

2024.10.01

3.13 Deputy J. Renouf of St. Brelade of the Minister for the Environment regarding reforming the planning service (OQ.183/2024):

Further to Written Question 293/2024, will the Minister provide details on the progress being made in reforming the Planning Service, which is one of the Government's 13 strategic priorities?

Deputy S.G. Luce of Grouville and St. Martin (The Minister for the Environment):

I am fully committed to delivering real change in reforming planning services. When I took on the role it was made very clear to me the challenges of the planning process and how it was affecting our community and the environment. Putting those recommendations of the MacKinnon Review into action has required my team to carry out a wide range of reforms, including cutting waiting times, improving customer service and boosting efficiency. I would like to take this opportunity to thank every one of them from the top to the bottom because their efforts have all clear results. Of the most noticeable changes has been a 30 per cent reduction in the number of pending applications, that is applications within the department waiting determination, and that shows our growing speed in handling of applications. We have also raised the percentage of determinations made within our own targets from 59 per cent in January to over 90 per cent by the end of August. The average time to validate new applications has also improved, falling from 10 weeks to just 2 weeks, a sharp 80 per cent improvement. We have also launched the Planning Industry Partnership Board to work closely with stakeholders by publishing quarterly statistics to give a clear picture of our performance. I remain focused on delivering all these reforms to make sure the Planning Service stays effective, efficient and able to meet the needs of the Island.

3.13.1 Deputy J. Renouf:

The aim I think stated in the Government's strategic priorities was to get Jersey building again. In answer to Written Question 287, it was recently revealed that while there were 615 approvals for planning for new homes in 2023 and so far this year there have been about 644, only 108 buildings this year have had commencement certificates issued against them. Is the Minister proposing to do anything to deal with the problem of planning permissions that are given but not built?

Deputy S.G. Luce:

That is a very interesting question, one that I tried to grapple with when I was previously Minister for Planning back in 2014. It was myself who reduced the time that you could spend before you started building from 5 years to 3 years. My intention with that decision was to try to encourage people after they had been given an approval to get building. It is still a problem and the changes I made back then have not seemed to have made much of an improvement, I have to say to the Deputy. People are still putting applications through, we are improving our performance, the approval rates are rising, but that in itself does not allow or does not mean that people will start building. The cost of building, the cost of materials, the cost of finding people to do the building, the cost of inflation, it is all having an effect. We have a number of applications that have been improved which I would desperately like to see getting built out. But it is difficult as a Government to force people to build once they have got an application approved.