

2025.08.09

3.19 Deputy P.F.C. Ozouf of St. Saviour of the Minister for the Environment regarding amendments to the Bridging Island Plan (OQ. 203/2025):

Will the Minister advise whether he intends to seek amendments to the Bridging Island Plan, particularly in relation to the demand for homes available for rent to families, or does he intend to leave any planning framework changes until the next Island Plan is brought to the Assembly?

Deputy S.G. Luce of Grouville and St. Martin (The Minister for the Environment):

The established legal framework which governs any review of the Island Plan would preclude any review of the Island Plan before the end of this political term. The Bridging Island Plan is, however, already delivering family homes for rent on the sites zoned for the provision of affordable homes, along with the provision of family homes on other sites being developed by Andium Homes. As I just said, there is insufficient time to undertake and complete the requisite stages required for any review of the current plan before the end of this political term. Currently the existing legal framework does not enable the review of part of an Island Plan. But I am proposing that the law is changed to enable this to happen. This proposal is currently the subject of consultation and is part of the Planning Services review.

3.19.1 Deputy P.F.C. Ozouf:

The last part of that question was very welcome indeed because does the Minister agree that the Minister for Housing's comments over the summer break that there is a need for more family homes, the background to the Bridging Island Plan disproportionately delivering flats with 75 per cent of supply being apartments, Fiscal Policy Panel warnings that there is undersupply of appropriate homes, will he then give any indication of when the legal changes will be made so that we can say to our constituents that there is going to be a prioritisation of putting back what should have been done in the Bridging Island Plan?

Deputy S.G. Luce:

As I said just a few minutes ago, it is my intention to change the law so that a section of the Island Plan can be debated in isolation from the rest of the plan. I thought for some time that this was necessary. We live in an ever-changing world where circumstances can change very, very quickly and we have seen that. Before the last Island Plan was debated there was huge demand, the population was soaring and here we are in what seems like just a few minutes later and circumstances have certainly changed. It may not be just on population housing, it may be things like trying to find sites for light industry to be put or energy, for example. We know that political scenarios around the globe change so, so quickly. I think it is vital that a small part of the Island Plan should be able to be debated in isolation from the rest of it. Those proposals are out to consultation. It is my intention that the changes will be made, I hope, before Christmas but certainly before the next election.

3.19.2 Deputy A.F. Curtis of St. Clement:

The Minister has said he cannot amend the plan, which is correct, but he can issue guidance. The provision of family homes is something the Government he is in is highlighting in investing in Jersey. Is he considering in the interim issuing guidance on the correct or the appropriate housing mix, so he can achieve the Government he is part of ambitions sooner?

Deputy S.G. Luce:

I have a number of pieces of guidance which I am in the middle of trying to get out of the door, so to speak, along with a huge amount of other work. I cannot say to the Deputy that changing guidance on this particular issue is something which I had thought about. I will certainly go away and take these views on board. As he will know only too well, I cannot change policy and guidance has to adhere to policy. I cannot change policy but I will certainly go away and have a look at that and see whether something can be done in short order.

3.19.3 Deputy J. Renouf of St. Brelade:

Will there be a new Objective Assessment of Housing Need as part of that process, given that the Minister for Housing described the current assessment of housing need as a work of fiction?

Deputy S.G. Luce:

I do not intend to comment on the quote from the Minister for Housing. But what I may say is that it does appear that, as I have said, things are changing very, very quickly. Anybody who owns a one-bedroom flat, for example, who is looking to dispose of it, will find that their property is being put on the market with a very, very large number of other properties. There are issues around people in first-time buyer properties looking to move on who cannot because the cost of their house has increased. There are a number of issues around housing. Housing is not my remit but I think there is definitely a case for looking as ever. One of the reasons for changing the plan is to allow us to look and make decisions and make some changes. That is the reason I think it is important that the law is changed.

Deputy J. Renouf:

Sir, could I under Standing Order just query? I did ask: will there be a new Objective Assessment of Housing Need? I do not believe that question was addressed.

The Bailiff:

If it was I am afraid it passed me by, Minister, so ...

Deputy S.G. Luce:

I may not have answered that question, Sir. But I would think that if an assessment is done of housing needs it may well be that there is some new direction of travel setting some new targets.

3.19.4 Deputy J. Renouf:

Can the Minister just clarify for Members, will it be only the Minister who can open up the Island Plan to amendment after his law change or will it be ordinary Members? Is there any particular area that he is prepared to say he will be opening up for amendment?

Deputy S.G. Luce:

The first thing I want to say is there is no particular area that I have in mind immediately to open up for Island Plan review. But this is out to consultation and it is a very interesting question that the Deputy poses, one that I have certainly considered myself. As much as it might seem like a good idea for someone sitting on the Back Benches to think they could bring a proposition to review a section of the Island Plan, as Minister I would be slightly terrified by the prospect of waking up every morning with another Back-Bencher proposing review in another section of the Island Plan. I think in reality we would have to be very selective of it as to who would have the ability to bring that proposition forward, whether it would be only the Minister for Planning, whether it would be only the Chief Minister or a recommendation from Council of Ministers. There would have to be a mechanism put in place which would ensure that this Assembly is not asked to sit in judgment on sections of the Island Plan every other sitting.

3.19.5 Deputy P.F.C. Ozouf:

In the previous question I asked about a housing needs assessment and the Minister said that he was not the Minister for Housing but certainly in other post-holder's time, as the Minister for the Environment or Planning President, most of the time it was housing that dominated all issues.

[16:30]

Would the Minister also agree that he and the Council of Ministers need an economic impact assessment of what is going on in the housing crisis that is not the crisis that we thought it was but now a crisis of over-supply and people not buying, with developers not building and the rest of it? It seems that he agrees with the underlying sentiment that one is picking up that there is absolute carnage in the market generally, inexplicable decisions. Will he get an economic assessment of why this is and what the Government in advance of maybe the Budget could do about it?

Deputy S.G. Luce:

I think it is incumbent on any Government to try to keep an eye and a handle on what is happening in the housing market and in Jersey particularly. We hear a lot about family homes but family homes are being delivered on rezoned sites. Maybe the Deputy may say that there may not be enough but the Minister for Housing will have an idea of how many we need. He can look and see what is available in the rezoned sites and what is still to come forward. He can look at some of the applications which have been approved and still have not to start being built. But I can agree with Deputy Ozouf, I think it is incumbent upon us to keep an eye on what is happening, to look at the demand, the type of demand and particularly the type of house that is in demand and to try to adjust accordingly. Because while one, like myself, can be very much wedded to the supply and demand theory, it is all very well having a huge amount of supply in one sector and nothing in another, when it is the other sector that really needs those units. I take the Deputy's views on board.