

2.5 Deputy R.G. Le Hérissier of the Minister for Housing regarding the imminent requirement for 400 sheltered units of accommodation:

How did the Minister reach the conclusion that 400 sheltered residences are required in the immediate future?

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

At this moment, some 17 per cent of Jersey's population is of retirement age with some 5 people working for each pensioner. By 2030, 30 per cent of Jersey's population will be of retirement age and the position will have changed in that there will be only 2 people working for every pensioner in retirement. As for the need for sheltered housing, I am talking about last-time homes fit for purpose, which therefore, will cater for elderly people throughout the remainder of their independent lives. I am not talking about sheltered housing offering additional specialist services. Bungalows, as I say, are for independent living and I believe, Sir, there is a subtle difference. I will shortly be bringing to this Assembly details of the Housing Department's 10-year property plan. Within that plan is a commitment to create within our stock some sheltered homes to meet the challenges already highlighted by me. Although this will require some acquisitions, it will also necessitate amalgamating bits of accommodation to create fit-for purpose one-bed homes. Bed-sit accommodation is totally unsuitable for current needs, and most certainly will be the case with an aging society. Currently Housing have 369 bed-sits, many of them occupied by elderly people. It is the aim of my department to eliminate the majority, of bed-sit accommodation over a 10-year period. This, together with the adaptation of some existing one-bedroom homes, will lead to a net loss in sheltered accommodation within our stock of approximately 170 homes.

The Bailiff:

Could you wind up, please, Minister?

Senator T.J. Le Main:

These homes will very much need to be replaced so, therefore, must be added to the equation when considering need. With regard to a waiting list both for existing tenants and those living in the private sector, there are some 352 individuals in need of shelter-type housing.

2.5.1 Deputy R.G. Le Hérissier:

The Minister mentioned 369 people in apartments. Has he, Sir - or has his department - carried out a survey of how many of these 369 occupants - if indeed they are single occupants - will be possible occupants of his sheltered housing programme? Secondly, Sir, has he carried out a survey within each Parish or obtained data within each Parish in order that he can reach the figure of 400?

Senator T.J. Le Main:

The figures given to me by the department are the figures that my department hold in regard to requests and waiting lists, and I am not sure whether the department has, in fact ... I am not sure; I do not think the department has contacted the Parishes or Connétables in regard to requests. But most of the requests we get are on an Island-wide basis and the accommodation is coming in on figures that we hold in the department.

2.5.2 Deputy of St. John:

As part of his deliberations, has the Housing Minister been able to gauge how many people are likely to downsize to sheltered housing thus providing additional vacant housing units which could be acquired by growing families? Thank you, Sir.

Senator T.J. Le Main:

Yes, Sir. The officers in the department advise me there is a huge demand for people wanting to downsize to 2-bed smaller properties, particularly with a garden. When we talk about last-time buyer homes there are a large number of people of retirement age and those approaching retirement age who are living in large family houses. Many of them will have found themselves with a reduced income and the large overheads of a big property. They are asset rich, cash poor. You would be very surprised by the number of requests my department receives from those pensioners who are property owners but are finding it very difficult making ends meet. Think of the benefits for all concerned if these people - and those approaching retirement age - could access a last-time buyer home fit for their needs. Not only would it release a family home into the property market, it would give people some equity in which to enjoy and provide for their retirement. Sir, I understand through the department that estate agents have got a constant huge demand for people who are wanting to sell family homes and downsize on accommodation.

2.5.3 Deputy G.P. Southern:

For how many of the 6 years of his tenure as Island Minister or President has he known about this crying need for sheltered housing?

Senator T.J. Le Main:

It had been a growing problem over the 6 years, so it has been a growing problem since before 6 years - since the first rezonings of the later years in 1999 and 2002, during the Island Plan debate. Not one house or one site has been built on of those rezoned sites for sheltered homes. In fact, it is only the Parish of St. Martin and the Parish of Trinity in the last few years that have built some sheltered homes for retired persons. Apart from that, it has been a growing problem and as I have highlighted, Sir, by 2030 30 per cent of our population will be in retirement, and it is getting worse by the month and by the year.

2.5.4 Senator L. Norman:

In his answers the Minister has consistently, on several occasions, referred to "last time buyers" but his press comments have been trying to push the Parishes to provide sheltered accommodation on a rental basis. Could he tell us where the demand really is and which it is that he is really seeking? Is it last time buyer homes or is he trying to persuade the Parishes to spend millions of pounds in providing retirement homes?

Senator T.J. Le Main:

No, Sir. As I said, we have got a waiting list at the moment in Housing of existing tenants and those in the private sector of 352 in need now. In need now for rental accommodation. Accommodation that needs to meet their needs. We get constant requests, Sir, from elderly people that want to be moved to where their children are living - in St. Brelade, St. Mary and other places - where they can have care and attention and assistance, but are still able to live independently. The last time buyer is a huge demand that is separate to the rental demand. There is a huge demand by

people who want to downsize who have 3 and 4-bedroom houses. They have children that have left. They have got large gardens and will make ideal family homes. Originally many of them were first time buyer homes and they cannot release that equity because there are no properties that would suit their needs to be able to purchase.

2.5.5 Senator J.L. Perchard:

Does the Minister have any idea as to how many vergées will be required to facilitate the building of 400 sheltered residences bearing in mind by nature, Sir, they will have to be ground floor developments. Would he be able to advise the Assembly as to how many vergées would...

Senator T.J. Le Main:

No, Sir, I cannot do that, but as I say, it is intended that a property plan will be coming to Members. I am sorry about the delay on the property plan but the property plan has several recommendations in it but at the moment it is with the Treasury. It is with the Treasury for assessment but certainly it is intended that within the property plan, there is very much unsuitable accommodation that does not meet the needs of the elderly - particularly not wind and watertight - and there are recommendations to get rid of some of that accommodation and to replace it. The issue is we can take some from out of our stock and out of the land we currently own, but there is quite a demand for parochial village developments. I cannot give the Senator the figures; I have not got theirs.

The Bailiff:

May I implore that Members asking questions, and Ministers, to be concise in their questions and replies, and then I think a great many more Members would be able to ask supplementary questions. Deputy Fox, a final supplementary, please.

2.5.6 Deputy J.B. Fox:

I wonder if the Minister would advise whether his department is also looking at urban sites? This subject came up last Friday in the development and regeneration of St. Helier, and it is obviously a big urban area, and I just wondered if this has also been included in the department's consideration? Thank you.

Senator T.J. Le Main:

Yes, Sir.

The Bailiff:

Admirable, Minister. **[Laughter]** We come next to the question by Deputy Southern of the Minister for Treasury and Resources.