

Comments in relation to the provision of affordable homes on Field 402, St Martin

These comments are for the attention of the Inspectors and are in response to the queries raised in a letter from Programme Officer Mrs Helen Wilson, dated 10th December 2013.

Item 1 and 2

(a) The Parish of St Martin to demonstrate that it is willing to develop the site for the creation of homes that contribute towards the Island's housing needs, as put forward by the Minister (ie; for occupation / purchase by people who qualify after assessment through the Housing Gateway on the basis of an 80 / 20 tenure split between social rent and affordable purchase).

Obviously this is one area that is causing concern. The field had been identified many years previously as a site for a parish-led project similar to the successful Rue de la Haye development, a project that been undertaken by the St Martin's Housing Association. Field 402 was identified as suitable for the provision of 13 x affordable homes and two further larger homes, these latter two for the owner of the field as part of the arrangement. The 80/20 split had never been an option considered by the Housing Association as they wished to allow 13 families to purchase affordable (discounted) homes from an Association that is a non-profit, honorary organisation and therefore able to provide reasonably priced homes. They hoped that not only would this allow local families to get on to the housing ladder but would provide attractive homes in a rural location, close to all the local amenities and also encourage the new owners to remain in those homes for many years.

The St Martin's Housing Association had learned lessons from the Rue de la Haye development and intended that any new homes on the proposed site would remain "affordable" by the introduction of a form of "shared equity" scheme whereby a third of the sale value of the home would be retained by the Housing Association, this to prevent speculators acquiring the homes for immediate profit.

The St Martin's Housing Association are happy to work together with the Housing Gateway although would seek to use the Gateway to house those with strong St Martin's connections, a condition that forms part of the objectives of the Association, *ie; to provide residential accommodation and any ancillary amenities by whatever mode of tenure it shall from time to time deem appropriate for persons native to or resident in the Island of Jersey and in particular persons having a close connection with the Parish of St Martin, and to provide assistance whether financial or otherwise for the provision of such accommodation.*

The St Martin's Village Plan Working Party and the St Martin's Housing Association Parish both acknowledge the need for "affordable housing" and wish to try and alleviate the housing problem faced by the Housing Minister, the States of Jersey Government and the Island community.

The layout of the proposed development was to make a small, attractive complex of 13 houses as part of its contribution for the Island's affordable housing needs in a manner that was sympathetic to the location and also being able to provide two additional homes for the owner of the site thereby actually providing 15 new homes on the Island. The site seemed to fall exactly into the "Village Plan" proposals contained within the (Draft) Island Plan.

(b) Whether the Parish of St Martin can demonstrate that it is able to develop this site for housing in view of the representation received from the site owner.

The St Martin's Housing Association has a proven record of development of "Village Plan" type sites following the successful development of the complex known as St Martins Village or Rue de la Haye development. Lessons were however learned by that Association that would stand them in good stead for a new project in particular issues regarding maintenance of roads & common areas. The forum contains enthusiastic and experienced persons, some involved in finance, quantity surveying and project management and all with parochial interest including two former Connétables.

The St Martin's Housing Association has maintained close contact with the owner of Field 402 for many years and believes they have her support for their development in exchange for the two new homes. Both she and the St Martin's Housing Association have, on advice, continually delayed bringing the project forward in anticipation of the new Island Plan. The owner finds herself facing the possibility of compulsory purchase of the land and unlikely to receive 2 x four bedroom homes.

The provision of the 2 x four bedroom homes is vital as part of the deal. The intent is to acquire the land and provide those two homes and using a bank loan (or through a loan from the Treasury Minister) selling the other 13 houses off-plan at affordable home rates to those who are likely to enhance the community.

Although land has been donated or sold to parochial authorities at very attractive rates in the past the Parish of St Martin / St Martin's Housing Association do not have that luxury on this occasion. The submission made by the owner to the Planning Department suggests 20 years of consultation. The initial years of that consultation related to the parish attempting to identify possible sites for future development. Information suggests that encouragement was given by the Planning Department / a previous Environment Minister to bring forward a suitable development scheme for Field 402.

