



TYNWALD COURT OFFICIAL REPORT

RECORTYS OIKOIL
QUAIYL TINVAAL

PROCEEDINGS

DAALTYN

HANSARD

Douglas, Thursday, 18th July 2019

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Present:

The President of Tynwald (Hon. S C Rodan OBE)

In the Council:

The Lord Bishop of Sodor and Man (The Rt Rev. P A Eagles),
The Attorney General (Mr J L M Quinn QC),
Miss T M August-Hanson, Mr D C Cretney, Mr T M Crookall, Mr R W Henderson,
Mrs K A Lord-Brennan, Mrs J P Poole-Wilson and Mrs K Sharpe
with Mr J D C King, Deputy Clerk of Tynwald.

In the Keys:

The Speaker (Hon. J P Watterson) (Rushen);
The Chief Minister (Hon. R H Quayle) (Middle);
Mr J R Moorhouse and Hon. G D Cregeen (Arbory, Castletown and Malew);
Hon. A L Cannan and Mr T S Baker (Ayre and Michael);
Hon. C C Thomas and Mrs C A Corlett (Douglas Central);
Miss C L Bettison and Mr C R Robertshaw (Douglas East);
Hon. D J Ashford and Mr G R Peake (Douglas North);
Mrs K J Beecroft and Hon. W M Malarkey (Douglas South);
Mrs D H P Caine (Garff);
Hon. R K Harmer and Hon. G G Boot (Glenfaba and Peel);
Mr W C Shimmins (Middle);
Mr R E Callister (Onchan);
Dr A J Allinson and Mr L L Hooper (Ramsey);
Hon. L D Skelly (Rushen);
with Mr R I S Phillips, Clerk of Tynwald.

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Tynwald

The Court met at 10.30 a.m.

[MR PRESIDENT *in the Chair*]

The Deputy Clerk: Hon. Members, please rise for the President of Tynwald.

The President: Moghrey mie, good morning, Hon. Members.

5 **Members:** Moghrey mie, Mr President.

The President: The Lord Bishop will lead us in prayer.

PRAYERS

The Lord Bishop

Order of the Day

44. Strategic Plan – Assessment of need for housing units – Amendment lost; combined vote to be taken at the next sitting

The Hon Member for Middle (Mr Shimmins) to move:

That Tynwald notes the updated evidence papers submitted in June 2019 by the Cabinet Office which reduce the number of housing units required under the Isle of Man Strategic Plan; and calls on the Minister for Policy and Reform to report in October 2019 on the reasons for the change in the number of housing units required under the Strategic Plan, with special reference to the division of housing between the four Area Plan regions; and further notes the urgency of amending the Strategic Plan to reflect the current assessment of the Island's needs.

The President: Hon. Members, as before, feel free to remove jackets.

10 We completed up to Item 43 yesterday, Item 44 on our Order Paper, Strategic Plan, Housing Units Figure. I call the Hon. Member for Middle, Mr Shimmins.

Mr Shimmins: Thank you, Mr President.

I bring this motion following the publication of additional evidence papers submitted on 28th June to the Draft Area Plan for the East Inquiry.

15 Some may well say that we should not discuss this evidence, as the public inquiry will
consider this matter in due course. That is wrong for several reasons. A few immediately spring
to mind: firstly, the evidence has significant implications for the whole Island, not just the east.
Currently, the Cabinet Office are progressing the Eastern Plan, the Northern Plan and the
20 Western Plan, that covers 83% of the Island's population. Of course, most people living in the
south travel regularly to the other areas so really this evidence impacts everybody on the Island.
Secondly, since the Strategic Plan, which sits above the Area Plans, was agreed by this
Hon. Court some time ago, it appears that it is only this Hon. Court which can change the
Strategic Plan allocation.

I am sorry if I am a wee bit out of breath, Mr President, I have just run from the initial inquiry
25 meeting for the Area Plan for the East, at the iMuseum. It is unfortunate that was scheduled for
the same day as the Tynwald sitting but, putting that to one side, (*Interjection*) Tynwald sits for
three days and this is a very important matter which needs to be considered in the appropriate
way. Certainly judging from the public attendance at the iMuseum, we need a bigger room
because there were not enough seats, there were a lot of people at the back, but I am sure the
30 Cabinet Office will take that on board. We did have the opportunity to ask a couple of questions
and these centred around the Strategic Plan allocation and, of course, the disconnect with the
population projections and the reality that we now face.

And the question of the Strategic Plan is one which firmly and squarely is what my motion is
looking to deal with, rather than specifically looking at the Eastern Plan. The Eastern Plan is a
35 function of ... the aspects of that are driven from the Strategic Plan. The inspector was perfectly
open in terms of the legal challenges that this presents for him and the Cabinet Office, and he
explained that the only people that can change the Strategic Plan allocation is this Hon. Court.
And there is a bit of a legal debate, the Cabinet Office QC had flown in to help provide and
support the inquiry. He explained that the Cabinet Office are looking for legal advice in terms of
40 what the implications are and how you change this, and I am concerned that this is going to turn
into quite a legal debate. That is important, clearly, everything needs to follow legal due process,
but Notice 1 of the Strategic Plan, which really focused on the original population projections
which drove the Strategic Plan allocation, which then filtered down into the Eastern Plan, the
Western Plan and the Northern Plan, does say that the Cabinet Office population figures are not
45 open to being contested, so that is quite an interesting legal background to this.

But clearly it is this Court which can look at the Strategic Plan numbers and it is this Court
which has the authority to reset those to reflect reality. My submission to you, just from this
morning's meeting, would be, 'do we really want to go through all of this legal advice and this
legal debate?' because it is kind of missing the point that the public need to have confidence in
50 our planning process. At the moment, large sections of the population do not have confidence in
the planning process because there is such a big disconnect between the population projections,
the Strategic Plan and reality. So we could go down this expensive legal investigation about how
we need to look at what the possibilities are and what the implications are, or this Hon. Court
could agree today the right thing to do. The sensible thing to do, actually, is to urgently review
55 the numbers because that then would take care of that legal issue in terms of this Hon. Court
could look at a more sensible Strategic Plan allocation going forward and this would remove all
this very complicated legal debate.

