and Housing:

As I said, if we want to build a load of luxury apartments we may as well not bother because that provides longer-term problems as well. It distorts the market and it does not provide greater access. So there may well have been problems with the previous policy. My assertion is that we ought to try and do better than that and not give up on that principle and look at examples elsewhere, of where that sort of thing can work and be a bit more politically tough about it, which is one thing unfortunately previous Governments have not been very good at.

Connétable S.A. Le Sueur Rennard of St. Saviour:

Can I just ask how you feel about the immigration policy, which we do not seem to have? Do you not think that is adding to your problems?

The Minister for Children and Housing:

It does in some respects but the chair referenced before the *Objective Assessment of the Housing Need Report*, which very clearly attempted to predict what the housing need would be based on different immigration scenarios. So they gave a prediction of what would happen if we reduced migration to net zero now and net 500, net 750, net 1,000, and even if we reduced it to zero there is still a need for homes.

The Connétable of St. Saviour:

I appreciate that.

The Minister for Children and Housing:

Yes, it helps give us a greater degree of certainty but the underpinning fact that we need more homes is still true and the fact we will continue needing more homes, especially because people move from the unqualified sector to the qualified sector every day because they have been here for 10 years, and what have you, and that will still happen for a while.

[11:45]

So it would help but we have got plenty to do even without that, that we can still get on with. There is still work to do even if that part of the process has not been ideal.

The Connétable of St. Brelade:

The system of providing affordable homes changed from the one that you described whereby luxury houses are built and then some affordable houses had to be built alongside, which I contend didn't work. The new system I find extremely good. I was lucky to be invited to the opening of the De La Mare site when you there; I think you opened it. That worked extremely well because it did provide affordable homes and all of those homes were affordable. There were a few of them to buy but mostly to rent, so I am not quite sure why you think the other system is better.

The Minister for Children and Housing:

That part of the system is good. That was delivered through Jersey Homes Trust in partnership with Andium Homes, who have their Homebuy product for selling first-time buyer homes, and it is extremely popular. It does do a very good job. There are sites around the Island and Andium, when they are building their developments, they also include a proportion for first-time buyers. Not every site but some of them they do and again they do a very good job. That as an offer is really good but it is drastically over-subscribed. We need more. One of the things we can do is we can attempt to increase the supply from those housing providers, and I think that is the right thing to do. We ought to be doing that and having discussions on the financing of that is something that I hope we will be doing after the Housing Policy Development Board report comes out. So, yes, absolutely, let us get on with that and carry on providing that. But it is still massively over-subscribed and if you can get greater private sector contribution to that as well why would you not? It just strikes me a bit weird that we talk about affordable housing and if only these homes are affordable then by definition that means the other homes are not affordable. Why would you tolerate even that? You would want to push for as much to be affordable as possible rather than merely serve the interest of investors rather than the interests of people who need a home, so we ought to be pushing on all fronts, is my argument.

The Connétable of St. Brelade:

But affordable to who? If you're wealthy you can pay for a better house but under the present schemes the site value is reduced, which means the houses can be produced at an affordable price and then sold or rented to people who don't have such a large income. That seems to me a perfect system and you just need to find more sites.

The Minister for Children and Housing:

The system is a good system. It has just not been done enough. So we can push for it to be done more; great. But I would like a private sector contribution as well with that. This will be a political argument that we will end up having.

The Connétable of St. Brelade:

Just going to stats, if you like, the *Objective Assessment of Housing Need Report* also identified the need for 7,000 dwellings between 2021 and 2031, which is the time span of the original Island Plan. Do you see this feeding into the shorter plan, the next 10-year plan, or do you look to try and update and revise these current figures in time for the next 10-year plan because policy clearly has to be based on figures?

The Minister for Children and Housing:

I think that is a good question. I would argue that we should not have the first part of the Island Plan as a slow start then gearing up to the second. We should try and make the first part as fast a start as possible because then that mitigates the risk of getting 3 years down the line and suddenly realising that circumstances have changed or predictions have changed and being less well-equipped to respond to that. We started this process not anticipating we would have to do a 2-part Island Plan but the fact that that now is the case it strikes me as reasonable to suggest that for the second part it would be worth going back over those figures and assessing whether they are still relevant or if anything in particular has been tweaked. If there is an immigration policy in place at the same time or before that, then that makes that an even better idea. But just looking at the timescales, that might be a decision for my successor but it is a good question, I think.

The Connétable of St. Brelade:

Moving to St. Helier you spoke in the Island Plan in-committee debate about the importance of enhancing St. Helier. There is also an action set out in the Government Plan for 2023 to enhance the St. Helier urban environment. Should this be an important focus of the bridging Island Plan in your view and, if so, how do you envisage this to be balanced with other competing priorities in such a short period of time?

The Minister for Children and Housing:

I think the Minister for the Environment has also spoken about a plan for St. Helier as part of this, and I think that is an important aspiration, which I support. It is difficult though. St. Helier is already densely built up. We already have a lack of open green space and when you have a lack of open green space and community facilities at the same time there is a shortage of homes, those are really difficult issues to reconcile with one another. Especially when there is also a prevailing view that St. Helier is where all the homes should be built, which I do not agree with either. So I would say that I am slightly more pessimistic of getting something properly in place than that we can sort of sit back and relax on and say, okay, we have secured this and that is fine. Because I think that really is a big piece of work but I do not think that means we should not try and I do not think it means we should not at least try and secure some policy or designation for land in St. Helier or the broader town area as part of that.

The Connétable of St. Brelade:

I suppose that leads to my question in terms of housing. How would you think the bridging plan should balance the development between St. Helier and the rural Parishes?

The Minister for Children and Housing:

I say this as not just a Senator but I am a town resident. I live in town. I think it is a fantastic place to live. It has a huge amount going for it. But I sometimes listen to the views of representatives from outside of town and I wonder how much time they genuinely spend in town and deal with some of the issues that we have to deal with here. For me there is a non-negotiable point, which is that this plan must not sell St. Helier down the river. That means we must protect open green space and aim for more where possible. It means that if we are pumping new supply of homes into St. Helier that we do not have absolutely no regard for community facilities, school areas and that sort of thing. I think the other Parishes should take their fair share. Protecting the countryside as much as is possible but I know the Parish Constables will be aware of good sites in their Parishes that would be good for housing. Looking at the village centres as well and what can be done to support those. It is all going to be extremely difficult and messy and wherever ends up being proposed will be subject to lots of amendments. I am not somebody who thinks that there should not be any more homes in St. Helier. I used to live in London. I know perfectly well that we can support a greater population in St. Helier but it comes with conditions to make sure the quality of life is protected here.

The Connétable of St. Brelade:

Indeed, thanks. I know, Andy, you had a comment to make. I am not sure if that was pertaining to this policy or the previous one.

Acting Director General, Growth, Housing and Environment:

Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Yes, it was pursuant to the previous policy, which was the policy H3 around contribution of affordable homes from private developers. The panel is correct, there was an approved policy in the last version of the Island Plan in 2011 for that. It was subject to the detail, then been subsequently approved by the States Assembly, but when that detail came back as to how the policy would work the States Assembly then chose not to agree it. It sort of half got there, if I can describe it in that way. We got the principle agreed in the 2011 Island Plan for a contribution from developers for new and affordable homes but then the detail was not enacted so that then prompted a review of the Island Plan and we no longer have that policy in place. It was just to provide a bit more colour on that answer.