Matters progressed significantly from about 2006 when an agreement was reached with the owner of the field. The initial plans were drawn by architects in 2007 for 15 homes in Field 402. In December 2010 the then Minister for Environment wrote to the Connétables asking that parishes advise him of any possible sites for affordable housing in addition to any sites being considered by parishes to meet local needs.

It is acknowledged and accepted that every owner of such land could try to enter into similar agreements as a means of allowing development on their "green zone" sites. However this land was not being used for agricultural purposes and had not been for very many years. Derelict sheds once used as a commercial bus depot remain on the site. An air raid shelter or German bunker remains on the site. Although further parochial consultation would have taken place with parishioners regarding the proposed project it is believed that the parishioners would have agreed for the St Martin's Housing Association, with a proven record of the successful Rue de la Haye development, to project-lead the sympathetic development.

It is accepted that some parishioners will oppose the proposed St Martin's Housing Association development but this occurs on every site suggested for development. This same opposition will be forthcoming should the Ministers proposal of 80% social-rented / 20% owned houses proceed.

It is unlikely that the owner of Field 402 will wish to develop her land with the proposals under consideration by the Planning Minister / Planning Department. This may lead to the unfortunate "compulsory purchase" process that is likely be expensive, divisive and may be unsuccessful.

(c) Provide evidence of local housing need as independently assessed Housing Gateway.

The St Martin's Housing Association has been collating the names of people seeking homes for more than a decade. Various questionnaires have accompanied parish circulars over the years, media reports have asked for interested parties to contact the parish and the 2010 public consultation resulted in even further applications. Applications for consideration continue to be received. The vast majority of applications will now be outdated with some applicants having had a change in circumstance, maybe having acquired a home by other means, others having left the Island and some having decided to take another course of action with regards to their accommodation needs. Holding yet another public consultation as to "parochial" needs will only raise expectations and maybe miss some of the most deserving families whose names are on the Housing Gateway. Furthermore the proposed development is small and the St Martin's Housing Association already have more than 13 names. It is accepted that some are likely to decline an offer of an affordable home when they have to make a final decision. This occurred on the Rue de la Haye development albeit that development provided twice the amount of homes compared to the current proposals.

The St Martin's Housing Association are happy to liaise with any States department that can assist with identifying housing needs. However the clearly defined aims of the St Martin Housing Association (and contained within the Constitution) have been highlighted previously within this document. The St Martin connection is a must for that Association.

In October 2013 the Connétable made contact with the Housing Minister, Deputy Andrew Green and Mr Ian Gallichan, Chief Officer at the Housing Department to enquire the best way to work in partnership in identifying the numbers of persons on the Housing Gateway list with St Martin connections. Advice was given by the Chief Officer and the Housing Association intend to now work with Officers within the Strategic Housing Unit to assess that issue.

In saying that the Minister for Housing wrote to the Comité des Connétables on the 8th April 2013, together with his Chief Officer met with the Comité des Connétables on the 22nd April 2013 and subsequently confirmed the content of that meeting in a further letter dated 8th May 2013. The Minister advised the Connétables that it never been his intention that the proposed new Social Housing Regulator should apply to the Parishes and that it was equally the case with the Gateway. The Minister stated it was not his intention to compel the Parishes to use it for their allocations although he went on to state he believed it to be a useful tool of potential applicants to draw from when allocating to existing housing schemes. The Minister stated in his letter that he was most willing to make the Gateway available to the parishes as and when required.

Item 3

The Minister expects the Parish of St Martin to justify why Field 402 ought to be rezoned for the provision of homes.

As stated previously this field had been identified as a possible site by previous parochial administrations and by the St Martin's Housing Association. Proposed development had been continually delayed by the then Minister and more recently to await the new Island Plan but there was an expectation that this disused, former bus depot would be an ideal site for a small scale development.

The size was in keeping with the proposals under the (Draft) Island Plan for "Village Plans" that had suggested approximately 100 new homes in the six rural parishes (average approximately 16 homes per Parish) during the life period of the Plan. The site was close to the amenities, ie; the school, Churches, local pub, Public Hall, Village Green, bus routes to and from town.

