

STATES OF JERSEY

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REZONING OF SITES IN THE GREEN AND COUNTRYSIDE ZONES AND ISLAND PLAN REVIEW

Lodged au Greffe on 26th February 2008
by the Deputy of Grouville

STATES GREFFE

PROPOSITION

THE STATES are asked to decide whether they are of opinion –

- (a) to request the Minister for Planning and Environment to suspend all proposals for the rezoning of green field sites in the Green and Countryside zones for development purposes until the review of the Island Plan is completed;
- (b) to request the Ministers for Housing and for Planning and Environment to ensure that that no commitments or indications of ministerial or departmental support for individual applications for rezoning are expressed until the revised Island Plan is approved by the States;
- (c) to request the Minister for Housing, in co-operation with the 12 Parish Connétables and other stakeholders, to develop and establish as a policy, a rational and consistent criteria for determining admissibility to ‘waiting lists’ for housing on rezoned land;
- (d) to request the Minister for Planning and Environment –
 - (i) to prioritise the Island Plan review process so as to minimise delay in bringing it forward for full public consultation and eventual States debate;
 - (ii) to ensure that consultation on the Island Plan review takes the form of a ‘Green Paper’, presenting the people of the Island and States members with a full range of options from which to choose, with the options included taking fully into account and bringing into the public domain all available information relevant to the planning process;
 - (iii) to include within the Island Plan review process a managed exit strategy for the glasshouse industry of Jersey so that redundant or derelict glasshouses are removed and the sites restored to open land, or, where appropriate, rezoned for housing;
- (e) to request the Minister for Planning and Environment to bring forward a Policy that requires planning applications of over a certain size to provide a percentage of their build for social need whether that be social rented, first-time buyer, retirement, sheltered housing or a mix, whichever is most appropriate for the site.

DEPUTY OF GROUVILLE

REPORT

For some time now I have been concerned at the Minister for Housing's request for open land to be rezoned for housing; this ahead of the forthcoming major review of the Island Plan. Having responded to this request, the Constables have identified 12 sites, most of which are either in the Green or Countryside zones.

I drew some comfort earlier in the week when I received Scrutiny's Report on Rezoning Land for First-Time Buyer and Retirement Homes. This report reinforced many of my concerns, and I have drawn upon it in preparing this Report and Proposition. I would like to acknowledge the hard work and insight revealed in the Sub-Panel's document produced under the Chairmanship of Deputy Power.

Having attended the Parish Hall meeting organised by Planning in my own parish and subsequently attended a briefing for States Members, it is apparent to me this entire exercise is being rushed through before the relevant research has been undertaken, all the facts established and all options considered within the context of the new Island Plan.

This is supposed to be an era of 'joined-up government' yet this haphazard approach to planning looks little short of chaos.

I would go as far as to say our countryside is being treated in a reckless and cavalier manner.

I have also become concerned with the definitions and criteria used to assess the supposedly 'many hundreds of people' on waiting lists. Many people are being put on lists for retirement homes, for example, using criteria which often differ from parish to parish, and some parishes have no criteria at all. Yet we are told there is an 'urgent need'.

The current Island Plan only permits development in protected zones in cases of the most compelling circumstances and when it has been demonstrated that the proposed development cannot be sited elsewhere.

It is simply not possible for this Assembly or the Planning authorities to determine that X or Y field should be rezoned for development – without having any consistent and accurate assessment of the actual need to take such drastic steps.

For example, it may be the case that many of the people who wish to move into what may be termed retirement homes, already own a substantial property. They may wish to 'down-size' thus enabling the large home to house a family. However, some people may be wishing to follow this course of action as little more than a means of liquidating their assets. I expect a number of retired couples would happily move out of their home if they could sell it for say, £1.5 million – and buy a cheaper home.

This is an entirely reasonable course of action for private individuals to wish to undertake.

However, the question is this: should we be rezoning our precious open land to build retirement homes that, essentially, represent a cash-releasing 'lifestyle' change for the 'down-sizing' people concerned?

I do not believe we should.

Certainly, there will be some legitimate need for retirement homes, and, perhaps, some open land may need to be rezoned. But at present we just have no credible means of assessing the validity and urgency of the 'need'.

How are these urgent needs being established?

Imagine Jersey 2035, of which I was not a fan, still expressed the need for a balance of quality of life with economic success. It gave a clear indication of being against building in the countryside. One of the preferences from the options as put to the forum was to work longer. Yet the rezoning for retirement homes is for people of over 55 years of age. This is simply an example of a government going in different directions at the same time. It is a disjointed, ill thought-out review that does not co-ordinate with anything gone before, nor what is likely to be

the outcome of the Island Plan and population debates.

It now appears that virtually anyone who fancies a new home, and who can claim to fit one of the various inconsistent 'criteria' being applied by parishes, can put their name down and see what comes up.

There is absolutely no logic in embarking upon the rezoning swathes of land before we complete the Island Plan review.

This is why part (a) of the proposition seeks the cessation of proposals to rezone green field sites in the Green and Countryside zone for development purposes until the Island Plan review is completed.

Part (b) of the proposition is of similar effect. It asks the Ministers for Planning and Environment and Housing to neither support nor progress rezoning proposals or to offer any such proposals support, until the new Island Plan is approved by the States.

Part (c) of the proposition asks the Minister for Housing, in co-operation with the 12 Constables, and other relevant stakeholders, to develop a consistent and rational set of criteria and definitions which will be used across the Island in determining the admission of people onto a 'waiting list' for housing on redeveloped land. I accept there may need to be some flexibility to enable Parishes some variation in criteria according to the particular needs of the day, but such variations simply must happen within the framework of a rational and consistent overall policy.