It is clear that the terms of reference of the Eastern Area Plan are slightly unclear. I recently
asked Mr Thomas for clarity on the terms of reference and he replied that the terms of
60 reference really only cover administrative matters. It seems to be actually that it is slightly more
than that, and the inspector was open to hearing additional evidence, but he explained his
hands are tied and he has to work obviously within that legal framework. So it is this Hon. Court
that can bring, I think, some common sense to that so that is absolutely why we need to discuss
this today, Hon. Members, because it is in our power and in our responsibility to look at the
65 Strategic Plan allocations; in fact it is only in our power, is my understanding of the legal
situation.

70 The Strategic Plan is the overarching document which determines development on the Island and it is of paramount importance that it accurately reflects our current situation and also that it supports sustainable growth going forward because we do want to grow the economy, we do want to grow the economically active population, I absolutely support that, but we need to do it in a more sustainable way than what we have seen in the past. So we must get this right. I personally feel it is important that any flawed assumptions and evidence should be reported and debated in this Hon. Court because that is our responsibility and this has such wide implications, not just for the east, but for the whole of the Island.

75 The Strategic Plan figure which was agreed was very controversial at the time, it predates a number of us coming into Tynwald, and many felt at that time that the population estimates were overstated. The inspector noted those concerns and commented that regular reviews would be essential.

80 The evidence papers recently submitted by the Cabinet Office finally recognise that the population estimates were overstated but unfortunately they still propose to go with the original numbers under the Strategic Plan. That may be because they feel they are constrained by the legal framework with the Strategic Plan and the Area Plan. The linkage with the Strategic Plan actually determines what is to be delivered under the Area Plan. And, if so, I understand that maybe they are operating under a straitjacket and that is why I hope that the Cabinet Office will view this as a helpful debate on these issues.

85 I was disappointed in the evidence to see the use of strategic reserves to get back to the original overstated population allocation from the Strategic Plan. We have seen strategic reserves used before. The Airport is an excellent example of that: it is a strategic asset, but not on the scale that we have seen in the additional evidence papers where 22 sites have been designated to strategic reserves right across the east, pretty much all of them on outlying greenfield sites, and that is kind of a lazy and irresponsible approach, just to get back to the number. I would prefer that we had a more adult, grown-up debate about why that has happened and how that is really going to work in practice.

95 Hon. Members, you may not have had a chance to look at all the evidence papers, because there is a lot of information to take in. But I would direct you to the SYSTRA expert traffic modelling evidence, which was submitted by the Department of Infrastructure, I think, who instructed a firm of professional experts in traffic modelling who looked at the traffic flows at the moment actually on the ground, they had people counting vehicles going past, and then they modelled the impact of all the additional units that were proposed under the Eastern Area Plan. 100 The results were quite startling, and it comes out clearly in the evidence that actually it shows that if all the sites that are proposed under the Area Plan for the East – including the strategic reserve sites which have now been allocated by the Cabinet Office – were built in, that travel times will double in the evening peak. So a journey which takes 20 minutes would now take 40 minutes, and that was felt to be unacceptable. The Cabinet Office, I think sensibly, realised that 105 nobody wants that. It has all sorts of negative consequences in terms of inefficiency, frustration, pollution and the last thing we want is traffic times doubling in the evening peak because already there is quite a lot of congestion at key points. It is not right the way across the Island, it is at key points, we all know where those key points are, the kind of key migratory points on the commuting routes in and out of Douglas as people come to work.

110 So I would ask you to consider, Hon. Members, the reason I used the term 'lazy and irresponsible' I do not use that without due consideration and I do think it may be just because we are constrained by the legal framework of the Strategic Plan. If we are saying that these 22 sites are going to be strategic reserves then that is just going to create the same issue in terms of doubling the traffic flows, so are we really going to build dual carriageways, flyovers, remodel the whole of the Douglas road network to avoid that happening? That is why I think it needs 115 quite a bit more thought.

Clearly the traffic impact of the Western and the Northern Plans is also likely to increase congestion around those peak times because we already see a lot of commuter traffic from the

120 west and the north, so if more housing development is brought forward then it is a reasonable
assumption to say that on top of the Eastern Area Plan and potentially these strategic reserves
then traffic is going to get even worse. So that is one interesting aspect of the evidence papers
which I would really direct you to if you have not had a chance to look at them as yet.

125 The papers do contain a number of other questionable aspects. Clearly, the population
growth estimates are debateable because we just have not seen the trend. I know there are
policies coming forward but we know that the population is relatively flat, the only growth that
we are seeing is in the over-65s. Certainly we do want to grow the economically active
population, of course, but we need to look at it in a sustainable way.

130 The average household size has been subject to quite a lot of debate and Cabinet Office have
thankfully recognised that an error was made in the calculations, I have already stated that. But
then that actually introduced us to the other dynamic about the average size of each housing
unit in terms of if the average household size is declining so why are we increasing the average
unit? I am kind of struggling to understand the logic on that.

135 Strongly, Hon. Members, I would be submitting to you that what we must do is base our
plans on reality. A strategic plan needs to be based on reality. It needs to factor in our desired
growth, absolutely, but reality is important.

I would just bring your attention to a motion that was brought forward to this Hon. Court, in
April 2015, by Mr Thomas, before he was a Minister, on population policy and demographics.

During that debate Mr Thomas said:

The currently planned Isle of Man population in 2026 is 93,526, then 100,000, then more. This is the projected
population growth. Will that actually happen? What is the evidence?

He goes on to say:

140 Furthermore, both the actual population growth and the age profile matter in housing policy, and this is
particularly important now as we currently review the housing numbers in the Strategic Plan. That is an important
context of this motion.

