

2.4 Deputy S. Pitman of St. Helier of the Minister for Housing regarding flooding of houses at Nicholson Close:

In view of the heavy rainfall during the last weekend of February, would the Minister inform Members what action, if any, his department have taken to prevent the regular flooding of houses at Nicholson Close?

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

Contrary to the Deputy's allegations on BBC Radio this morning, houses at Nicholson Close do not flood regularly. Housing officers and the Transport and Technical Services Department have confirmed that the last record of flooding in the Grands Vaux area was over Christmas 1999 and on that occasion the flooding affected homes at Troy Court. Subsequent to that sewers in the area have been upgraded. A substantial amount of rain fell over the weekend of 27th and 28th February with almost 53 millimetres of rainfall being recorded at Maison St. Louis between 6.00 p.m. on Saturday and 9.00 a.m. on Sunday morning. The department has already asked Transport and Technical Services' drainage engineers to investigate the reasons for the flooding at Nicholson Close and will consider any recommendations they make to minimise the likelihood of any recurrence of flooding in the area.

2.4.1 Deputy S. Pitman:

If the Minister was to speak to these tenants he will know that in the last 15 years this occurrence of flooding has happened 4 times. Bearing in mind what I have just said regarding the constituents' word on the flooding 4 times in 15 years, could the Minister explain why these houses are earmarked for sale in the Housing Property Plan?

Senator T.J. Le Main.

There has been no evidence of any flooding 4 times in 15 years. If the Deputy would like to send on to me or to the department the names of those tenants she claims have been flooded over those period of years, then I am very happy to look at it. I still could not quite understand the last part of the question; is it why we are selling properties off?

Deputy S. Pitman:

Why are these properties being earmarked for sale under the Property Plan?

Senator T.J. Le Main.

There is no particular properties been earmarked for sale. The Property Plan indicated over a period of 10 years that those tenants who would wish to purchase their own homes *in situ* over a period of 10 years would have the ability to do so. So no particular homes are targeted, but if tenants are able and willing to purchase their home then there remains an availability. The other think I would like to say, the Acting Director of Waste Management Drainage Engineers, T.T.S. (Transport and Technical Services) duty officers are holding a meeting this Thursday to discuss any flooding problems in Grands Vaux and Vallée des Vaux areas and I would like to ask the Deputy to put in writing or give us names of those she claims have been flooded over a period of years because we have no evidence of that at all.

2.4.2 The Deputy of St. John:

Could the Minister inform Members whether or not tenants of his department are required within their rental agreements or leases to carry insurance for contents of their properties?

Senator T.J. Le Main.

No, they are not required. We offer the clients in their tenancy agreement a very good offer of household contents insurance but unfortunately we cannot force them to take that up. In this instance, I know of the 4 homes that were flooded, 2 were insured, one had not got round to getting any insurance and the other did not think they needed it. But we are looking at insurance. It has been something that has concerned me for a considerable time that tenants, somehow, we should be able to work with them to give them the kind of cover that they need.

2.4.3 Deputy T.A. Vallois of St. Saviour:

Could the Minister just confirm whether there has been a timeframe from T.T.S. as to how long it will take them to look into this flooding situation?

Senator T.J. Le Main.

I cannot speak for T.T.S. All I can say is that there will be a meeting this week to discuss the outcome of those 4 houses that were flooded and I can give an assurance to the Assembly that if it is anything to do with the Housing Department, the Housing Department will do all in their power to rectify if there are any problems. But the issue is that it is a difficult one. Nicholson Close is connected to a system that is affected by a number of factors which are outside the responsibility of the department, including the height of the tide, the height of the water in the Grand Vaux reservoir, and the amount of water running off fields and whether downstream the public drainage system is blocked. I can give an assurance to particularly the Deputies in St. Helier No. 2 that I will work with them if necessary, but make sure that any of our property tenants have the comfort of knowing that they will not get flooded if we can do anything to assist.

2.4.4 Deputy S. Pitman:

I would just like to clarify a couple of points. Firstly, that one of the tenants in Nicholson Close has been flooded twice. The Grands Vaux Community Centre was used about 15 years ago to put these people up who were flooded and one person did look to buy one of these properties so they are definitely earmarked for sale and in the Housing Property Plan. Will the Minister say whether he will be working with T.T.S. because it is my understanding that the problem is the drains around Nicholson Close, they are too small to take the water?

Senator T.J. Le Main.

I am not sure how the Deputy is such an expert on drains but I would have thought that perhaps you ought to ask the Deputy of St. John who is an expert on drains and toilets, he may be able to assist. I can assure the Deputy that I will be working... or the department do work hand in hand with T.T.S., we have got a very good working relationship between officers and we will do everything we can to make sure that this does not occur again. This was an extraordinary night of rain where many homes in Jersey were flooded and, as far as I am concerned, the advice given to me, is that the drains are all up to date and were upgraded some years ago, but it was exceptional circumstances and I am not sure where the Deputy gets her advice from that the drains are not in order or otherwise.