The Connétable of St. Brelade:

Thanks, Andy. Going back to the Minister. Are there any short or long-term implications, including financial, that you foresee with this new bridging Island Plan process?

The Minister for Children and Housing:

Financial for who; like the Government?

The Connétable of St. Brelade:

It would be for the Government, I suppose, and in turn the population.

The Minister for Children and Housing:

Doing 2 plans rather than one is obviously going to be a more expensive process and getting to that second part of it we will inevitably have to re-do certain things that were done as part of the first part of it and reconsult with people who were consulted first time round. I think it is inevitable that that will end up being more expensive unless the Minister for the Environment somehow has a genius way of getting round that. I do not fully speak on his behalf but I presume he considers our being in this situation a consequence of COVID, at least in part, and so to a degree that is probably inevitable. I think the worst option would have been delaying a debate on the Island Plan, having a full Island Plan but delaying it until just after the next election, which I think would have been the most expensive option because the next Assembly would inevitably end up throwing it in the bin and starting the whole thing over again. I think we are not particularly in an ideal position but it is probably the best we can hope for.

The Connétable of St. Brelade:

I think you are not wrong. Going back to, as Sadie alluded earlier on, immigration policy. What is your view on the decision to decouple the shorter bridging Island Plan from the long-term policy, such as migration population policy, and what will this mean for housing in Jersey in the short term?

The Minister for Children and Housing:

As I said, I am not concerned about the lack of policy for housing in the short term. We have got plenty to be getting on with and we have got enough good indications so far to have an idea of what we ought to be aiming for, so short term I am not concerned about it. Longer term, I think anyone in Jersey with a brain ought to be concerned about it because it is a huge issue and impacts on so much on top of that. But again, our government system ends up with us spending extraordinary amounts of time on these things and inevitably missing deadlines over and over again. As long as there is something in place for the next part of it, and is in place before the next election, then that puts us in a better position that we might otherwise have been.

Deputy I. Gardiner:

I have a follow-up question. It is interesting that you did not mention census that is coming in 2021. What are your views on the coming census; should, would and how it would feed into the Island Plan because I think it will give us new and very good indications on the situation?

The Minister for Children and Housing:

But I presume the team who are doing the day-to-day work on the Island Plan are fully prepared for that. I think it would have been a tall order to have asked Stats Jersey to have tried to bring a census any earlier. I often work with and speak to staff in Stats Jersey and know how pressured they are to compile all sorts of reviews and all sorts of different things. But the census is due to come when it comes and we just have to have our eyes open to it when it comes out and make sure that that is fed into the process, at least as much as is possible given the time for it. But it is a huge undertaking to do a census and so trying to get it timed perfectly for other pieces of work is always going to be difficult.

The Connétable of St. Brelade:

We had a submission from the Jersey Farmers Union in relation to the Island Plan review and it highlights land use as a significant area of importance. Considering that agricultural land is reasonably protected under the current plan, concerns may exist around rezoning of land for housing purposes. What is your view as Minister for Children and Housing regarding the potential use of agricultural land for the purpose of housing developments in the light of the shortage of first-time buyer homes?

The Minister for Children and Housing:

We have to be careful in that if we take a dogmatic approach that says housing always comes first then give it a few years we will not have an agriculture industry left, and I think that would be disastrous for the Island. So we have to be sensible about it. It then also is difficult because different farmers might have different aspirations for their land. I think there is an economic side of things

that I am not best placed to answer or comment on that seeks to support the agriculture industry to make those businesses as successful as they can possibly be so that that land they are using remains an attractive thing to be using it for.

[12:00]

But I do not particularly like the idea of losing substantial agricultural land for housing if there are alternatives. There might be some exceptions to that. There might be the occasional field that has potentially reached the end of its time naturally in terms of its use or there is a greater good argument simply because of the location of it. But I would not want to see the mass scale of rezoning agricultural land for housing unless there is a good reason for it.

The Connétable of St. Brelade:

Clearly, it is envisaged that the use of agricultural land would involve rural Parishes due to the growing demand of housing in the Parishes. I suppose you would have to admit that this would help address the shortage of first-time buyer homes; would you agree with that?

The Minister for Children and Housing:

It would, but as always, this will end up being very contentious. Each example will have for and against on it and it will not be particularly fun trying to reconcile each one. There is a huge amount we could do for housing if we were prepared to sell certain industries down the river and not have regard to the economic contribution that they make to the Island. I know I keep saying this but there is not going to be an ideal situation and there is going to be contention over every part of that.

The Connétable of St. Brelade:

Of course that is added to by the overlap, shall we say, between Housing and Environment responsibilities to ensure that housing developments meet the needs of the community as well as the environment. So that influence in the decision-making process I think you would agree probably just complicates the matter further.

The Minister for Children and Housing:

Yes, indeed. Quality of life has to be part of this as well. Other amenity stuff as well. There may be a field that is close enough to the infrastructure that it is easy to connect it to whereas another field might, on the face of it, look ideal but because it is out of the way it becomes more expensive to connect it up to everything else. All of that has an environmental impact as well. Also trying to focus on decent transport connectivity as well. If you are going to build homes that are near a school then you know it is more likely that children are going to be able to walk to school or cycle to school

rather than have their parents have to make 2 journeys in a car every day, or what have you. So the location has got to play a part in that as well.

The Connétable of St. Brelade:

Given that you are the Minister for Children and Housing, within your remit, are you happy to consider ways to encourage sustainable developments while meeting the housing needs of the community; do I understand that?

The Minister for Children and Housing:

Yes, absolutely. Some of that is difficult but you reap the long-term benefits from that as well, so it has to be thought about.

The Connétable of St. Brelade:

Would it be the case that you would work closely with the Minister for the Environment to achieve that? I do not know what his views are on that but I presume they would be similar; is that the case?

The Minister for Children and Housing:

I would assume that as well. Having oversight of Andium, which is a substantial contributor to housing in the Island, when it is Andium that is undertaking a particular project we have the right ultimately, as their shareholder, to instruct them on particular things, how they may do a development, and we have the right to set the direction on that. If there are certain things we wanted to do, to safeguard environmental conditions or something like that, we have got a good opportunity with them to do so. One really good example of this is the Gas Place site in town, which originally had planning permission for, I think, it was like near 300 properties or something like that on it. It was only because we acquired it with Andium that we were able to drastically reduce that number and increase the amount of open green space on that. When we have the tools at our disposal to get stuck in and do some of that we should not be afraid to do so and should not be afraid to say to our entities that we have to deliver on those things, that that ought to be part of their priorities too.