These are Mr Thomas's words not mine. He continues saying:

But do we really need 5,000-plus houses built before 2026, half of them around Douglas and Onchan, half of the
rest in the south of the Island? Making homes is paramount, but this will transform the fringes of our towns and
villages.

Mr Thomas also said:

Our Island is forever, not just for economic development in the next couple of years.

145 Hon. Members, what has changed since these wise words were spoken by Mr Thomas? We
are still seeing the same development trends, but we do now have the 2016 Census which
shows that the actual population was much lower than forecast. So Mr Thomas, who we all
know is an intelligent man, had anticipated that the projections were overstated, he knew that,
he strongly suspected it in 2015 and he was urging, actually, does this make sense? I think that is
clear from his wise words in 2015. He pleaded his case with his usual eloquence, I have to say.
150 And unfortunately the then Council of Ministers deflected his commendable motion with an
amendment which was brought forward to water down the impact, and that is really
unfortunate, I think, because that is one of the reasons we are here today with this big
disconnect. I would ask other Members to think about that in terms of that unfortunate history
we had with an amendment brought forward to deflect what I thought was an admirable motion
155 from Mr Thomas.

Of course, the Tynwald Select Committee into the Development of Unoccupied Urban Sites
also made a number of recommendations in November 2018. I will not go through those in

160 detail but, as you all know, the thrust of those was to regenerate the towns and reduce the amount of countryside concreted over for new-build housing. Again, you may recall that the Council of Ministers brought forward an amendment watering them down and overturning key aspects. I really do not want that to happen today, Hon. Members, I think that would be a very undesirable outcome for our Island.

165 Our Strategic Plan needs to reflect reality. It must be sustainable and it also must encourage the regeneration of the tired and rundown areas that we see in our towns. We all see these rundown areas; we all know they are there. It was interesting on Tuesday that my hon. friend, Mr Henderson, highlighted, from 2000, a motion that he had brought forward which looked into the vacant property problem in Douglas, so this is not a new problem but it is a problem we need to address. Unfortunately that initiative, for whatever reason, did not progress as originally envisaged, (*Interjection by Mr Henderson*) and we still have that problem. It is not just in
170 Douglas, we heard I think from Mr Thomas in answer to my Question on Tuesday, that there is a very high number of vacant properties in Ramsey as well and he is going to publish the figures for the other towns, which is really helpful and I thank him for that, so we can see the scale of the vacancies that we have.

175 Personally, I was very disappointed that there was no meaningful commentary in the Cabinet Office evidence papers on the 2016 census, 15% vacancy. I felt that was a particularly shocking omission. We understand that there may be differences in definition. The UK rates their vacancy rate at 4%; Jersey rates it at 7%; we are at 15%. It was 14% in 2011, so it has long been a problem. I put it to you, Hon. Members, the definition is not important. We know we have a problem, we knew we had a problem in 2000, but we have not actually done very much about that and I am struggling to see what the policies are to bring these homes back into occupation. I really have been trying to rack my brains about what is going to deliver that, what is going to stop us? It probably will not be me I suspect, but perhaps people in 2039 will be saying we have
180 got this big vacant property problem in all our towns, it was 14%, 15%, it is now 20%, our towns are now hollowed out. That creates all sorts of social issues. It is our responsibility, I believe, to investigate these in a lot more detail and factor these into our strategic planning and area planning process.

185 And just to remind you, Hon. Members, that in Douglas, in particular, the vacancy rate was 21% so that is 2,430 vacant dwellings out of a total of 11,592, so more than one in five homes was vacant at the last census. Now, we can look at the definitions but, Hon. Members, what a waste of resources. We should all be concerned about this. We think of the impact on our towns, it is really concerning and that is why I call the lack of commentary on the vacancy rate as a shocking omission in the Cabinet Office. It is definitely not a cheap point, let me make that clear; it is a matter of national importance.

195 Fundamentally this is an issue for us all. It is an issue in the Strategic Plan. For me, it stands to reason – building on brownfield sites, in line with the original recommendations of the Tynwald Select Committee will regenerate our towns. It will help make them vibrant communities and it will also save concreting over the Manx countryside.

200 So today, what I am asking for you to do is to call on the Minister for Policy and Reform to report to the next sitting of this Hon. Court, which is in October, so there is a fair amount of time for all of us to look into this in some more detail over the summer recess on the reasons for the changes made in the Cabinet Office evidence papers. I believe that we do deserve explanations for the reasoning and also the omissions on vacancy rates and housing supply and demand. This is a supply and demand equation; there is no real commentary on that unfortunately.

205 I am asking you to note the urgency of amending the Strategic Plan. I think it is now clear that it is this Hon. Court that needs to amend the Strategic Plan to regain the trust of our people in the planning process, it desperately needs to happen. We are tracking 6,000 people below the population estimate on which the Strategic Plan was based, so it just makes no sense to continue as we are. No other organisation would do that. In the face of facts you adjust your plans – that is appropriate responsible management, in my view.

210 I also think we need to factor in other considerations including demographic trends and the
climate change emergency which has been declared since the Strategic Plan, since the Area Plan
for the East was launched. I absolutely understand and appreciate that the Cabinet Office needs
to follow due process, and I respect that, but it must grasp these important trends. Ultimately it
is the Cabinet Office which has responsibility for planning policy; it will be them who will bring
215 forward the plans.

So, to summarise, unfortunately over the last few decades both the Strategic and Area Plans
have supported the hollowing out of town centres whilst new housing estates have been built
on farmland in the countryside. In many ways, planning is absolutely the key to this. The
Strategic Plan is the overarching document; it needs an urgent review, it needs to be amended,
220 it needs to have credibility. Otherwise, Hon. Members, these trends will continue. More large
estates will be constructed on the outskirts of our towns, the town centres will continue to
decline and more countryside will be lost forever, when it is gone, it is gone. So urgent action is
needed, that is why my motion calls for an urgent review.

Please do not leave it until the various Area Plans are presented to this Hon. Court. I know
225 that some Ministers have been lobbying backbenchers very hard against this motion. Please
resist the pressure that is being applied.

