

The Jersey Homes Trust.  
Scrutiny Review of Supply of Housing.

I have been asked, as Chairman of the Trust, to make a submission to the Environment, Housing and Technical Services Scrutiny Panel in its review of the supply of housing.

I am pleased to respond. These are my own personal views based on my experience as Chairman of a Jersey housing association for twenty years. I have not had the opportunity of discussing these matters with my Trustees.

**Housing Need;**  
**The Affordable Housing Gateway.**

The establishment of the Gateway has been an important step in measuring acute housing need in Jersey. However, the statistics published by the Gateway need to be read with an understanding of the role of the Gateway, its banding system and the limitations in its reporting.

Rental Accommodation:

The two upper bands are a reliable measure of actual acute or urgent need for affordable rental accommodation. The very fact that there are hundreds of names listed in these bands is confirmation of a severe social housing shortage.

Applicants for transfer (to larger or smaller accommodation) would vacate accommodation for letting to another applicant. By and large, transfer applicants can be ignored for statistical purposes.

In an ideal world the housing providers would be letting to applicants mainly in the third band, with very few names remaining in the two upper bands. Regrettably, very few allocations are made to applicants in the third band.

Some lower bands contain the particulars of applicants who are adequately housed but have aspirations to move. Such applications can be ignored for statistical purposes.

It must be understood that the criteria for acceptance onto the Gateway waiting list are severe. Generally speaking, criteria in the UK are more flexible/generous. This has been recognised from time to time (see the Whitehouse Report; The States White Paper on Housing Reform). **The effect of this is to conceal the true extent of the housing need.**

Owner-occupied accommodation:

The Gateway has also been set up to list suitable applicants for Category 'A' housing to buy. It is unlikely that this is a complete or reliable indication of the housing need in this category. As and when further "first-time buyer" homes are constructed, it is very likely that demand will then take off.

Very few schemes for shared ownership have occurred. Jersey property law is not helpful. The States should pass enabling legislation to bring us into the 21<sup>st</sup> Century.

Conclusion:

The Gateway is a reliable indication of severe housing need for rental accommodation. However, its strict criteria tend to conceal the true extent of this need. The Gateway is not a reliable indicator of need for other housing categories.

## **Housing Supply**

Government has a role in monitoring housing supply and pursuing policies to promote the adequate housing of the whole community. This should be the key role of the Strategic Housing Unit. Its success or otherwise in this area will be the measure of its relevance and usefulness.

There is a shortage of housing in all categories, which impacts especially on young households, who cannot afford to buy (due to inadequate supply) or who may not meet the Gateway criteria to rent, or (if they do) must wait for months or years to be housed.

## **Delivery**

### Social Housing Providers

The States can have a “hands-on” role in the delivery of affordable rental accommodation by understanding and supporting the role of affordable housing providers (Andium Homes and the housing trusts). Jurisdictions in developed countries (UK and Europe) recognise this responsibility and invest substantial resources accordingly.

In the last six years, in Jersey, there has been very little development of Category 'A' rental homes, due entirely to the withdrawal of States' support for further development over that period. The result is a big increase in acute housing shortage and increased poverty.

The establishment of Andium may alleviate the situation, but only if it receives the further support it needs. The Jersey Homes Trust is committed in principle to develop some further badly needed rental units in the next few years from its own resources. Sadly, it is not anticipated that the JHT will receive any further States' financial support to fund growth.

### Planning obligations

Attaching obligations for the development of Category 'A' units to Planning consents may well contribute to delivery of further affordable housing units. Developers may be challenged to acquire land at viable cost in the light of the severity of the current obligations attaching to newly zoned rural sites.

### Redundant Offices

Conversion of redundant offices may offer some limited opportunity for residential provision. Such conversions are entirely unsuitable for families with children and they will lack amenities normally considered essential for urban schemes. They are also expensive. Government subsidy (paid from the massive profits arising from the Esplanade Quarter development?) would make a difference.

### Waterfront

Consideration should be given to the development of residential schemes on the Waterfront instead of offices for which there is no demand. A retirement village would make excellent sense, close to amenities, with no detriment to the countryside, freeing up badly needed family accommodation elsewhere. This would be relatively uncontroversial and an excellent and proper use of States-owned land. It would solve many problems “at a stroke”.

## **The Planning Process**

It appears very unlikely that further “greenfield” sites will be made available for housing development in the foreseeable future.

Attaching Planning Obligations for Category 'A' housing to planning consents is an excellent means of achieving delivery of affordable housing. Such obligations can be attached to urban as well as rural development proposals. However, given the depressed office market in St Helier, there is no scope at present for utilising this avenue in commercial developments.

Planners have compromised in recent years on car-parking requirements as well as density regulations. This is sensible in a small Island with little land available for development. Architects will argue that “well-designed” flatted developments can achieve very high density. That may be the case; however, homes for families should offer adequate amenities, areas for play and community engagement, storage, facilities for bicycles and prams, drying facilities and car-parking. Good design should incorporate all these essential elements.

Planning applications are very expensive. Conditions attaching to consents are extensive, complex, bureaucratic and onerous. There should be a “fast track” to assist consents for housing development and to relieve them of unnecessary conditions and obligations.

There is far too much protection for old and redundant buildings in St Helier. This is an unnecessary disincentive and obstacle for residential development. It is very detrimental to the orderly re-development of the Island's infrastructure. It is also, ultimately, unsustainable and damaging to the very concept of protection. When common sense eventually prevails (in years to come) great harm will have been done to St Helier.

MICHAEL VAN NESTE  
CHAIRMAN  
THE JERSEY HOMES TRUST

19 May 2015