It had and still retains the support of the land-owner who has wanted to work with the parochial authorities and St Martin's Housing Association in providing affordable homes.

Consideration has however been given to other sites within the parish:

- **The Amy site (existing Tea Rooms and plot) alongside the Glebe land.** The owners initially sought from the Parish up to five building plots on the Glebe land in exchange for their old building, Tea room shop, barn and garden. This was not an option as planning consent for five houses was most unlikely on the "green zone" Glebe land and value expected from the family was completely at variance to what the Parish would receive in return. The Parish or St Martin's Housing Association would have acquired buildings requiring massive investment and only been able to provide a very small number of homes. A private developer has now agreed to purchase the site and a Court date for "exchange of contracts" has been provisionally set. It is likely that only four new homes will be on the site, the remainder being refurbishment of existing buildings.
- **The old St Martin's School building.** This complex will be returned to the Parish of St Martin (owners) in the spring of 2015 following the building of the new school immediately alongside. However agreement to build a new school took some considerable time and was not without its critics. Formal approval was only given on the 9th November 2012 and the "turf-turning" ceremony took place on the 19th July 2013. The project relating to Field 402 had by this time been progressed to stage as shown within this response.

Careful consideration will be given by the parochial authorities as to the future of the "listed" building when it is returned to the Parish of St Martin. This will be in full consultation with the parishioners. Some initial work has already been undertaken and the matter will be brought to a Parish Assembly in order to gain the views of parishioners. Future possibilities include using the building as a "community centre", for health events, together the provision of a doctor's surgery, a dentist, an optician and even a chemist.

Interest has already been shown in the building by a number of organisations including use as an additional nursery school, an after-hours nursery and as a location for training facilities for a large community orientated organisation. Private individuals have also expressed an interest, one for a hobby / haberdashery shop and another with a tourist slant with the display of museum artefacts in one or more of the former classrooms.

Suggestions have also been forthcoming in relation to even vacating the existing Public Hall and re-locating in the former school when it is returned to the parish. The building has a more attractive façade and any move could make the existing Public Hall available for a project to provide a limited number of new sheltered homes on the site of the existing Hall.

All these suggestions have arisen before any parochial consultation has taken place or for seeking “expressions of interest” but opportunities therefore exist for other development on sites already occupied by buildings. Conversion of the school will not be a cheap option.

- **Field 389.** This field abuts the existing Rue de la Haye houses and is south of the Village Green. The owner sold some of his land in the past to allow the St Martin’s Housing Association to build the Rue de la Haye complex. Enquiries have been made by both the previous Connétable and more recently by the current Connétable, as to whether the owner would consider selling this small field to the Parish or St Martin or St Martin’s Housing Association as a site for another “parish-led affordable housing” project. The site is ideal in that it is even closer to all the amenities and is immediately alongside existing developed land and “Village Green”. It would be suitable for a considerable number of homes, equal in size to Field 402 and probably larger but more evenly shaped.

The owner has declined to consider the opportunity despite the enquiries that have been made and he continues to use the plot for a small amount of horticultural growing on a private scale. This site is seen by some as the most suitable and an obvious plot for future development because of the reasons as outlined above.

- **“Common areas” on the Rue de la Haye complex.** Consideration has been given to building additional houses on the small areas of “common land” owned by the St Martin’s Housing Association within the Rue de la Haye complex. There are five small areas of grassed land, varying in shape and size but that might accommodate a limited number of new homes. However this would detract from the appearance and amenities of the existing development and are currently used as play areas for the children of the estate. There would be considerable opposition from the residents should the land be developed for additional homes.
- **St John Ambulance training building.** This building is positioned near the entrance of a small development known as Neville Holt off La Rond Collas and is alongside the small, parish-owned 3 hour car park. It is known that the organisation are keen to consider future training sites and may wish to develop the site themselves as a commercial venture.

Information regarding their possible relocating of the site has only recently become known to the parish and the parochial authorities are likely to enter in dialogue with the organisation at some future date to ascertain whether there is a possibility of acquiring the land. The likelihood of acquiring the building / land at a reduced rate for future parish-led development is thought remote.