Hon. Members might wish to imagine how much more pressure will be applied when the
Area Plans are presented to this Hon. Court in due course. The pressure will be ratcheted up
significantly, it will be suggested that all sorts of bad things will happen if these plans are not
230 accepted in their entirety. You will be accused of derailing something which is of national
importance. It will be too late then, when these Area Plans are presented to this Hon. Court.
Please do not leave it too late, the Strategic Plan needs to be amended now.

Hon. Members, please ask yourselves the following five questions: would you prefer to see
urban regeneration whilst also preserving the Manx countryside in our UNESCO Biosphere? Are
235 you worried about the vacancy rate of 15% and the more than 6,400 empty homes on our
Island? Are you concerned that the plans for the east, the west and the north are being
developed on overestimates, questionable data and flawed reasoning? Do you, like me, want to
see the population grow in a sustainable way? Do you feel that our Strategic Plan should reflect
reality? If you can answer yes to any of these questions, then please support this motion.

240 I beg to move.

The President: The Hon. Member for Douglas East, Miss Bettison.

Miss Bettison: Thank you, Mr President.

245 I beg to second the motion made in the name of my hon. colleague, Mr Shimmins.

I will start by declaring an interest, as I am a proud home owner within the east of our
beautiful Island.

Overbuilding might well reduce the value of homes in town as new residents are likely to opt
for those suburban developments with additional space and they might also reduce the value of
250 homes within the outskirts as those are the easy developed, easy sell areas that are
understandably often preferred by developers. Those reduced prices are unlikely to lead to
affordability for first-time buyers. Rather, they will simply make it easier for those able to
purchase additional homes and rent them out. And when you add this to the challenges of
getting a mortgage for a first-time buyer, it further reduces the chance for some to ever get onto
255 the housing ladder themselves.

But, in fact, we benefit everyone by keeping the total number of houses in line with the
current projected need. This is particularly profound within Douglas where the vacancy rate is
visibly high in some of the areas where I canvassed. (**Mr Robertshaw:** Hear, hear.) On the whole,
these are not lock-up-and-leave properties left in good condition. They are properties often left
260 in poor condition that also affect the living standards of those who live near to them. (**A
Member:** Hear, hear.) Yet at the same time as we see this, we also have beautiful tranquil in

town locations, such as Finch Hill Bowling and Snooker Club, being re-designated from recreational to mixed use. So we do not address the issues presented by rundown properties and we put green spaces in our towns at risk.

265 The importance of managing our Strategic Plan cycle to respond to the figures of the census cannot be overstated. Yet seemingly here we are seeing the result of those activities occurring back to front. We have decided what we are building based on outdated data and we are now hoping we can find the people to put in the properties. I think we would see people moving into these new suburban properties built on our greenfield sites, but at the cost of our in town
270 locations that have not been given a full opportunity as they are a little more challenging to develop. We must incentivise development of those brownfield sites, as a priority.

We have had some success with relocating people to the Island and with attracting graduates back to our Island, but this must be considered in line with birth and death data which, put simply, shows that more people are dying than are being born. This is all against a clear
275 backdrop of a need to reduce our carbon footprint and building homes that meet far more stringent energy ratings, and rightly so.

The technology for buildings is improving by the day, and allowing overdevelopment against a demand that was projected years ago and as yet has not materialised, is an odd strategy that I am not comfortable with, let alone when by the time we need these houses, if we ever need
280 some of them, they would be outdated properties requiring building upgrades potentially prior to inhabitation. We will also be at risk of having houses outside of the geographical area where active travel is realistic for most people.

The opportunity that Mr Shimmins' sensible and pragmatic motion affords will allow a chance to think again, to not act rashly and to assist in preventing a property slump where over
285 availability of new houses creates a response of profoundly damaging the market for older properties, all while exploiting our greenfield sites in preference to brownfield sites. And I have to ask, why *wouldn't* we look at this again?

What we absolutely need above all is public confidence in our Strategic Plan and this will only be obtained by ensuring that any new evidence is given appropriate scrutiny and action as
290 necessary. At the minute we have a chance to do that; when we bring this back finally we will have missed that golden opportunity.

For me, it really is simple. There are some rates, as I discussed yesterday, that we should absolutely be working to increase, but the vacancy rate really is not one of them.

Thank you, Mr. President.

295

The President: Hon. Member for Onchan, Mr Callister.

Mr Callister: Thank you, Mr. President.

I cannot disagree with anything that the two previous speakers have actually said. I am going
300 to curtail my comments, at the moment, just to population trends and some of the evidence I actually submitted back in August 2018 to the public inquiry, when it asked for its initial concerns to be registered.

Going through all the data since 1951, the Island's population has only grown by around 29,000, which gives an average increase of just 433 per annum, and that is over
305 a 67-year period. So, at the time, I seriously did question why the Island needed an additional 5,100 homes, especially in the east and especially in Onchan and in Douglas. Even if we look at the census report from 2011 – at the height of the Island's financial sector and industry – from 1986 to 1996 the Island's population only grew by 8,620 and if we take the following 10 years, the Island's population again only grew by 7,450. We then saw a small migration of people
310 leaving the Isle of Man but we have since then seen a small increase, which is excellent news. So, realistically, it is right that we question the figures. I think what the inspector said this morning at that public pre-inquiry was that actually one of the largest submissions of evidence was questioning the population data and figures.

315 So I would support Mr Shimmins in his motion to actually look at this again. I think it is absolutely important that we ensure that we have the right properties and the right type of properties in the future. I also fully support the comments from my colleague from Douglas East, Miss Bettison, when we talk about dealing with dilapidated properties, and it is something that has to be addressed.

320 I have recently looked at a case in Onchan, and there are powers there for the local authorities to deal with them, but they do not seem to do it because there are large costs involved and it is an incredibly detailed process. But it is something that may or should be dealt with as part of this Eastern Area Plan that we get hold of those dilapidated properties – if they are not needed then they are sold in some shape or form and put back on the market – because, as my colleague rightly said, they are having a serious effect on neighbouring properties and the area itself as a whole.