The Connétable of St. Brelade:

As Minister, what is your view on repurposing of old agricultural buildings that are no longer fit for purpose, such as converting old agricultural buildings? One view is that farmers could repurpose and let these buildings and so provide housing as well as subsidise themselves. What are your thoughts on that? That is something that we have touched upon in the work of the Housing Policy Development Board and looking at what can be done to make some of that easier, so then you get good use of sites that already exist but are being under-utilised. So I am in support of that. One of the things that I have spoken about in previous elections is some of the difficulties that can be with planning in things like fitting in double-glazing and that sort of thing. You have to be careful,

particularly when it is old buildings and trying to preserve their character. But I do think it is right that we do make that easier. I do not really know if I understand what the arguments against that are. It does sound like a sensible idea to me and that is something the Housing Policy Development Board has touched upon that the Island Plan officers and Minister are aware of as well.

The Connétable of St. Brelade:

Maybe, Andy, could you expand on that at all, the policy regarding this please?

Acting Director General, Growth, Housing and Environment:

Yes, I can. The main debate is around if it is listed buildings what is listed and what is special about the building. Very often old windows are one of the biggest contributors to a building's character so that is the starting point of the journey. Very often, the planning service tends to approve most changes to windows. About 85 per cent to 90 per cent of applications for new windows do get approved but it is a process of going through the assessment of character and making sure whatever is being put back still meets the character of the building, so we do not lose the quality, so to speak. The main issue that applicants or homeowners have with this is generally it is another bureaucratic administrative process for them to go through, and it often then requires higher quality windows than possibly would be ... you would not be able to get away with possibly putting in cheap plastic windows in a listed building. You would need to go down a double-glazed wooden sash window-type approach, which are often more expensive. While there is a technical solution, the design solution often comes down to cost and administration.

The Connétable of St. Brelade:

Thank you. Moving on to a C.T.J. (Christians Together in Jersey) Housing Trust submission, it was suggested there is land in the public estate that could be used for affordable housing. What are your views, Minister, on that?

The Minister for Children and Housing:

Absolutely yes there is and it has been a huge frustration of mine trying to get decent co-ordination of the use of those sites. That has been made more difficult by 2 things. One of those is the lack of clarity that has been up until now on the hospital site and where that is going to end up being and also the government office project, which there is still not as much clarity on as I would like. That has been frustrating because there are sites out there that are quite obviously not going to be used for either of those projects but which are being held back because of ongoing work elsewhere that is being done. That is difficult. It is annoying for organisations like Andium, who the greater long-term certainty they have got on supply of sites means the easier it is for them to plan and start financing their plans now. The second problem has been last minute to and fro over particular sites where you spend time and effort looking at the use of a particular site and then at the last minute

somebody has a bright idea for an alternative and then that ends up disrupting things. The biggest public example of that was obviously the Ann Court site, which inevitably meant the delivery of those homes was delayed by a little bit. Thankfully not too much but it could have been much worse. There are a couple of other sites as well where I have had to get people in a room and say: "Sort this out. Let us take the uncertainty out of this that has been unhelpful." Again the Housing Policy Development Board, which is due to report not too long from now, has looked at that as well and will be encouraging the development of a much more coherent strategy for the public estate in getting the best use out of it. I will be very glad when that happens because it has been a huge frustration for me.

The Connétable of St. Brelade:

So you would welcome a long-term plan but will the shortened Island Plan have an effect on the planning process for the development of affordable housing going forward? Because it seems that it is going to be slightly in conflict. We need a long-term plan but we are trying to foreshorten it. Do you think we can overcome the need?

The Minister for Children and Housing:

For many of the sites that are in public ownership now they are already built up so there are not necessarily too many difficulties for lots of those sites that we may want to just hurry up and get on with. One example is Westaway Court, for example, which has uncertainty over it because of the situation with the hospital. That might not be too difficult. It is more, I think, other political issues outside of the Island Plan that will be important for getting a better rationalisation of that portfolio and better use out of it. I think Andy is looking to contribute there.

Acting Director General, Growth, Housing and Environment:

Yes, we are, just through Property Holdings, moving forward with a better approach to estates management. The simple point the Minister has put here, we need to tailor our operational needs to our estate and the things and the land and the sites that we have, which are no longer operational and are no longer needed, we need a much better way of getting them away for other uses, either housing or into the market for other uses. But the Minister is correct, we have a significant landholding and there are many sites in public ownership, which could help meet housing demand. We are reinvigorating an estates management strategy, which does match A to B, and hopefully comes out with the requirement that many sites then can be released. The other reason for doing that is, notwithstanding it is really helpful for housing supply, but it is also very helpful that we do not have these assets, which cost us a lot of money to maintain and manage and they become health and safety problems and they slowly deteriorate. There are 2 main reasons for that but the Minister is absolutely correct, coming forward now through Property Holdings is a new estates strategy which hopefully will give us a bit of light at the end of the tunnel.

The Connétable of St. Brelade:

I am pleased to hear that and can we anticipate a cascade of developments after the decision on the hospital site takes place? It might be perhaps States Members could be informed as to the consequences of whatever decision is made on the subsequent Property Holdings decisions. I think it is quite important.

Acting Director General, Growth, Housing and Environment:

All property decisions that we make, certainly in disposals, have to come through to the States Assembly anyway, I understand, but there is no reason why we cannot keep this panel informed of work as it goes forward, either through the Minister for Children and Housing's portfolio or the Minister for Infrastructure's portfolio.

The Connétable of St. Brelade:

Just adding to that, have any concerns or issues been highlighted regarding the impacts of a shortened plan on future land use in the public estate, particularly in relation to the housing trusts being able to plan ahead for affordable housing? I just wondered if you had had this conversation with the providers and perhaps the Minister for the Environment.

The Minister for Children and Housing:

I have had correspondence with some of the trusts over the last few months, some of which was then getting in touch and some of it was me getting in touch because I feel strongly that with greater certainty over the hospital project that it ought to be the impetus we need to drive forward some of our ambitions for sites that are no longer considered as part of that.

[12:15]

I know that there is some good work that the trusts are doing that I, just from a housing policy position, would want to support. C.T.J. obviously opened Ed Le Quesne House recently, which I understand has been a good success for them and supporting them to do more things like that, and the other trusts as well, is something we want to do. So I have spoken to them to say that I anticipate that this is about to get easier because of that, and I have undertaken to them to keep them in the loop on that and bring them together. If there are particular aspirations that they have got that provide for a particular need then we can have that conversation with them and see what we can do to help them. Obviously Andium will always be our main provider and that is great. But when there is particular niche stuff that other trusts may want to do then we ought to support them as well.

The Connétable of St. Brelade:

Andium in fact highlighted that certain groups of the residentially-entitled population, that is singles and couples under the age of 50 without children or those with a household income of more £40,000 per annum are not able to access affordable housing because they do not meet the criteria to access the Gateway even though 700 homes are currently in development by Andium and about 40 can be sold by Andium each year. The point was made that the demand for affordable housing evidenced by the Affordable Housing Gateway is not being met. What is your comment on that?

