

'housing people'

Please reply to:-

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Deputy S Power
 Environment Scrutiny Panel
 States Greffe
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31 October, 2006

Dear Deputy Power

Design of Homes Scrutiny Review

Thank you for your letter dated 23rd October 2006 inviting a submission in connection with the above review. I am pleased to respond but I would mention that the views expressed are my own rather than the collective views of JHT Trustees.

JHT has previously participated in a consultation exercise conducted by the Planning Department with a view to compiling a policy guide for the design of social housing schemes. This was under the able direction of Roger Corfield. I recall that a draft document was circulated probably some two years or more ago. I recently queried the fate of the guide with the Minister and urged him to ensure its completion. The draft guide was a very detailed document and I considered it to be practical and helpful and I was basically in agreement with its recommendations. I would mention that I have not seen any further version and would not necessarily agree with any recent amendments or new inclusions. I think your work would be assisted by a careful examination of the draft guide and risks irrelevance without reference to it.

Your table is helpful but its detailed completion would duplicate much of the the work already done for the guide. I have limited my response therefore to the following observations:

In setting out guidelines for social housing I believe it is important not to over-specify. For example, spacious accommodation is generally regarded as desirable. If room sizes are excessive, tenants rightfully complain about the cost of floor coverings and the cost of heating. It would be a mistake to require homes to have open fireplaces, unwanted by tenants, or sash windows, which are difficult to open and close and require regular maintenance. Wooden doors and window frames are more expensive to install and to maintain whilst there are practical and preferred modern solutions.

In developing green-field sites we do have a unique opportunity of requiring quality developments of good design. The extra cost of such provision can, within reason, be extracted from the high land values deriving from land re-zoned for development. Social rented housing schemes should not be regarded as the poor relation in housing developments. Rented schemes, by definition, have the highest occupancy rates. They

therefore require a level of amenity higher than other schemes. For example; playing space for children; well ventilated kitchens and bathrooms all with windows; facilities for drying clothes; adequate storage; good quality kitchen fittings and door furniture; good sound insulation between properties and between rooms . The landlord requires ease of maintenance; avoidance of rabbit-warren circulation space and an excessive number of lifts.

The provision of sustainability elements is difficult. For example, mechanical and electrical consultants are ill-informed about the installation of solar panels and resistant to their inclusion. Landlords have no financial incentive to include them; quite the opposite in fact; they would be taking risk and increasing development costs by insisting on their provision. This provision would benefit the tenant, by reducing electricity bills, but it is not going to happen without statutory direction.

In my opinion there should be more emphasis on the planting of trees and shrubs in urban schemes. We were able to achieve this to excellent effect in the Berkshire Court scheme, for example, but were prevented from so doing in the John Wesley scheme in Cannon Street, which therefore remains sterile and intimidating.

Wherever possible, housing schemes should include garaging for one car per unit. This may not be possible in urban flatted schemes.

In refurbishing older housing there is no longer any excuse or reason to deny modern amenities and features to tenants, on account of excessive protection of "historical" elements. The principal purpose of any building is its intended use. If it fails in such provision it is no longer fit for purpose. It is possible to design double-glazing fenestration that is indistinguishable from "the real thing" at ten meters' distance. It is possible to preserve façades whilst re-developing interiors. It is also possible to demolish redundant but familiar buildings and to replace them with something better, both for the tenant and for the casual passer-by. There is excessive protection of redundant buildings in Jersey, which is positively harmful to the proper, orderly and inevitable regeneration of the built environment.

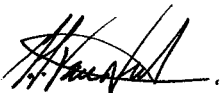
New building methods can deliver homes with extremely high thermal insulation characteristics. This would be of benefit to tenants and to the environment. This has to be led by government.

Unused office buildings in St Helier offer no opportunities for developments for families. There is limited potential for one-bedroomed apartments for elderly singles or couples. In my view, opportunities that do exist should be designed for younger J-cats, nurses etc. Lack of parking would be a critical difficulty.

I trust these observations will prove of some help in your deliberations.

Yours sincerely

THE JERSEY HOMES TRUST



MICHAEL VAN NESTE
CHAIRMAN