325 So, at this moment, I will be supporting the motion tabled by Mr Shimmins.
Thank you, Mr President.

The President: Hon. Member of Council, Mr Henderson.

330 **Mr Henderson:** Gura mie eu, Eaghtyrane.

I stand to support my hon. friend and colleague's motion, Mr Shimmins, with regard to charging the Council of Ministers to relook at the figures and come back in October and report on the same. Now, the wording of the motion is very carefully put and it does not cause any drastic change or deviation to central Government policy, it is asking that an explanation be put to this Hon. Court in October for the change in figures as put in by the Cabinet Office. I think that is a fair and reasonable request. It is not a direct challenge to anyone's particular authority. It is a request that we have further information for Tynwald Members to enable us to have a better understanding of an evolving situation.

340 Now, that is what I have taken the motion to mean rather than any particular direct threat perhaps, or perceived threat. I see it as a helpful motion in engaging with the process; and sharp observations from our hon. colleague for Middle in noticing the changes that are going on. Well done to you on that, sir.

I think I need to first, Eaghtyrane, pick up on empty properties, vacant properties because somewhere around 2000 in this Hon. Court I placed an Empty Properties Initiative Debate exactly on the same presumptions as my hon. friend and colleague, Mr Shimmins has outlined that are affecting us today in 2019. It was met with some resistance, I have to say Eaghtyrane, yet it was patently obvious that there were hundreds and hundreds of empty and void properties around our capital and around the rest of the Island in lesser proportions. (A Member: Hear, hear.) But I am sure the one or two that are still here, Eaghtyrane, who remember that debate will no doubt back me up at some point, because it was quite some debate and I faced some fierce resistance from the Department of Local Government and the Environment at the time, via the then Minister. The motion was eventually approved, albeit amended which watered it down a bit, and it went back to DoLGE, as it was in those days, who had responsibility for housing. And there it lay. In answer to my hon. friend's questions as to whatever happened to it, I can tell the Hon. Court this – and I do not want this, my reasoning, to happen to my hon. friend's motion today.

355 What happened was, it sat on a shelf and collected dust and from continual prompting from myself and my hon. colleague and partner-in-crime in those days, Mr Houghton, we finally tracked down where the motion went to and a Committee was established within DoLGE, the Empty Properties Initiative Committee to look into the whole situation – under sufferance. Then an Empty Properties Officer was appointed, who made an assessment of the Isle of Man. The acronym for the Committee was EPIC and the report was produced as the status, or otherwise, of each and every empty property that was discovered both in the private sector and the local

365 authority sector. That report is still there and that is as far as DoLGE took it because it was a
backbench motion, in my view, and they did not like me interfering in their strategic plans.

But I have resurrected the *Hansard*, Eaghtyrane, and the report and the responses and
copied them in to my hon. friend and to the Hon. Minister for the Cabinet Office because I think
it is a good base to start with, to have a look at this issue of vacant properties throughout the
370 Isle of Man. No doubt about it. (**A Member:** Hear, hear.) I do not want the Hon. Member's
motion to meet the same fate as mine, Eaghtyrane, and I would ask all Hon. Members to
consider the wording of Mr Shimmins' motion which is not in direct conflict with anything – it is
asking this Hon. Court to be furnished with some more information to help us in our decision-
making process. That is plain, simple and straightforward.

375 I would also like to put into the equation, Eaghtyrane, as my hon. friend has touched upon,
our natural heritage element in all of this. We had a wonderful presentation yesterday from
Manx Birdlife and, in conjunction with Island Aggregates, on the forming of a new National
Nature Reserve. I do not know if the Minister for Policy and Reform was present at that, I do not
recall, but he might have been ... maybe due to other commitments. But it was very interesting
380 to note that the scientific evidence from that shows that nearly 92% to 94% of the Isle of Man is
developed and only 6% or 7% is left to our natural environment. Endemic species of birds to the
Isle of Man have reduced in half in some cases over the last few decades. And what my hon.
friend is proposing, Shirveishagh, is that we should be careful how we undertake our
development and utilise at all possible cost, if I can put it that way, brownfield site options so
385 that we are maximising the use of brownfield sites and land before we enter into concreting
over our countryside, little of which we have left. We can see this happening in Crosby, for
instance, as I notice every time I drive past there the burgeoning development that is ongoing
opposite the Crosby pub. And there are other places that this is happening on greenfield sites.

I have to ask why that is happening when we have got so much brownfield site availability,
390 and now that my hon. friend has found out the number of empty properties around. I think an
empty property initiative should be resurrected and we should look at compulsory purchase if
necessary, or carrots and sticks to encourage those houses that are empty and that the owners
have no intention of coming back to – or certainly for a long time – to be tempted to sell that on
the open market or otherwise into an empty property land bank, or if all else fails compulsorily
395 purchased. I am specifically thinking of a large multi-storey building opposite Robinson's on the
Terrace down here in Douglas which has lain empty for decades. I am absolutely certain in my
view the owner, who I have a great respect for, because she has undertaken some considerable
social campaigns over the past few years, but nonetheless that is a large vacant plot that
seriously needs to be looked at in the aspect of empty properties.

400 We talk about climate change and we talk about the Chief Minister's climate change
emergency, yet we are promoting concreting the green open spaces, in a way. We need to take
notice of what the Hon. Member for Middle is saying with regard to this and as a matter of
urgent national priority we should be utilising and maximising to the utmost brownfield sites
and empty properties as a first call, and we should not be hollowing out our town communities
405 as Mr Shimmins has said. We should be working with real numbers and I think that is a fair call,
Eaghtyrane.