The Minister for Children and Housing:

That is a really important issue. The eligibility criteria we all know are not equitable. There is no point in pretending they are because they are not. It is the case that there are people who could really benefit from the help and support of being eligible for social housing that currently are not eligible. It is for reasons like the ones you have listed because they may just be over the income threshold, that they may not be the right age to fit into it, et cetera, which is something that I know we feel very uncomfortable about. The difficulty is opening the criteria too soon and opening the floodgates then, and then finding it extremely difficult and chaotic to manage allocations when our supply has not quite got to where it needs to be. I hate being in that position because it is an acknowledgement that there are people who ought to be helped that currently are not but we have to do this in the best managed way possible to make sure that those people get the best support when it comes to it. So it is my ambition to extend the criteria at some point, but that goes hand in hand with the supply of those homes to make sure that everybody can get a place and be supported and secure in that. That is why I am very pleased with the progress Andium has been making in the development of its homes. When Ann Court is up and running that is 165 homes for some of the greatest need on the Gateway. That is going to have a huge impact in enabling us to support more people when that is open. Also supporting them in the longer term, so over the next 10 years, to increase their supply across the board as well will be a real help for that. I look forward to a future where the social housing offer is not merely an ambulance service for people who have fallen on particularly hard times but can end up being a helping hand for much greater swathes of our population to have secure and decent homes as part of an attractive housing offer. It just takes time to get there.

The Connétable of St. Brelade:

Can your aspirations realistically be factored into the shorter bridging Island Plan?

The Minister for Children and Housing:

Not the longest-term aspiration because we will be looking over 10 years for that. But the more that we can pack into that first part the best head start we have got and the sooner we will be to meeting some of that need. Then that makes the second part of it easier. The view that I have transmitted

to the Minister for the Environment is that if we go easy on some of these issues in the first part it makes the second part much harder. So we do need to keep that aspiration for the first part.

Deputy I. Gardiner:

I do appreciate we need to have a supply before we are extending criteria. Just for my knowledge, when the last time £40,000 per annum the number has been updated, since when is this number in place?

The Minister for Children and Housing:

That is a very good question. It was not recently. I do not know if Jack is on the line and able to say if he remembers that.

Policy Principal, Chief Minister's Department:

Yes, it has been a number of years since it was updated. I think it has been in place since around 2014, 2013 time. So the review of access to social housing review report stated that the income criteria needs to be reviewed, and that work is ongoing at the moment within strategic policy as is looking at the impact of potentially opening up to a wider group of people. I think that there is an opportunity, as the Minister states, in the future to open up to more groups of households and single persons and couples under the age of 55. We are anticipating that and working on the criteria at the moment. There is also the more general policy, which the review spoke about as well, that we are working on. That work will be quite imminent, or at least before the end of the year, and that will be brought forward.

The Connétable of St. Saviour:

You are still selling off properties in St. Saviour at Grasett Park. When I have asked this question before I have been told that you are selling them off ... I use the royal "you". I do not mean you personally. They are selling them off because they would need a lot of money to put into them to refurbish them, to make them habitable. You are selling them off, could you tell me where that money goes? Does it go back into a general fund for others or what happens to that money?

The Minister for Children and Housing:

I do not think about making them habitable is accurate because Andium are required anyway to meet minimum standards.

The Connétable of St. Saviour:

In that case why are you selling them off?

The Minister for Children and Housing:

The second part of your question about where the money goes, that stays with Andium to support their wider aspirations in their business plan, so their business plan outlines future plans for developing more homes for building, more homes for purchase as well as rent. So it stays within that for that purpose. The rationale behind it is that with the income you get from that, and bear in mind that they are not open market sales, they are for first-time buyer sales. So they are still sold at below market value to first-time buyers and they stay in first-time buyers in perpetuity after that. So there is still a public benefit from that. They say that it enables them to then have the financing to then build more homes so they can provide more supply and provide more help to more people. It is not, strictly speaking, a profit-making exercise or anything like that. I would be deeply uncomfortable if that is what it was. There are a small number of open market sales that Andium does, but they are small and they are for the purpose of making the whole scheme that they are doing at any given time viable, so that you can get more out of it for that.

The Connétable of St. Saviour:

You were not the Minister for Housing at the time but I have been on this committee almost from the word go in 2011, so when I was told, and I was asking about why they were being sold, it was because we could not afford the upgrade, that was not strictly true. So they are still being sold but they are being sold to first-time buyers and then the money is going back into Andium, so it has nothing to do with refurbishment?

The Minister for Children and Housing:

I do not know what the situation was like years before I took office but the rationale now is for that. I do not necessarily share this view. In terms of selling off housing stock my preference is to sell off as little as possible, which is why I ask for regular updates from Andium on their plans for this to make sure that I think what they are selling is as rationale as possible. I do not like the idea of having a housing estate and selling one house in the middle of it because then you lose the viability to do something with the whole site 20 years in the future if there is one private apartment. But they have got smaller ones that frankly it does not make sense to hold on to, and they started selling some estates before I took office. So managing that continues. The overall purpose of it is to help with the supply of more homes in the future. I think the situation today is a lot better than it was previously because there are more safeguards in place for those processes than before, so you are not selling a home, making a nice short-term profit out of it, and then nobody in the future ever benefiting again from that. It stays first-time buyer and then goes back into circulation for first-time buyers when that family decides to move on, or what have you. So I think the rules today are better than what they used to be.

Connétable J.E. Le Maistre of Grouville:

I see the Scrutiny officer said we should introduce ourselves. A bit late in the day but I am John Le Maistre, Constable of Grouville, vice-chair of the panel. My question was really going back to affordability. Am I right in thinking that there is or was in place a formula by which I think the median wage was taken and then from that it could be worked out what mortgage could be forwarded by a couple, and that is how they based the upper limit of a house? Is that still in place?

Policy Principal, Chief Minister's Department:

Yes, that is the way it is calculated, I believe, so you will be looking at the upper wage median incomes and then taking the ability to afford a deposit and so on. I can certainly provide more information on that calculation. I will need to think about it a bit more but that is how it has been calculated in the past and continues to be.

The Connétable of Grouville:

Thank you. It will be useful to see how the formula works.

Policy Principal, Chief Minister's Department:

I will take that as an action, yes.

The Connétable of St. Brelade:

Minister, it is Andium's view that demand for new homes often results in the consideration of rezoning green zoned land and that any largescale rezoning could take considerable time due to all the processes involved prior to approval. This could result in delays in the development of housing. A proposed solution highlighted was to prioritise certain land for redevelopment in order to speed up the delivery of homes, for example, sites in Parishes, which have already been through extensive planning consultation and public consultation but because they fall outside the current Island Plan policies they have not been approved for development. What is your view with regards to utilising sites where work has already been done to speed up this delivery? One example given was the Ville du Manoir in St. Peter. Do you have any views or expectations as to whether a bridging Island Plan would facilitate these types of sites for development?

The Minister for Children and Housing:

On that particular site, I certainly hope that that is included, partly because when we debated that in the States Assembly you might recall that I supported the proposition to give approval to get on with it. I think there was a feeling from some that we ought to wait for the next iteration of the Island Plan to get on with that. I understand why people felt that way. I did not agree though because I felt that there were people who were in need who could have been helped sooner if we had made that decision and got on with it. Although I also appreciate that doing things bit by bit outside of the regular process is not great. But in terms of specific sites where there has been work that has been

done previously and that there were not any mass legitimate objections to it for whatever reason, then it strikes me as being sensible that the sooner those sites are clarified, because work has already taken place, it means the sooner you can then get on with delivering on them because you do not have to duplicate other work that has been done. So I certainly hope that bits and pieces like that are included in that first part. I confess that I have not particularly pushed that in the meetings I have been having so far but I might do in future ones.

