

STATES OF JERSEY



AFFORDABLE AND RIGHT-SIZE HOUSING PROVISION ON THE WATERFRONT

Lodged au Greffe on 4th June 2024
by Deputy H.M. Miles of St. Brelade
Earliest date for debate: 25th July 2024

STATES GREFFE

PROPOSITION

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

to request the Minister for Treasury and Resources, as shareholder representative, to instruct the States of Jersey Development Company that, in any new proposals or plans for housing developments on the Waterfront by the States of Jersey Development Company –

- (a) any such proposals must include a minimum provision of no less than 50% of the homes to be built as affordable housing for first time buyers; and
- (b) any such proposals must include a minimum of 15% of housing designed to encourage and enable Islanders who are looking to right-size, in line with the delivery of the right-sizing policy set out in R.85/2024.

DEPUTY H. MILES OF ST. BRELADE

REPORT

Housing Crisis

When I stood for election in June 2022, I made a manifesto commitment that I would support measures to address the housing crisis including, “a proper supply of affordable housing, in appropriate locations” and “voluntary schemes for those who wish to downsize, to assist with the supply of family homes.”

The Waterfront development offers the primary opportunity, certainly in the foreseeable future, for the Government and the States Assembly to provide new housing stock that is attractive to islanders. Although plans are currently being re-drawn following the rejection of the most recent application, it is stated on the States of Jersey Development Company (“SOJDC”) website that the next phase of the Waterfront development could provide nearly 1000 new homes.

Now is the perfect time, as a new planning application is being developed, to clearly stipulate our enhanced ambition – as set out in the new Government’s Common Strategic Policy¹ and the Housing Minister’s Right-sizing policy² – for this project to deliver a greater number of suitable properties for islanders than has been proposed in previous schemes.

The Waterfront

Whilst the overall Waterfront development has been one of the greatest disappointments in Jersey’s modern history, we have a chance to write a new chapter of which we can be proud. Currently, the Waterfront still lacks a sense of place, community and vibrancy. Ensuring we make it a location where hundreds of island families are personally invested for the long-term can only be positive in supporting this key part of St Helier to become the central part of island life that we all hoped it would be.

In 2021, the Council of Ministers described the plans for the Waterfront as ‘exciting’. They claimed that the Waterfront would become “more than just a large housing estate. It will be a community. This includes a leisure centre, expansive open and community spaces, gardens and a children’s play park, as well as the necessary sea defences.”

All of this came to nothing – the planning application was rejected on multiple grounds, including failing to demonstrate how it will achieve good quality housing and living conditions, failing to achieve community expectations, and a low level of provision of affordable housing.

Affordable Housing

Gradual progress has been made in recent years on the provision of affordable housing in new developments, but now is the time to go further. At present, all new developments, public or private, must include at least 15% of affordable housing. The South Hill development of 139 properties will see around 25% designated as affordable

¹ <https://www.gov.je/SiteCollectionDocuments/Government%20and%20administration/Proposed%20Common%20Strategic%20Policy%202024%20to%202026.pdf>

² <https://www.gov.je/SiteCollectionDocuments/Home%20and%20community/Right-sizing%20Policy%20from%20the%20Minister%20for%20Housing.pdf>

(which is approximately 35 of the apartments that will be built). I do not wish to criticise this provision of affordable housing, which is welcome, but it is obvious that we need to do more.

There are thousands of islanders who are hoping, but currently unable, to get onto the property ladder. These islanders are taking decisions now regarding their futures, and many are deciding to leave. Developments that include just a handful of affordable housing units will not make it more likely that younger islanders stay in Jersey. A better, clearer, and unequivocal message needs to be communicated. The Waterfront development provides a chance for us to deliver that message.

Supporting young islanders

Giving young islanders and families the hope and knowledge that the Government and the States is committed to delivering no fewer than 500 affordable homes in one new development would make a major contribution towards changing the perspectives of young families as to whether they have a future in Jersey. It would send a message that Jersey is a place where families can prosper, face the future with optimism, and plan for the long-term. It would give confidence that Jersey is an island where young people can build their lives and establish settled homes and families. It would show that the Government is on their side.

That positive message would give hope not just to individuals and families, but to businesses and the wider economy as well, that we are serious – both about keeping our talented young people in Jersey and ensuring that there are opportunities for skilled people coming to the island.

Supporting other Islanders – downsize/right size housing

Building new affordable housing is a key and central part of dealing with the housing crisis, but it is not the only fix. Across the parishes, there are number of housing estates that were built to provide family homes in the late 1960's and the 1970's, most of which were purchased by families using States loan provisions.