In closing, Eaghtyrane, I also note that there are sort of odd designations emanating from the
Strategic Plan for areas of Douglas, in particular, possibly through a further draft plan, and I
would make a call on the Shirveishagh of the Cabinet Office that we need to seriously look at
410 what we are throwing our designations over for building purposes, such as Port-e-Chee
Meadows and sports fields – that was a complete no-no, when that one emerged. And I would
ask him as a matter of urgency to review any notion, if there is one, to have the Marine Drive
Port Soderick area designated in any way, shape or form for zoning for housing. That, to me, is a
complete no-no and if it was ever considered, in my view – environmental negligence of the
415 highest order.

But nonetheless, Eaghtyrane, I would ask Hon. Members to support Mr Shimmins in what he is asking here. He is but asking for some information to be supplied in October and I think that is a fair ask.

420 **The President:** I call on the Chief Minister.

The Chief Minister (Mr Quayle): Thank you, Mr President.

Can I start by saying how I welcome the mover's continued active interest in planning policy, and also the interest of those Hon. Members who have accepted the invitation of the Planning Policy team in the Cabinet Office for one-to-one meetings regarding the Island Development Plan which is made up of the Strategic Plan and the Area Plans.

425 Before I go on I would just like to clarify for one minute, in case Mr Shimmins has any doubt, the Council of Ministers and the strategic planners are not in any way against supporting the development of brownfield sites. So let's put that down as a marker, that is an absolute given. 430 Of course we do not want to see all our greenfields built and our centres becoming empty. So I think that is a given and I am sure that the independent inspector will take that on board when they are looking at that evidence. I just wanted to clarify that position because it is a very important position to get through.

435 May I also take this opportunity to thank those 300-plus members of the public, organisations, local authorities and businesses who took the time to respond to the public consultation on the draft Area Plan for the East.

Now, planning is of the utmost importance to me personally, and my administration, to such a degree that we laid an action plan to improve the planning system before this Hon. Court in May last year. Mr President, the strategic plan is about setting a long-term vision for the Isle of Man, not just the next two years. It is not about short-termism. These plans, both strategic and area, exist in perpetuity until they are replaced. They are not short term in their outlook and should not be swayed by short-term politics.

440 The Programme for Government, developed with and approved by this Hon. Court, sets out the clear policy statement for this administration that we will grow the economically active population, promoting our Island and its qualities. This is an emphatic, clear and shared long-term vision to grow the economically active population.

Now, it would be extremely naïve to avoid planning for the implications of that intended growth, which we have agreed together we need to accelerate. But let's be realistic, Mr President, the Island's natural population is declining with deaths exceeding births, and our population indicators are estimating that there has been net inward migration of 377 people per year for the last three years which has driven small net population growth. Household sizes are declining with more people living alone.

445 We can only grow the economically active population by creating career and life opportunities for our children to remain and for new, younger people to choose to come to the Island to live and work. That is the reality which informed our Programme for Government which we agreed unanimously two and a half years ago at the beginning of my Government and this House of Keys and Tynwald after the 2016 General Election.

This Hon. Court confirmed its intention to grow the economically active population this February and approved the Locate.im Strategy and Action Plan to achieve this growth. And if we continue to be successful in delivering this policy these people will need somewhere to live and employment land zoned for their economic activity. Though I will again stress, Mr President, that of course we want to see the development in brownfield and town and village, and Douglas especially, centres.

460 To facilitate continued sustainable economic growth we have to be clear regarding where additional properties may be built. The Island Development Plan and the process of making and reviewing such development plans across the Island reduce the uncertainty of planning for the longer term and the Hon. Member suggests designation of strategic reserve creates uncertainty. 465

However, I would argue the reverse: it clarifies the potential future development and prescribes a process for this to be delivered.

470 It is worth re-emphasising for the record that the Strategic Plan and Area Plans are not time-bound. They will remain in place until next reviewed and therefore there has to be flexibility built in. This responsiveness is built into it. One important principle in the Strategic Plan is the concept of planning, monitoring and managing, which I am sure my colleague with delegated responsibility, the Minister for Policy and Reform, Minister Thomas, can explain more completely later.

475 The Cabinet Office is working hard towards holding the public inquiry into the Area Plan for the East which will hopefully come to this House for approval in coming months as outlined in our Programme for Government. Simultaneously there is a public call for sites under way as part of the process for creating a new area plan for the north and west as outlined in the Programme for Government.

480 Mr President, the production of the Island Development Plan through strategic and area plans is a statutory process. This must be respected and allowed to run its course. Today, on the eve of the independent inquiry is an important moment. I look forward to considering the Area Plan for the East in my Department and then in this Hon. Court after we have received and published the independent inspector's report – and it was good to hear from my hon. colleague from Middle, Mr Shimmins, that a vast amount of the evidence given to the inspector was about developing inner town areas and village areas and I am sure that the independent inspector will take this on board when he makes his recommendations to this Hon. Court. As I say, I am labouring the point but, please, I do not want anyone to think that we do not support, as the Council of Ministers, the development of our brownfield sites.

485 I also look forward to reviewing the strategic plan in good time. Let's deliver our Programme for Government; let's plan for the future.

Thank you, Mr President.

495 **The President:** Hon. Member for Ayre and Michael, Mr Baker.

Mr Baker: Thank you very much, Mr President.

I would like to thank Mr Shimmins for bringing forward this very, very important issue, and I think he has done a service to this Hon. Court (**A Member:** Hear, hear.) and to the Island as a whole in so doing.

500 We are totally in agreement, Mr Shimmins and I, about the need to get this right and about how we ensure our built environment is appropriate for our future. Mr Shimmins' motion very much focuses attention on this topic. Essentially, the key part of his motion is to say we urgently need to review the numbers of our housing needs. That does leave some unanswered questions for me and I would like to understand how long that would take and what will happen to the Area Plan for the East process as a result, and what are the implications of so doing?

505 Reviewing the strategic plan – it is a statutory document and it needs to follow a proper process – I would like to understand what that entails so that we do have a clear understanding when we contemplate the motion that is in front of us.