The Connétable of St. Brelade:

You might say “shovel ready”. With regard to States-owned sites for affordable housing developments, should decisions be taken to release appropriate States sites before the rezoning of additional green-zoned land is considered? I just wondered, as Minister, how would you balance the prioritisations?

The Minister for Children and Housing:

I think that there are plenty of sites that we have in our ownership that we can just get on with and will probably not be particularly controversial.

[12:30]

So you have got sites in the built-up area, you have got ones that have already got buildings on but are falling apart, or what have you. So getting clarity on those ones as soon as possible is good because they are the quickest ones probably to deal with. Then the next part of that is the ones that might be a bit more controversial or might need a bit more work done to make sure we are getting the best out of it. I have spoken about the St. Saviour’s Hospital site as one example that you can do something great with that site, but if we have got that opportunity I want to make sure it is something great and it is not a rush to just pile on homes without thinking of all the unintended consequences on traffic and all of that.

The Connétable of St. Saviour:

Nor do I. Thank you for that, Senator.

The Minister for Children and Housing:

No, indeed, and I make that point perfectly clear where quality of life has got to be a key part of this and it is not just a numbers exercise, there is more to it than that. But different types of sites will have different difficulties associated with doing that, so I think there is no sense at all in not reconciling the quick wins early on, but some of the broader ones may be more difficult. It will just be difficult balancing those and making sure that we get the best use of it and some of that will take

time, but we should not spoil nice parts of the Island and open green space out of just not having the will to do things properly.

The Connétable of St. Brelade:

Talking of time, evidence suggests that land rezoned by the States in previous Island Plans is not always or has not always been developed in a timely manner and can, therefore, fail to meet the needs of those that the States had in mind when the decision to rezone the land was made. While we will be asking obviously the Minister for the Environment about this, we would be interested to hear your views in your role as to how this could be prevented from happening going forward.

The Minister for Children and Housing:

Just to be clear, is that about privately-owned sites or government-owned?

The Connétable of St. Brelade:

I think any of them. I think we have not always been very timely in developing our own sites as well as private ones.

The Minister for Children and Housing:

You have certainly got that right. One of the things we have been considering with the Housing Policy Development Board is this principle of use it or lose it when it comes to planning permission and when it comes to sites that are not being utilised to their maximum benefit and for speculative reasons. It is my view that as a policy point we ought to try and take action on that. Some of that may well be controversial; some people have strong views about opposing all compulsory purchase on a matter of principle. I do not agree with that. I think the principle is the greater good and if land is being really poorly managed, and there is a huge public benefit from the use of that land, then I think there can be a case for compulsory purchase and to make sure that benefit is developed. That would be politically difficult but it is one suggestion that has been raised with the Minister for the Environment and from our side about what you could theoretically do there to get better use out of it.

The Connétable of St. Brelade:

So a proposal that rezoning of land could potentially carry with it an expectation on when the site might be developed because there is currently no rezoning obligation on the land owner to release the land for development. Would you agree that a timescale could be put on that so that it would stimulate the delivery of the developments as agreed in any particular plan, whether it be the bridging one or the full term one; would you agree with that?

The Minister for Children and Housing:

I would support that, yes, and I think if that is dealt with as early as possible it just means that we lose fewer opportunities in the first few years of that bridging Island Plan. I do not know whether things like that will end up in what comes to the States Assembly because there is still a lot of work to do on that, but the view that I have transmitted to the Minister for the Environment is that the more we can get on that sort of thing it just safeguards our ability to get the right type of housing as soon as possible.

The Minister for Children and Housing:

Thank you, Minister. Andy, you had a comment to make?

Acting Director General, Growth, Housing and Environment:

I was just going to say, yes, both compulsory purchase and time limited zonings are mechanisms which we should consider moving forward. There is a site in the current Island Plan which has been zoned for housing and the owner of that site has not wanted to bring it forward because I think the feeling is that it does not meet the values that that landowner would expect. So I think a process whereby a time-limited zoning could be seen. The zoning would then fall away and the land would revert to green zone again and the ability to get the site value would disappear, but we would then move on to look at other zonings instead. So I do think there are mechanisms available to us.

The Connétable of St. Brelade:

Thank you, Minister, for this first part of the hearing. I am now going to move on to more general matters in our normal quarterly hearing process. Once again myself, Mike Jackson, is the chair, Connétable Le Maistre is vice-chair, Connétable Le Sueur-Rennard and Deputy Inna Gardiner are present. I am going to start off by asking what your views are on the recent States vote to reject the principles of regulated licencing of rented dwellings.

The Minister for Children and Housing:

I think it is a derogation of our duty to some of the most vulnerable people in the Island. I thought it was an appalling decision and I am incredibly disappointed with it.

The Connétable of St. Brelade:

So, understandably, protecting tenants' rights and ensuring the safety of housing in which tenants live is essential. Though what are your views regarding landlords' rights and potential impact that the regulation might pose to them? Have any concerns been highlighted in that regard?

The Minister for Children and Housing:

Well, concerns have attempted to be highlighted to me but I have considered none of them legitimate. I have to be honest and say that I think this dynamic of landlords' rights in this debate is

ridiculous. As business people landlords have far fewer obligations put upon them than virtually all other business people, and I think that the exceptionalism that some attempt to apply to them has been very unhelpful in this debate. Business is business and I think what was proposed in P.106 still placed even fewer obligations upon those business people than people in other industries, so I do not accept the dynamic in this argument at all.

The Connétable of St. Brelade:

Considering the regulation is primarily in support of tenants' rights, are you, in your ministerial capacity, considering or directing any policy work in relation to landlords' rights and protection of landlords? Maybe from your answer I suspect not.

The Minister for Children and Housing:

What are landlords' rights? Landlords are business people, business people have the protection of the rule of law, they have the protection of a court system. When it comes to this particular industry they have the rights of the deposit protection scheme, they have the rights in the Residential Tenancy Law. Commercial landlords do not have that right but residential ones do. They have all of these at their disposal to try and safeguard their investments and they do not have to pay any fees to register their accounts, they do not have to pay any fees to register their business names. They get a pretty good deal as things are now and the idea that asking them to be part of a licensing scheme is an infringement on their rights is something I consider ridiculous.

The Connétable of St. Brelade:

Andy, you have a comment on this?

Acting Director General, Growth, Housing and Environment:

I echo the Minister's disappointment in the decision of the Assembly and I think we have missed an opportunity in that decision, but just to stress that the main focus of this is around standard of dwellings. While that benefits the people living in those dwellings, the tenants, it also benefits the owners of those dwellings in the sense that that asset is maintained and kept being maintained, thereby increasing its value over time. So I think there is a balanced argument as to who this benefits; it clearly does benefit the health and safety of those persons living within the dwellings but housing standards and quality of the building fabric itself I think in the long term benefits the owners of those properties and the investments from landlords. So I think it is an even argument that it benefits both parties.

