

23.03.21

2 Deputy T.A. Coles of St. Helier South of the Minister for the Environment regarding minimum size guidelines (OQ.38/2023)

Will the Minister advise whether the minimum size standards requirement, as set down in Supplementary Planning Guidance, for new dwellings, are still appropriate; and, if they are not, what consideration is being given to increasing them?

Deputy J. Renouf of St. Brelade (The Minister for the Environment):

I thank the Deputy for his question, particularly as I am aware of his continuing interest in and concern for the quality of accommodation in the Island, and particularly in St. Helier. The question I think refers to current minimum size requirements; however, the Deputy will be aware that in accordance with proposal 20 of the bridging Island Plan I have just recently issued revised Supplementary Planning Guidance setting out new standards for the design and specification of new homes. That is because residential space standards have not been comprehensively reviewed since 1994. Some minor changes to them were made relating to a 10 per cent increase to the minimum house sizes in 2009 but no further changes have been made since. In light of all of this, I think it is necessary and appropriate to review and revise the minimum standards, which is why I have issued the revised draft guidance. These revised draft standards have been issued for consultation with relevant Ministers, key stakeholders in the development industry and members of the public. I would be pleased to receive comment on them before I adopt new standards with or without amendment.

3.2.1 Deputy T.A. Coles:

I am trying to think how to phrase this properly. Can the Minister provide his opinion on whether the new guidance which is out for consultation for single-storey dwellings of one and 2 bedroom, 2 and 3-person occupancy, these increases, is he of the opinion that they go far enough to improve the well-being of their occupants?

Deputy J. Renouf:

I think it is interesting to put these guidelines in some kind of context. The original standards that were brought in in Jersey were based on the Parker Morris standards in the U.K. and these were initiated in the U.K. in 1967 but they were withdrawn in the U.K. in the 1980s and, as a result, the U.K. has not, until very recently, had minimum size standards. They are now reintroducing minimum size standards and they are below the levels as we are setting our standards in the revised guidance that I have issued. So, I think that is one part of the answer, I think is that we are certainly doing slightly better than the U.K. in those standards which is significant in an Island with considerable pressures on space. But I would also draw attention to the fact that the guidance includes guidance on particular aspects of the space standards, for example, relating to private open space, shared open space, storage, bicycle storage, and so on which have a cumulative effect of increasing the standards available even in those small dwellings.

3.2.2 Deputy G.P. Southern:

Could the Minister explain to us to the best of his knowledge why these U.K. limits were withdrawn? Was it pressure from developers of the time?

Deputy J. Renouf:

Sorry, I may not have been clear in my answer. The guidelines were withdrawn in the U.K. during the 1980s, and I am sure the questioner will draw the appropriate conclusions about the regime in power at that time, so they were never withdrawn in Jersey. Jersey has had minimum size standards since the early 1990s and in that respect we have consistently been able to apply higher standards than in the U.K. In fact, it is widely acknowledged that in the U.K. the removal of those standards led to a shrinkage in the size provision of new developments.

3.2.3 Deputy G.P. Southern:

Does that mean then, in the Minister's judgment, that there is no possibility that the withdrawal from the U.K. will be repeated here due to pressure from developers?

Deputy J. Renouf:

No, I do not believe there is any intention on my part, or the Government's part, to withdraw minimum space standards. Indeed, the issuing of revised guidelines of the Supplementary Planning Guidance in this area would certainly lend credence to that statement. I would not be intending to revise standards only to withdraw them. So, no, the intention is to have a consultation, a meaningful consultation, where of course developers will be able to feed into that consultation, along with the members of the public and all relevant stakeholders.

3.2.4 Deputy S.Y. Mézec:

The Minister has made reference to the proposed new residential space standards that he has put out to consultation. Could I ask him if he checks the maths on them before publishing them?

Deputy J. Renouf:

I had a pretty good look through them but I suspect something is going to be pointed out to me right now.

3.2.5 Deputy S.Y. Mézec:

Indeed. **[Laughter]** The very, very first one on the list which is for a one-bedroom property for single-person occupancy says that an increase of 34.5 square metres to 40 is an increase of 4.5. Does he need a calculator to work out that that is incorrect and does he think that they should go back and look at this to ensure what is being put out to public consultation is correct?

Deputy J. Renouf:

I may be looking at something slightly different. The document in front of me says: "One single-storey dwelling, one bedroom 34.5, proposed 40, and plus 5.5" which is an increase of 16 per cent. In that case I suspect there has been a printing error somewhere but certainly when it was presented to me that is what the figure was, so I apologise if the figure has been transcribed incorrectly.

3.2.6 Connétable P.B. Le Sueur of Trinity:

In terms of minimum space standards, does the Minister agree with me that Government-led schemes should be leading the way and strive to do better than the minimum to improve the health and well-being of Islanders?

Deputy J. Renouf:

I certainly would be keen to place emphasis on the word “minimum”. I would also draw attention to 2 other factors, one I have already mentioned, which is that the guidance does provide more detail in terms of provision of particular forms of space within developments, and I think that will result in a significant improvement in terms of well-being of occupants. I would also say that a significant part of this guidance is around trying to encourage the proper application of these pieces of Supplementary Planning Guidance. It has been noticeable in reviewing these guidelines, the previous Supplementary Planning Guidance, that in some developments they were not always either appropriately referenced in the planning determination process or fully applied, and I think that would be interesting if that was done. I think the final point I would make is that we do need to have some regard to the complexity of the issue, and the drive for greater space is indeed important, but we also need to understand that people have different requirements at different stages of their lives and different standards can be applied in those different circumstances within those minimum guidelines.

3.2.7 Deputy T.A. Coles:

Does the Minister believe that the comparison to the U.K. is fair when Jersey is isolated, and commuting from larger areas to provide more space for yourself is not an option?

Deputy J. Renouf:

I think the comparison is a useful starting point, no more. I used it to provide context.

[11:00]

I think in some respects you could say that, given the space pressures in Jersey, the fact that we are able to maintain a slightly more generous provision than is the case in the U.K. through our minimum space standards is quite significant. But, no, I would not want to make too much of that comparison. I would simply say that it provides some useful context to show that we are not aiming below decent standards, that is all.