510 Mr Shimmins and I have spoken at length about the topic and indeed we both brought amendments to the recent Planning legislation which was in another place a few weeks ago and which did introduce some additional flexibility and some additional tools, particularly national policy directives, with the objective of making the planning system more flexible and more relevant. And that is exactly what Mr Shimmins' motion is trying to do here. He is saying, 'Let's make sure we are making decisions on the right basis; let's make sure that the future development of our Island is based on the correct foundations'. And that is what we all want.

515 I would, in passing, just highlight that this, which is the Island Development Plan, the Isle of Man Strategic Plan 2016 which is at the heart of this. It is entitled Towards a Sustainable Island (**A Member:** Hear, hear.) and it sets out a whole raft of policies and of assumptions which

520 underpin how we try and develop the Island. Within it, on pages 66 and 67, it talks about the use of strategic reserves and talks about such sites being identified and then only being released for development when the Department considers there is sufficient evidence to justify such action:

Such sites will only be released for development when the Department considers that there is sufficient evidence to justify such action.

Strategic Reserve sites will be subject to detailed development briefs and a clear methodology for release.

If anybody wishes to follow that up it is in 8.4.9, just ahead of Housing Policy 1, which embeds the number of additional houses that are required. So there is in there reference to a
525 mechanism to try to balance this difficulty of controlling the need to build a forward forecast as against the reality. And as anybody who has ever put forward knows, whether it is a financial forecast, or a business plan, or whatever, the reality is always different from the plan – and it is about how you deal with that.

I have thought long and hard about this and I have an amendment which has been tabled.
530 This is designed to build on the principles that Mr Shimmins has articulated and to give Hon. Members an option around their choices in this matter. I would just like to emphasise we are both trying to achieve the same thing here which is to make sure that our future development is right for the Island.

I absolutely want to stress that this is not in any shape or form trying to water down
535 Mr Shimmins' motion, but hopefully to provide a possible solution and a way forward which builds on the sentiment and the principle of his motion. If the forecasts are reset, as Mr Shimmins is requesting, that rebases the numbers in the Strategic Plan as a one-off exercise and that has got value – it has. What I want to see, is to make sure that we continue to make sure those numbers are relevant and we have the control over the process to make sure that
540 development happens in the right way. So we must have an effective strategic planning process to guide our development. Without that you end up with developments taking place in the wrong places, the infrastructure does not match and we end up in a mess. We absolutely need to avoid that.

Forecasts and reality do diverge, as I have said, and we need to have flexibility to react. At the
545 moment the need to react is to potentially have fewer houses than we thought we needed. That may change. In the same way as the minimum wage debate yesterday talked about, 'Well, it's great because we have got full employment and no unemployment'. That can change – as some of us, unlike Mr Hooper, are old enough to remember a situation of significant unemployment on the Island. There are no guarantees with this.

Equally, at the moment we are struggling to achieve the growth and that is a problem that
550 many parts of Government are working to address, and it may well be that there is a time ahead of us where actually we do have faster growth. It is not inconceivable that elements away from these Islands do conspire to make the Isle of Man a more attractive place for people to move to. We need flexibility and we need to be able to respond. The planning system needs to be able to
555 respond to that and we need to ensure that the right development happens in the right place at the right time.

So I apologise for what looks like quite a lengthy amendment and it is a single amendment, it is not a pick-and-mix, it is just a single amendment which you will either support or you will not. What it tries to do is provide the control and the oversight and a mechanism to achieve what
560 Mr Shimmins wants to achieve, and I bring it forward simply as an alternative.

I believe that my amendment adds a mechanism which does not currently exist to our toolkit to manage the challenge that we face, and I believe it preserves the integrity of the strategic planning process and is capable of being brought forward in parallel with the Area Plan for the East, which I think is important. In particular, it focuses on the strategic reserves and the control
565 of the release of those for which there is no clear mechanism for that to happen at the moment. The Strategic Plan says that they will be used but actually right now there is no methodology around that – there is no mechanism to deliver that.

570 I completely endorse Mr Shimmins' comments about brownfield sites and about the number
of empty properties. Those are things that we absolutely as an Island need to grab hold of and
address. But that is not directly this issue, that is a separate policy response that is required and
we absolutely do need that and I am heartened by the Chief Minister's comments in that regard.
We also need to review the incentives that skew buyers to buying new rather than existing
properties. At an obvious level the VAT system incentivises new builds because, as I understand
it, they are free of VAT, whereas repairs and upgrades to existing properties are at 5% VAT.

575 New properties come with a very attractive package including a warranty. That is great, you
do not need to worry about that for 10 years – if there is a problem the developer will fix it. That
is fantastic and that is great customer service. But it does mean that it is less likely, particularly
for young people, to go and buy an older property and perhaps do it up; and those tend to be at
the hearts of our town centres. It is really important that we do make it attractive for people to
580 be buying those properties and to be investing in the heart of our town centres; and, again, that
needs a policy response. Yes, there may well be limitations on what we can do from a VAT point
of view because of our wider obligations, but there may be other things that we can do to make
it more attractive for people to buy those properties.

If we keep increasing the supply of new properties and the number of people wanting to buy
585 houses does not increase, then we are effectively making some of these older properties
redundant. Is that what is going on in the numbers of empty properties? I do not know, but we
need to find out. Certainly we need a policy response around brownfield sites and empty
properties and this skewed incentive that we currently have; but whilst they are related issues I
believe they are different issues for another day.

590 So I have got this amendment and it is more lengthy than I would like it to be, but I think that
indicates the complexity of what we are talking about here in terms of planning. Essentially the
first part of the motion emphasises the need for a coherent development approach and balance
between the different considerations. And it does acknowledge the potential given by the
national policy directives which are potentially a tool that can be used to improve how we
595 manage all this. But we do need a workable tool to achieve what we need to achieve. We can
reset the population numbers in the Strategic Plan, as Mr Shimmins proposes, but actually it is
the *how* we manage this going forward that interests me. We have a tried and tested pattern of
coming out with strategies which say, 'We want to do this ...' We are less good at saying how we
are going to do it and that is about the implementation.