The Minister for Children and Housing:

On top of that, the fact that Environmental Health had always said that their intention was for a light touch approach and, in certainly the early stages of that inspection regime, was to be there to help

landlords to know if there are perhaps issues with their property that they were not necessarily aware of, or there were practices in their tenancy arrangement that were not appropriate that they were not aware of. Environmental Health were going to help them through that and sit with them and say: "Look, if you just be aware that the rules are X, Y and Z you can help yourself by doing this, this and that." For the sake of an actual cost of £40 a year, that is a bargain to get that free advice basically; not free because you pay your licence fee but for £40, not bad.

The Connétable of St. Brelade:

Indeed. Thank you, Minister. I am going to refer to COVID-19 and the impact on the housing market. Is the Housing Policy Development Board looking at what possible impact a downturn in the economy might have on the housing market going forward and how to mitigate any potential negative effect on property prices in both the sales and rental markets?

The Minister for Children and Housing:

Yes, so as you know the Housing Policy Development Board was hoping to publish its report in April this year but when the COVID crisis hit there was a joint view among its members there saying it does not make that much sense to publish a report based on how things were before the crisis and expect us to pick it up after the crisis and nothing has changed. That obviously does not make sense. So the board met last week to go over what would have been the old report and work out what is still relevant and what might need tweaking. There is still a little bit more work to do but there will be a covering report alongside that, that outlines what our views are based on what we have been able to observe so far from the impact of COVID-19. So what will eventually come out will have taken that into account in some form, which I think was the right thing to do.

The Connétable of St. Brelade:

Would you agree that there will be a long-term impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on rent prices ongoing?

The Minister for Children and Housing:

Of course, but it is so difficult to predict this stuff with any certainty and some of the predictions - not just housing stuff but wider predictions made at the start of this - have proven to either not be as bad as we thought they were going to be or be worse than we thought they were going to be. We have still got the prospect of a second wave, which could then throw all sorts of other stuff into the mix. So it is really extremely difficult to predict that. We spoke beforehand about immigration policy; well if one of the short-term consequences of COVID-19 is a massive reduction in immigration levels into the Island then that could theoretically ease pressure on the rental sector, which strangely might have some benefits to some people. So taking it all into account it is extremely difficult especially when it is still a fast-moving situation, and knowing exactly what the impact is, is very difficult.

The Connétable of St. Brelade:

Indeed. Given the adoption of P.103/2020, which repealed the provision within regulations to suspend rent increases and evictions at the start, are you satisfied that the legislation has now served its purpose in this regard and do you anticipate a sudden increase in evictions or homelessness now that this has been repealed?

The Minister for Children and Housing:

There are a few questions in that; I will try and give as clear an answer as I can. The provisions in that law that I propose were I think right at the time. I was pleased that they were supported and I am confident that those measures will have helped people significantly in the last few months. In terms of evictions, a legal eviction has a legal process and with that legal process comes time, so there are things we will be able to observe.

[12:45]

We will be able to observe what goes on in courts as people apply for their eviction orders. If there is a spike we will be able to see it and notice it. We have got some safeguards in there that remain in place even though the legislation is done to protect people from evictions if those evictions are COVID related; so if it is to do with rental arrears because of loss of income, and what have you, so long as the tenant has been reasonable about it and demonstrated that then courts are not going to be making people homeless because of that. So that protection still being there is really important. I think the 2 things that worry me the most are illegal evictions; that may not be the right way of phrasing it but people being taken advantage of who just do not know any better who might be asked to leave and just assume they have got no choice and so have to go along with it. Also rent increases from 1st October I am worried about. I have lots of cases come to me from people who are just trapped because they have got no alternative on where they can move and they are just being taken advantage of, frankly, and having rent increases imposed at that point that do not appear to me to be justifiable. That is going to put people through hardship, which I am disappointed by.

The Connétable of St. Brelade:

Do you have any stats from Andium on this?

The Minister for Children and Housing:

From Andium?

The Connétable of St. Brelade:

Yes, in terms of people perhaps accruing rent arrears.

The Minister for Children and Housing:

I see. We can get their stats from that but just at a high-level point on that Andium do not believe that it has been particularly bad and they were bracing themselves for it, and it has not been anywhere near as bad as they thought it would be. There has been a bit of an increase but most people have been pretty sensible about it so they are just working with tenants to deal with it, so they should not be pressuring people and threatening them with eviction or anything like that. Their feedback that they gave us was that some of the new financial support mechanisms that were introduced worked quite quickly and so the people who all of a sudden had to claim for help, that they were not claiming before, that was able to be ratified fairly quickly and that mitigated the effect that it might have otherwise had on not being able to pay rent on time. So their feedback has been quite good to hear.

The Connétable of St. Brelade:

Thank you. What was the reason between the 3-month delay between the Ministerial Decision to delegate powers relating to Article 7C, which is the suspension of rent increases, to the Head of Environmental and Consumer Protection and their deputies in April 2020, and then the subsequent report presented to the Assembly in July 2020; that was R.77?

The Minister for Children and Housing:

I have not got a clue. I will say that I have noticed on occasions I have signed stuff that has appeared to take time before it has ended up being publicised, but that particular one I am afraid I cannot answer. I do not know.

The Connétable of St. Brelade:

Maybe Andy can show some light on this?

Acting Director General, Growth, Housing and Environment:

Could you just read the detail out again, Mr. Chairman? I think this might relate to the different laws that apply and the tenants' law that allowed the Environmental Health team to cover off as well. I think that may have been the answer but if you could just give me the detail.

The Connétable of St. Brelade:

The Ministerial Decision was the Minister for Children and Housing's 0008 to delegate powers relating to Article 7C, suspension of rent increases to the Head of Environmental and Consumer Protection in April 2020 and the subsequent report presented to the Assembly, R.77 of this year. You can always come back to us with that at a later date; that is not a problem.

Acting Director General, Growth, Housing and Environment:

Yes, I do not have the detail on the timings between the 2, unless Jack could potentially comment.

Policy Principal, Chief Minister's Department:

Yes, I was going to. I am just looking at the system now, it looks like the M.D. (Ministerial Decision) was signed on 21st April but it may have been created later. I would need to check on that but certainly I think the M.D. was fairly quickly after the legislation was brought forward, recognising that it needed to be overseen and have some form of enforcement for Environmental Health who had been delegated all other responsibilities in respect of the Residential Tenancy Law.

The Connétable of St. Brelade:

Thank you, Jack. Moving on to buy-to-let properties, which I know, Minister, is a subject close to your heart. It was reported recently that property registry figures obtained by the *Jersey Evening Post* show that of the 365 apartments across the Castle Quay complex in Harbour Reach 116 are owner occupied with the remainder being investment properties. Do you consider this to be a wider issue impacting on affordable housing in Jersey and is this something the Housing Policy Development Board is looking at as part of a wider housing strategy or policy?

The Minister for Children and Housing:

That particular issue is not something that I anticipate manifesting itself as a particular recommendation from that board. It is more something that I think myself and the Chief Minister are going to have to look at separately. I spoke to him yesterday evening and we briefly raised this. What I think is intolerable is a States-owned entity producing properties as investment opportunities like that. Maybe there are people who disagree with me on that but I do not think that is business we ought to be getting involved in and it is not my gift to give, but I would like a suspension on that. I think if we are doing Government-backed schemes through S.o.J.D.C. (States of Jersey Development Company) or whatever then that should not be what we are aiming to contribute to. But I also think that if you are pursuing things like the affordable housing contribution, which we spoke about before as a policy for developers, that would mitigate some of that and would be helping the supply of affordable homes and reducing the construction of homes as investment opportunities, which I worry about the inflationary effects that may have on housing.