- **Maufant Village green areas.** This large private estate has been in existence since at least 1979. There has been an ongoing dispute as to who should maintain the roads and pavements and it is likely that the dispute will continue although it is the intention that it will be finally resolved (one way or other) during the first half of 2014.

The roads and “common areas” of land are currently owned and maintained by the States body known as Property Services. They wish to off-load them to the Parish of St Martin and Parish of St Saviour (houses on the estate fall in both parishes).

If the two parishes decided to take over the responsibility of the roads and “common areas” then there is the possibility that the small areas of land could be developed for a small number of additional “affordable homes”. This opportunity has been looked at by the Parish of St Martin and by the St Martin’s Housing Association but as the initial ownership issue has yet to be addressed then it is difficult to bring forward the areas as possible building sites. Furthermore, the parking situation on that estate is already at near crisis point and the provision of more homes on that private estate would create a need for additional parking facilities.

There is likely to be fierce opposition to such development and like the Rue de la Haye complex, the “common areas” were provided to improve the amenities of the development and to allow children to play safely in the area.

- **Field 410.** It is known that the owner of this field has been attempting to develop on this field for very many years and has continually failed. The owner brought forward a proposition to a Parish Assembly in September 2011 to build 14 x first-time buyer homes with the offer to the Parish of a further 10 x two-bed retirement homes in a two-storey building. The whole development was strongly opposed by parishioners at a Parish Assembly for a number of reasons.

The field is alongside a small 15mph “Green lane”. The exit of the parish owned road would have to be extinguished and realigned to allow safer access onto La Grande Route de St Martin. The development was immediately alongside and very close to the Catholic Church cemetery. The idea of a two storey complex position near a cemetery and small Church was opposed. Numerous parishioners spoke against the development that evening including the Connétable-elect.

It is known that the owner of the field is now putting forward his site once again for examination by the Inspectors and due to meet on Tuesday 21st January 2014.

- **Field 387A.** This is only a small area of land immediately in front of the Rectory and to the north of the Amy site. This area was already “white-zone” but to be returned to “green zone” with the introduction of the new Island Plan in 2011. The background was that the Parish Rector had retired and moved from the Rectory. The building was found to be in a very poor condition and requiring major refurbishment. The Parish had insufficient funds for that refurbishment and following discussion with other Parish Officials the Connétable submitted an amendment to the Island Plan seeking to retain this narrow section of land in Field 387A as a possible site for the building of a new Rectory. The intent was that the old Rectory would have to be sold to provide funding to build a new Rectory. The small area of land on Field 387A was just large enough to provide a home and garden. The proposition was only narrowly approved following the States debate.

A Parish Assembly was held on the 14th September 2011 when a decision was to be made regarding the sale of the existing Rectory and the building of a new Rectory. However following a lively meeting the then Connétable advised parishioners that a Benefactor had in fact come forward with a generous offer to refurbish the existing Rectory by way of a gift of money and a further sum as an interest-free loan.

The old Rectory was subsequently totally refurbished, handed back to the Parish in October 2013 and marketed for rental (whilst the current Rectory owns her own home) in order that the interest-free loan can be repaid. New tenants signed a lease as from the 1st January 2014.

It is thought unlikely that Planning Permission would now be given to develop affordable housing on the small area of Glebe land as the only reason it remained as a possible site was the dire-straits the parish found itself in in trying to provide a habitable Rectory.

Item 4

Why a “Village Plan” has not been undertaken.

It is hoped that the separately submitted “draft Village Plan” document shows that much work was actually undertaken in 2010 and 2011. A great deal of further work was undertaken since that time and in particular in the four main areas believed relevant to a “Village Plan”.

- First-time affordable housing and Retirement / Sheltered homes.
- Public Transport, Traffic and Pedestrian safety.
- Recreation and Sport.
- Conservation and the Environment.

This work would have continued with a further parish consultation exercise and Parish Assembly but was halted once it was ascertained that the Minister had identified the site for the States-led 80% social rented - 20% owner-owned scheme. Parish politics has also proved difficult where every issue appears to result in ad infinitum debate. Consideration was given to a custom made, independent consultation exercise but again this was not progressed due to the reasons outlined within this report.