

2.5 Deputy S. Pitman of St. Helier of the Minister for Housing regarding the future of the tenants of Convent Court and Caesarea Court:

Would the Minister advise Members whether tenants of Convent Court, when re-allocated, will get priority over people on the States' Housing waiting list if they want to move to Les Marais (Block G) or the Cedars? Would any tenant of Convent Court or Caesarea Court who has refurbished/redecorated their flat shortly before the reallocation date be reimbursed for these costs and will tenants moving costs be met?

Senator T.J. Le Main (The Minister For Housing):

Any tenant who needs to be moved as part of a refurbishment programme takes priority for empty units over those on the waiting and transfer lists, other than those categorised as the most urgent medical cases. Of course subject to the Property Plan being approved by the Assembly, residents of Convent Court and Caesarea Court will be visited before the end of August this year and during these visits officers from the department will be able to update tenants on the timetable of events, answer such questions as they have, and most importantly ascertain the preferred choice of relocation. In view of the size and duration of the refurbishment programme as outlined in the Housing Property Plan the department will be reviewing the policy regarding moving allowances in order to ensure it is equitable and sufficiently broad to meet tenant's expectations. Naturally any such expenditure will have to be met from within the existing budget constraints. Residents of Convent Court and Caesarea Court will be treated, as I have often said, with total compassion and respect, as will all those facing a similar situation. Nobody, but nobody, will be rushed into making any decision about the location or the future of their new home.

2.5.1 Deputy S. Pitman:

Could the Minister confirm when Caesarea and Convent Court will be demolished?

Senator T.J. Le Main:

I cannot confirm anything at the moment, Sir, because as I have said this Assembly has to make the decision on whether the Property Plan will be approved or not. Subject to approval then it is highly likely. Negotiations are taking place at the present time. The town park is a top priority as I understand it under *EDAW* and there are discussions of changing course a little bit on Convent Court and Caesarea Court allowing the town park to take place with parking facilities in the east of town. So it is quite likely that subject to all sorts of issues there could be a delay of anything up to 48 or 60 months in Convent Court and Caesarea Court.

2.5.2 Deputy J.A. Martin:

Given the shortage of sheltered housing we have... I have seen some very good 21-22 storey tower blocks in North London, obviously where I am from, converted into some superb sheltered housing. Has the Minister's department looked into the feasibility of these 2, and maybe even the Cedars or La Collette... because as it has been discovered, Sir, in the U.K. these are really not suitable for families and young children. Could he tell us what consideration has been given?

Senator T.J. Le Main:

The issue with high rises is something that my departmental officers, my Assistant Minister and I do not like for a variety of reasons. They have caused us immense problems over a period of years and we feel that to put elderly people in a high rise does cause concern in many areas. I am not really interested in what happens in North London, I am interested in the people of Jersey. The issues are that the people of Jersey - a wealthy little Island like we have - deserve better than jamming them up in high rise developments. Quite honestly the issue is quite clear: the town needs a total regeneration and some of these high rise developments that have been placed in the town areas need coming down over a period of years and we can refurbish and work with the *EDAW Report* and provide a wonderful new town that can be a credit to everyone.

2.5.3 Deputy J.A. Martin:

I am sorry that the Minister does not feel he would like to look further a field. These places, if the Minister of Housing cared to look, are absolutely superb and all the residents like them and they are secure. They are not high rise for families. They are sheltered housing. Obviously the Minister hopes the planning will go through and we will build sheltered housing in the countryside, but that is another problem. I would ask has the Minister had any structural, let alone visual, engineering done on both of these - Convent Court and Caesarea Court - and if he has, and if they are suitable to be refurbished as sheltered housing or not, could he let us have the structural engineer's report? Thank you, Sir.

Senator T.J. Le Main:

No, Sir, we have had some structural reports, particularly on Convent Court. I am not prepared to release it to the open media at the present time. The issue is quite clear: it is confidential information between the department and the engineers. At the moment I am not prepared to release any material that could be construed and misconstrued in the open media by Members or otherwise. The issue is quite clear by the evidence we have got before us, it would be cheaper to demolish the existing high rise structures than spend a huge amount of money on refurbishing them where, in fact, the residents have to move out anyway while major work is undertaken.

2.5.4 Deputy R.G. Le Hérisier:

Building on that issue, would the Minister acknowledge that in fact under his highly esteemed leadership developments like the Berkshire development in La Motte Street - modest high rises - have proved very successful and he is being somewhat over dismissive of high rises which have, in some cases, with the right security and community facilities, been successful.