Part (d) of the proposition is in 3 parts. The first requests that the Island Plan Review be given every possible priority so that the community has a cohesive Island Plan *prior* to considering dramatic proposals for rezoning.

The second part asks that the consultation on the Island Plan takes the form of a "Green Paper", that the relevant background information is made public and thus, importantly, present to the people of the Island and States members the full range of options.

The third part seeks that specific attention be given to finally producing an agreed and effective exit-strategy for redundant glasshouses. This is an issue which has lain unresolved for too long. How can we even contemplate developing what may be pristine open land when a derelict glasshouse site may be a better option?

In Grouville alone there are 4 huge glasshouse sites, the owners of which have been waiting for decisions from the States that will, in effect, determine the destiny of the redundant facilities.

In 2001 the growers naively asked the States for support, thus allowing the Jersey glasshouse growers to compete on equal terms with their competitors throughout Europe. No such support was given and the growers were told to prepare themselves for significant change.

The glasshouse growers proactively brought forward to States Members of the day a report and a radical approach to the dilemma. They were to offer all their sites and ancillary land for purchase to the States of Jersey, thus creating a land-bank for the Island. It would then be up to the States to determine which sites were suitable for housing and which were not and should be restored as open land. And the price for each plot was, on average, £40,000 per dwelling. For some reason this report never saw the light of day as far as the States were concerned.

So here we are, 7 years on, with oil prices at the highest they have ever been and on the up, and nearly all glasshouse growers going out of business. The glasshouse-grown Jersey tomatoes and peppers for export will be greatly diminished by the end of this year. And still no decision about the glasshouse sites from the States. Yet we are seriously asked to look to rezoning our open countryside as the first port of call - when these growers have been waiting for 7 years for a decision.

We simply must, finally address the redundant glasshouse question.

Paragraph (e) of the proposition asks that the Minister for Planning and Environment bring forward a policy to enable him to require developments over a certain size to include a percentage of socially desirable and necessary

units, such as first-time buyer, rental or sheltered housing.

In my own parish of Grouville, there is already a huge site in Gorey Village, which gained planning permission a few years ago for a large amount of housing. The building work hasn't started yet. I asked the Minister for Planning and Environment at the States Sitting of 12th February 2007 why a percentage of large developments such as this can't be obliged to provide some social housing of some type on their sites, whether that be for social rented, first-time buyer, retirement, sheltered housing or a mix – whichever is the most appropriate for the site. The Minister for Planning and Environment told the Assembly he would need a Policy approved by the States in order to achieve this. I say, let the Minister and his department prepare such a Policy and bring it forward for debate before any more large developments are given approval.

I am also lodging, at the same time as this Report and Proposition, a proposal to ask the Chief Minister to conduct a full census of the Island's population. This was scheduled in 2006 but was delayed until 2011. Now that we are told of this urgent need for housing and looking to rezone swathes of our open countryside to provide it, I believe we need full and accurate statistics to work from.

Conclusion

When the Minister for Planning and Environment answered questions I put to him at the States Sitting of 12th February 2007, he admitted the short-term rezoning review and consultation is being conducted as an almost parallel piece of work to that of the comprehensive and scheduled Island Plan Review.

I set out the 2 timetables the Minister's department provided to me –

Dear Deputy Labey

Further to your request, the current timetables for the Rezoning of Land for Retirement and First time Buyer Sites and the Island Plan Review are as follows:

Rezoning of Land for Retirement & First Time Buyers

Consultation Ended –	15th February 2008
Consultation Report Published –	early March 2008
Report and Proposition Lodged –	early April 2008
States Debate –	May/June 2008
Initial Housing Completions Expected –	mid 2010

Island Plan Review - Current Project Timetable

Project Commenced –	May 2007
Information Review –	June 2007 – Feb 2008
Strategic Options Paper –	Feb – March 2008
Consultation on Draft Plan –	June – Sept 2008
Publish Amended Draft Plan –	Jan – Feb 2009
Examination in Public –	April –Sept 2009
States Debate –	December 2009

(Ends)

If there is such an urgent need for housing, which may well be the case, should we not bring forward the Island Plan Review and relevant population studies to provide a cohesive policy and more facts as to how such housing needs are to be determined and met?

There is no logic for conducting two almost simultaneous reviews, the first far less comprehensive, concluding shortly before the scheduled review that would, I would hope, consider all options, all sites and hopefully establishing the *actual needs*.

That is, the “needs” of the people of this community for a home – as opposed to buy-to-let investment opportunities for overseas investors.

The observations of my Parishioners have been of a more and more concerned nature. People feel that the States does not know what it is doing – and is just rushing around in a panic-stricken reaction to events – rather than planning properly and being in charge of our destiny.

If we are to restore public confidence, we must have a calm, evidence-based assessment of both our housing needs and the Island’s planning requirements.

I will probably be accused of denying people homes. Not so, I say. I say let’s consider *all* the available sites in an orderly and fair manner. Let’s establish the numbers, let’s establish the criteria, let’s know the facts. And then, and only then, let us provide.

When we are considering something as fundamental as the housing needs of this community and its precious and diminishing open land – there can be no credible argument against a proposition which simply seeks competent government planning.

Finance and manpower

There will obviously be some manpower and finance requirements in enacting this proposition. But I would suggest that the manpower and finance requirements in enacting this proposition will constitute a saving rather than an expense. There have got to be less resource requirements involved in having one comprehensive Island Plan Review than two simultaneous reviews – one Rezoning Review and implementation and one Island Plan Review and implementation.

The policies that I am requesting are, frankly, something that the relevant departments ought to be doing anyway as part of their responsibilities.