The Connétable of St. Brelade:

Thank you. Referring to the Altair Report examining the suitability of current key worker housing; what plans are there currently in terms of different types of tenure for key workers' accommodation - shall we say short-term landing accommodation for new arrivals or long-term leased accommodation or even partial ownership - are there currently schemes being worked on for each?

The Minister for Children and Housing:

So there is still the second part of that review to conclude, and I have to say that it has not been high up on my agenda throughout the COVID period, as I am sure you can understand, focusing on other things at that time. In terms of the delivery of homes to be used as key worker accommodation, that thankfully has not been delayed throughout this period and the project at Hue Court is still going ahead as planned and will be in a position of having 90 homes as part of that complex as key worker accommodation for nurses and social workers and doctors, and that sort of thing. That then gives us the flexibility with the rest of the property portfolio to provide for an improved offer. But there are still some bits and pieces that need to be done to support that on the policy side of it that right now I am not in a position to announce that there has been a good amount of progress on that, just because my focus has been on other things. But I hope to resume that at an appropriate time.

The Connétable of St. Brelade:

Do you perceive that there is an increased demand from key workers in respect of the type of tenure of accommodation?

The Minister for Children and Housing:

I do not know if that is measured in any way from people who have either arrived in the Island or are looking to come here to work. The feedback that we would often get from applicants for particular jobs is that the accommodation situation was difficult for them. Turning up to the Island to sort out bits and pieces for you taking on your job and trying to fit in a viewing for a flat in that time and cancellations, and that sort of thing, is something that is really, really difficult for people who are relocating their lives here. So having landing accommodation so you know you can come here and for the first few months your position is secure, and then you can look at alternative accommodation elsewhere or be supported in one way or another is really important. But I think the position we are in with Hue Court has helped because we have got some really nice homes there that will help those people when they are here; we have just got to get back on track with the other parts associated with that.

The Connétable of St. Brelade:

Once Hue Court is complete would you anticipate looking for further sites to enlarge the offering to key workers?

The Minister for Children and Housing:

Potentially. We have got lots of options and also that depends on what we were speaking about earlier about the rationalisation of the government-owned property portfolio. But potentially I think knowing finally where the hospital is going to go might be helpful just because if you can have a site with proximity to the hospital then that is obviously good for those who will be working there. So

there is still some uncertainty associated with that because of it, but it features more broadly in the work we have been speaking out before.

The Connétable of St. Brelade:

Will you be looking for sites perhaps nearer the Overdale site for key workers?

The Minister for Children and Housing:

I certainly hope so because it is not going on People's Park, as far as I am concerned.

The Connétable of St. Brelade:

The tenancy deposit scheme, if I can just take us to that; we know that one of the key performance indicators assigned to Mydeposits Jersey is the 14 working days for responses to customer enquiries and/or complaints. Do you have more specific figures for how long it takes on average for a response to be provided?

The Minister for Children and Housing:

I have got some K.P.I.s (Key Performance Indicators) in front of me. I am just trying to find if that is specifically one. I do not know if you have had sight of this. Could you just repeat the question just so I know what I am looking for?

The Connétable of St. Brelade:

The suggestion is that one of the K.P.I.s assigned to Mydeposits is the 14 working days for responses to customer enquiries. So it was just a question of whether you had more specific figures and how long it takes on average for a response to be provided.

The Minister for Children and Housing:

I do not have that detail in front of me. I do not know if Jack will or not or if Jack will know where to get it from if asked for that, but in terms of producing how they measure up against their K.P.I.s I know that their system is automated. I do not know how you access that system to drill down on some of that detail. I do not know if Jack is able to help at all with that.

Policy Principal, Chief Minister's Department:

Yes, certainly. So for August, for instance, between 1st August and 31st August the response to customer enquiries via email was ... the target is 14 business days; the performance was 4 business days. There were various other sort of K.P.I. performances that if the Minister is content I would be happy to share with the panel, and perhaps if you would like further detail then we can drill down into it. As the Minister says, it is all automated reporting but Mydeposits are very helpful in getting

this data together and providing information on performance of the service so we can provide any information that the panel requires.

The Connétable of St. Brelade:

Thank you very much. We may follow that up with some questions. Can I just conclude that one by asking if it is the intention, once established, that Mydeposits will be based within the Housing Advice Service as opposed to C.A.B. (Citizens Advice Bureau) where it is currently based?

The Minister for Children and Housing:

That is a good question. From what I have seen so far on the work that we have done there, that has not been put to me. It is an interesting suggestion though that I might want to look into. I mean, the system as it currently is works well and I am hoping that the Housing Advice Service, when that is up and running, will be a really helpful front door for people who will have all sorts of housing issues. It may be complex if one housing issue in particular you have got to go somewhere else for, so thank you for raising it; I will have a think about that but, yes, it is an interesting point. Jack has asked if he can contribute.

Policy Principal, Chief Minister's Department:

So the Housing Advice Service, it would stand to reason that if you are going to provide advice and guidance from within government that the tenancy deposit protection would be part of that, and we are looking at that as part of the offering and certainly online at the moment.

[13:00]

I think the physical face-to-face offering is focusing on other areas of the housing crisis at the moment, so that might be a further few steps down the line. We have considered it but the relationship between Mydeposits and Citizens Advice is strong, they sort of exchange information, people are able to go there for face-to-face support. One of the conditions upon the procurement was that Mydeposits has to have a local presence. We have found that with C.A.B. it works well and until there is something better in place we would hope that that would be continued for the foreseeable future.

The Connétable of St. Brelade:

Thank you. Just picking up on the Housing Policy Development Board report, the recently published Government Plan 6-monthly report notes that progress on this is on track with work due to restart soon to finalise the board's recommendations. Has this work now restarted and do you have a target date of when you will be in a position to publish your findings and recommendations?

The Minister for Children and Housing:

We met last week and had a really positive meeting, I felt. I think the intention next is to receive via email some extra documentation within 2 weeks for us to privately go through and comment on and edit, and then the intention is for one final meeting in just under a month's time to cross the t's and dot the i's and give our approval for that. I think maybe it is theoretically possible that somebody raises an issue that has to be dealt with and requires more time, but based on where we are right now I am hoping about a month for us to approve it and then it is down to the Chief Minister ... the report is to be presented to him so then it is down to him to then present it to the wider public. But I will be encouraging him to do that as soon as possible.

The Connétable of St. Brelade:

Have you had to make any adjustments or do you anticipate any having to be made to ensure the policy outcomes are appropriate to the changing circumstances and requirements post-COVID as a result of experience gained in this last period?

The Minister for Children and Housing:

I think most of the recommendations themselves still stand and I think are still good recommendations. The main thing we will have to consider will be the financing of the delivery of new homes. One of the recommendations was going to be about mobilising our housing delivery agents to deliver more homes. In 2014, when Andium was founded, there was a big drive to deliver more homes with borrowing to finance that and a plan to then pay that back but, looking at the delivery of further new homes, how we will finance that, we will have to take into consideration our financial situation as a Government now. So I think the supplementary report for that will focus on that as a result of COVID.