Senator T.J. Le Main:

Yes, I agree that is a moderate high rise but I was asked the question of high rises and when I consider a high rise I consider a high rise more in what has taken place in past like Les Marais and the Cedars and Convent Court. I do not believe that what we are trying to achieve in St. Helier and what we are trying to achieve for the elderly people of this Island those kind of high rises are what is required. I have to say that the situation is getting worse by the day, we are now creeping up towards 400 very, very urgent cases for sheltered housing. I keep getting asked by the Connétables, I get asked by other Members: "Where are the figures?" Well, we have got an urgent waiting list increasing by the day and the quicker we can get something done... I am getting extremely concerned, Sir, at the lack of action, income provision and moving forward with the provision of homes for elderly and otherwise. It is very, very important and urgent that we proceed with the Property Plan as a starter.

2.5.5 Deputy S.C. Ferguson:

Does the Minister not realise that it is a perfectly reasonable request for the relevant Scrutiny Panel to ask for sight of the consulting engineer's report on Convent Court and Caesarea Court? Does he not understand that Scrutiny is well aware of the need for confidentiality and has observed it scrupulously throughout its existence?

Senator T.J. Le Main:

I do not know where the Member is getting her facts and figures. In fact, Scrutiny have not asked for that report or information and my department are totally transparent. If, in fact, any information is required by Scrutiny, Sir, then they are able to look at it in the department with officers. But I am not prepared to release any report, which is confidential to the department, so that they end up in the open media and then the scaremongering that takes place afterwards. In fact, I am really disappointed with the statement being made this morning. Because there are several issues there that can be addressed and the questions have not been asked of myself, or my Assistant Minister.

So, I am terribly disappointed the way that Scrutiny are acting and behaving at the present time over the Property Plan.

2.5.6 Deputy G.W.J. de Faye:

Specifically, in respect of high-rise accommodation, especially that which might represent a value to the Island and which is already planning approved, I wonder would the Minister consider, at some time in the future, the possibility of selling existing high-rise accommodation into the private sector to be developed and using the proceeds from such a sale to provide the sort of accommodation that would be more suitable to his tenants?

Senator T.J. Le Main:

Yes. We are always willing to accept and to look at issues. But you must remember, Sir, that we have a duty also to house people in the areas they wish to live in. You take places, like Convent Court and Caesarea Court, which do not meet the needs of the people that are living in them and our prospective and future clients because of all sorts of issues. Therefore, by removing some of these eyesores, it gives us an opportunity to create homes in the area where people have wanted to live and lived all their lives. It is all about people. It is not about money all the time. I am well aware, Sir, that we could probably put Convent Court/Caesarea Court on the open market and probably get developers interested. But I have a duty to house people on this Island, and the developers are certainly not going to put in developments for sheltered housing and for housing for elderly people. They are there to make the big money.

The Bailiff:

Final supplementary, Deputy Fox.

2.5.7 Deputy J.B. Fox:

Would the Minister consider that if I identified suitable converted high-rise in the U.K. - of which I have been to several myself over the years - that it might be worth a visit to have a look at how some of these units can be converted to quality sheltered housing and especially, as he indicates, that there seems to be a very urgent need that will not be fulfilled by other sources for some time. Thank you, Sir.

Senator T.J. Le Main:

Yes, Sir, because in London, and all those places, they are used to living in immense high-rise developments. People have been brought up in many areas of the U.K. to live in huge high-rise developments. The majority of people we are housing in some of these high-rise developments, in the town areas, are people that have lived all their lives in the country in Jersey. Because they cannot be housed in their own parishes, we are dragging them in, putting them in high-rise flats, like Cedars, Convent Court, and Les Marais and such places. I think we have a better duty to our Jersey people. We have Jersey people that would like lifetime homes so they are going to be able to enjoy the fruits of their working lives in retirement. My aim is to work to get this achieved. But I am very happy to work with any Members. Sir, I have seen the developments in London and the high-rises in these other countries. Certainly, I would not want to live in them but some people may do. The general public that I deal with, and the ordinary Jersey people I deal with, do not want those sort of high-rises. Even the public in Jersey do not want high-rises, themselves, in Jersey.

The Bailiff:

Deputy Pitman, that is all the questions I have.

Deputy S. Pitman:

May I just clarify for the House that there are a lot of people in these high-rises, who love living in these buildings, and they have been there for many years, Sir.

Senator T.J. Le Main:

Absolutely. I know for a fact that since the Housing Department, 4 or 5 years ago, refurbished Les Marais high-rise, there is a waiting list. We have a huge amount of people wanting to live in the Les Marais high-rise. Of course, they have wonderful views. You can see France. They all sit in their windows with their binoculars and their telescopes, and the environment at Les Marais - a refurbished high-rise - is a little different to the environment in some of the parts of St. Helier.