Many of the occupants of those properties are now 'empty nesters' or widows/widowers. Indeed, Jersey Census data from 2021 shows that 1 in 4 households under-occupy their homes according to the UK Bedroom Standard. There is a clear need to provide accommodation, suitable for sale or rent, to those who may wish to sell their former family homes and downsize/right-size.

However, the current market for this type of "downsize" or 'right-size' housing tends to comprise of high-density flats with little or no outside space. These existing options are unattractive to the "downsizing" demographic, in terms of location, design and price. There are examples of village type accommodation which is in great demand (for example Hameau de la Mer in St Clement, L'Hermitage in St Peter, Tabor Park in St Brelade and Langtry Gardens in St Saviour). These schemes aimed at 'last-time buyers' show that downsizing/right-sizing options can be successfully implemented, and in demand, if properly thought through and delivered. The Waterfront development presents an opportunity for providing this type of accommodation, as is recognised in the Housing Minister's right-sizing policy.

Public land

The Waterfront development is public land, managed by a company 100% owned by the Government. It represents our opportunity, in this Assembly term, to deliver meaningful levels of housing where there is a realistic prospect of sale to islanders – both first-time buyers and those looking to right-size – and to alleviate the housing crisis for a good number of people in the community that we represent.

We need to make the best possible use of public land – and we must lead by example. I am pleased that this is recognised in the Common Strategic Policy which states, “Ministers will be focusing the Government’s development and planning resources on encouraging the building of more affordable homes for Islanders to buy or rent.” Similarly, the Minister for Housing’s recently published Right-sizing policy notes that “creating a supply of suitable homes in the right location for people to right-size into is essential”. The policy also specifically notes that “SOJDC will also be expected to consider a right-sizing offer in the progression of new plans for housing at the Waterfront”.

50% of affordable housing in this development may be considered by some Members to be too great a figure. Other Members might think I am not being ambitious enough. I have noted previous propositions of Deputy Mézec – P.96/2021, which included options for a 30% and a 50% figure, and his amendment to P.9/2023, which would have required 100% of new States of Jersey Development Company homes in St Helier to be affordable.

Equally, Members may question the 15% figure for a right-sizing provision. This proposition is of course open to alternative proposals through an amendment. Until recently, 15% was the target figure for affordable housing in public developments, and I therefore consider it a reasonable starting point for a right-sizing provision in this type of development.

I am cognisant of views that the development needs to be deliverable, but also conscious of ongoing need, and the commitment of this Council of Ministers in their Common Strategic Policy and the Housing Minister’s Right-sizing policy. If adopted, this proposition at no less than 50% of affordable housing, and a further 15% for a downsizing provision, would likely still represent a challenge for the Government and the SOJDC – but it is a challenge I ask them, as public bodies, to rise to. It is a challenge the Government have set themselves in their Common Strategic Policy and the Housing Minister’s Right-sizing policy, and they are achievable figures. Indeed, if it is a challenge the Government feels it can exceed in either respect, Ministers could count on my support.

The public realm

Public realm and wider improvements are often cited as benefits of developments on public land, and a reason for ensuring a project drives profit. Indeed, earlier unsuccessful schemes proposed up to £156 of public realm and infrastructure improvements. Such improvements are always welcome, and are a duty of Government to fund anyway, but at this moment in time our primary challenge is the housing crisis. We must be alive to the reality facing islanders. Delivering affordable housing and providing realistic and attractive options to downsize must come first. We need to show that our actions match our words.

A positive message

Government is making good progress in developing shared equity and assisted purchase schemes, with ambitions to do more. That is important work, but it needs to go hand-in-glove with the sufficient provision of suitable housing which necessarily includes right-size housing. If we send a positive message by adopting this proposition, that message will reverberate. Confidence breeds confidence. If we send the wrong message, the reverse negative effect can be just as impactful.

A great deal of time and money has already been spent on an unpopular Waterfront scheme that many people, including numerous experts, had predicted would not achieve positive outcomes for islanders. If we are to change the outcome next time, I believe we must change the brief to which the SOJDC are working.

I ask Members to give hope to islanders, of all ages, and to show that as their representatives, we can both talk the talk, and walk the walk in addressing their housing needs, and the housing crisis.

The government needs to grip the Waterfront development debacle firmly and provide clear direction to the States of Jersey Development Company. The Housing Minister has shown a willingness to do so. This proposition is an opportunity for all States Members to show our support for a shared ambition.

Financial and staffing implications

At present, there is no live application for the development of housing on the Waterfront, and this proposition therefore doesn't impact on the financial viability of any existing scheme.

The States of Jersey Development Company, Ministers, and officials will need to work together to ensure that a scheme which incorporates at least 50% of affordable housing and a further 15% of downsize housing is viable and deliverable.

Children's Rights Impact Assessment

A Children's Rights Impact Assessment (CRIA) has been prepared in relation to this proposition and is available to read on the States Assembly website.