The Connétable of St. Brelade:

Thank you. Sadie, you have a question?

The Connétable of St. Saviour:

Yes, sorry, I am going back to the hospital bits and pieces. When the hospital is drawn up and wherever it is going to be, are there any plans to put staff accommodation within the new hospital?

The Minister for Children and Housing:

I have not got a clue because I have not been part of that process, and if I had been part of that process the process would have been very different from what it has turned out to be.

The Connétable of St. Saviour:

I only ask because, as you know, in Gloucester Street we did have a nurses' home and it is now an office block. It was there for staff accommodation and they were on the doorstep almost. I just wondered, because we seem to be spreading with this new hospital, whether we were going to have staff accommodation there, which would be a good thing.

The Minister for Children and Housing:

Yes, it is a good point. I do not know the honest answer to it because I am not involved in the in-depth stuff but there is certainly some logic in that.

The Connétable of St. Saviour:

I appreciate it, thank you.

The Minister for Children and Housing:

There is a lovely view from up at Overdale, so they would have that as well.

The Connétable of St. Saviour:

Better than Five Oaks.

The Minister for Children and Housing:

And better than People's Park.

The Connétable of St. Brelade:

Referring to the States of Jersey Law 2005: Delegation of Functions can you, Minister, elaborate on the rationale for designating 2 Assistant Ministers?

The Minister for Children and Housing:

Yes, that is very, very simple. There were a small number of Ministers who at the start of the COVID crisis we realised did not have Assistant Ministers and so if I were to become incapacitated from COVID for whatever reason, in ensuring good Government and that the Government could still operate and still stand, it was important that there were other Ministers or Assistant Ministers who could step in to take over my legal responsibilities. So I appointed Senator Vallois in the first instance as Assistant Minister and then if, for whatever reason, she was not able to undertake that it would then fall to Deputy Maçon. I am also Senator Vallois' Assistant Minister for Education because obviously there is lots of crossover between children and education, but I also know that Senator Vallois has had a very keen interest in housing issues for a long time and I know has a good relationship with Andium as well just on a constituency basis too. So it made a lot of sense to have her as Assistant Minister in the first instance and then Deputy Maçon as a backup just in case. But that was purely worst-case scenario which, thankfully, has not had to be invoked thus far.

The Connétable of St. Brelade:

So it was proactive rather than reactive to any particular circumstances?

The Minister for Children and Housing:

That is right. I cannot remember exactly how many other Ministers did not have Assistant Ministers; I think the Minister for International Development might not have had one either. So it was just a case of better safe than sorry.

The Connétable of St. Brelade:

Moving on to affordable housing supply and the Samarès Nurseries site; at the time of our hearing in June you noted that phase 1 and 2 had been delivered and phase 3 was underway at the time, a completion date of August 2020 was anticipated. What is the status delivery of phase 3 now?

The Minister for Children and Housing:

Phases 3 and 4 have been reprogrammed as a result of COVID and the impact that has had. Looking at delivery phase 3, October this year and phase 4, for February next year.

The Connétable of St. Brelade:

Were there any other issues apart from COVID that would have affected the delivery of these phases within the timescale? So the new proposed timescale will accommodate whatever delays have taken place, I understand?

The Minister for Children and Housing:

Yes, I presume so. I have not had any other problems that have been fed back to me. I have asked about the impact that COVID has had and it has thankfully not been too bad, and you can see when you go around that the work is still ongoing. Even getting people into homes when the other phases have been complete has still happened, which has been difficult at times, but I think things are as good as they can be and these new homes, when they are available, I am absolutely confident will be very popular.

The Connétable of St. Brelade:

Do you know what the occupancy rate is at this stage?

The Minister for Children and Housing:

For the rental homes there in the phases that are already complete?

The Connétable of St. Brelade:

Yes.

The Minister for Children and Housing:

I should imagine if not completely occupied certainly very close to it. When some of those became available during the crisis we were able to use some of those for emergency moves that had to be done as soon as possible, so we are quite lucky that a bunch of homes became available at that point. So if they are not fully occupied now they will certainly be very close to it. But, yes, they have been very popular and very useful as well when we have had emergency cases we have had to deal with.

The Connétable of St. Brelade:

Some will be sold of the phase 1s and 2s; can we assume that is underway as well, properties are being sold?

The Minister for Children and Housing:

Yes, that is right. Some allocations were made for that quite a while ago and they have gone through the usual process for that. I think I have even had a couple of emails just from people when they have found out when they have been allocated, just contacting to say thank you because they are over the moon for it. So, again, those are amazing opportunities for families that will be lucky to live there.

The Connétable of St. Brelade:

Indeed. Talking about the Robin Hood site; the Robin Hood site was underway at the time of our last hearing and completion was anticipated at the end of 2020. Is this still on track to be completed at the end of this year?

The Minister for Children and Housing:

We are looking at the end of November for that.

The Connétable of St. Brelade:

That is good, so it still is on track. What progress, if any, has been made on the Ann Street Brewery and the Summerland sites?

The Minister for Children and Housing:

Just looking at Summerland, again there has been some reprogramming for that, anticipating the end of next year. All of those are for rental through the Gateway. The Brewery site I think was the other one you mentioned?

The Connétable of St. Brelade:

Summerland.

The Minister for Children and Housing:

Summerland was the one I just mentioned.

The Connétable of St. Brelade:

Yes, Ann Street Brewery.

The Minister for Children and Housing:

Yes, Ann Street Brewery is not for a few years away. That is due for completion at the end of 2024. There is still a reasonable amount of work to be done in that planning permission.

The Connétable of St. Brelade:

Well, Minister, that concludes our questions unless any other of my panel members have any others they wish to put, please do so.

Deputy I. Gardiner:

Yes, I would like to ask the Minister: has the Minister received emails from the George V residents at Andium who might need to be rehoused, if Overdale will be chosen as the site? I have received emails and there are lots of worries. How will it be handled?

The Minister for Children and Housing:

Yes, so surprisingly I have not received any direct emails from residents there, I do not think. I know that Andium are obviously cognisant of the fact that tenants there will be worried about their future and that is very sad that that is the case. I know that they are seeking to make contact with everybody there. I do not know at what stage that is but we will make sure that Andium are kept as up to date as possible because there is still some uncertainty over that, which is obviously very unhelpful. But I hope that the tenants there can at least know that, if it does come to pass that that land is used for access for a new hospital. When Andium tenants are having to be moved because of development like that they end up being absolute top priority for being rehoused with Andium elsewhere and they have a support package that they offer to people for those sorts of moves because they recognise that unfortunately sometimes there are people who might be vulnerable or might be elderly and need that support and make sure that it does not come at a cost to them either. I think they have done a good job on that when they have done it in other places as well, so I hope at least that might provide some reassurance to them.

Deputy I. Gardiner:

Thank you, Minister.

The Connétable of St. Brelade:

Minister, thank you very much. I do not think we have got anything else so I thank you and your officers for your time this morning and look forward to speaking to you in due course. Thank you very much. That ends the meeting.

[13:13]