600 The reason for me bringing this motion was simply to get on the table that this is *how* we
could achieve what Mr Shimmins is looking to achieve. (*Interjection*) So it tasks the Minister for
Policy and Reform to produce a mechanism to control the release of housing sites and
specifically refers to the release of strategic reserve sites so that we have a workable tool. It
highlights the potential that should the Planning Bill received Royal Assent and be approved by
605 Tynwald that national policy directives may well provide that mechanism; and it broadens the
conversation so it is not just about the Area Plan for the East or the Area Plan for the South,
which is already in existence, and asks whether there should be Island-wide approach. It
requires the Minister to ensure that this mechanism has up-to-date and realistic forecasts for
housing need to support any proposed release of strategic reserves. That is not a one-off, 'Let's
610 get the numbers right now'; that is saying, 'If you ever want to release any of the strategic
reserves you have got to look at the numbers and justify why you want to do that'.

And just to ensure that Hon. Members feel the appropriate control is over this process, the
national policy directives do of course have to come to Tynwald for approval. So this is not
something that is just left in the hands of the Minister for Policy and Reform to go and do what
615 he likes, the national policy directive will have to come to this Hon. Court before it can be
implemented. Finally, to ensure that there is the timeliness and the pace that Mr Shimmins quite
rightly asks for, it looks for this to be twin-tracked with the production of the Area Plan for the
East so that these things continue to work in parallel.

620 Now, Hon. Members, the sentiment of myself and Mr Shimmins in this is to provide constructive solutions and to make sure that the Island develops in the right way to ensure that we pass it on to the future generations in the best shape it possibly can be. Our motivation is the same, our wording is slightly different, but you have an option as to which way you want to go – and I will leave that to you, Hon. Members. I move:

To leave out all the words after ‘That Tynwald’ and to add the words:

- recognises the benefits to the Island of taking a long-term strategic approach to Planning;*
- notes that the Development Plan needs to reflect the Island’s expected future requirements whilst ensuring land is released for development in line with realistic and up to date forecasts of need;*
- acknowledges the importance of the Planning system being sufficiently flexible and responsive to the Island’s needs;*
- recognises that the Development Plan is intended to provide a degree of long-term certainty, and the potential for flexibility is increased by the proposed new power to produce National Policy Directives;*
- notes that it can be difficult to release land for development which is not allocated, whilst it is perhaps easier to allocate land but have some form of brake on its release;*
- further notes that the use of Strategic Reserves can be a useful and appropriate tool to control the release of sites and assist in the balance between allocation and release;*

and calls upon the Minister for Policy and Reform to:

- produce a mechanism to control the release of housing sites, including providing more detail on the release of Strategic Reserve Sites;*
- consider, in the event that the Planning Bill receives Royal Assent and is approved by Tynwald, whether this mechanism should be a National Policy Directive;*
- give consideration to whether this should be an island-wide approach;*
- ensure the mechanism requires up to date and realistic forecasts for housing need to be issued to support any proposed release of Strategic Reserves for development; and*
- give consideration to such a mechanism being twin tracked with production of the Area Plan for the East.’*

The President: Hon. Member for Arbory, Castletown and Malew, Mr Moorhouse.

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Mr Moorhouse: Thank you, Mr President.

I am concerned about how a well-intended motion could have many unforeseen and potentially negative consequences. The premature nature of this motion is a concern, the production of accurate, interim population data will be a challenge. The Island’s population is incredibly volatile and short-term blips could have huge unintended consequences. We must not forget that the key purpose of the Strategic Plan is to provide a clear and long-term direction for each area of our Island.

630 I am concerned by the ‘either’ new homes on the edge of our towns ‘or’ urban renewal. We need *both*. People deserve a choice; this motion could limit what is available. To restrict development will limit the vitality and opportunity across our towns and villages. In Castletown, there is a real excitement about the future opportunities which would further stimulate and revitalise our ancient capital. Vacant properties are an issue, but to make these attractive again we cannot simply turn a switch and limit the number of new homes. Ultimately, people in a free market should have the opportunity to choose what they want and what type of home they want to live in.

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In my opinion, if the issue of decaying houses is to be tackled that should be the key focal point. Support from the Government and a new banking mind-set is required. If we want the young to return home and new people to come to the Island there must be a suitable housing stock. To limit choice and distort the market could create many unintended consequences.

645 Thank you, Mr President.

The President: Hon. Member for Ramsay, Dr Allinson.

Dr Allinson: Thank you, Mr President.

650 I stand to second the amendment by the Hon. Member for Ayre and Michael, Mr Baker.

Can I just start by saying that I think this shows some of the problems we have with the complexity of planning and the complexity of the decisions, whether it be on a strategic level or on a local level, and so I very much respect the input from Mr Baker, who obviously spends probably a disproportionate time of his life dealing with these sort of planning decisions.

655 I would also like to thank the Hon. Member for Middle, Mr Shimmins, for bringing this motion because it shows a real concern, but also that he is an extremely strong advocate for his local constituents and his local community.

Throughout what is a relatively small Island, I think there are different priorities and certainly in his area the growth of residential developments in greenfield sites is seen as a real concern. In my own constituency, in Ramsey, we have perhaps slightly different priorities. We have had some very successful development of brownfield sites, particularly on the old gasworks, which has been extremely important in terms of providing affordable housing, but we need far more. As has been already described, we have relatively high rents for the area, we have relatively high vacant properties for the area, we have a lack of affordable housing and we do not have enough local jobs. And one of the priorities in Ramsay is actually commercial development, we have seen some, but we have also seen others, on what was described as a 'tired and rundown brownfield site on the Quayside', being stalled again and again by Planning, and that is incredibly frustrating for us in our area.

660 So I would certainly, in the north, like to see more commercial properties being developed, but done in the right way, because, as Mr Shimmins describes with traffic, if there is not a co-ordinated approach through a strategic plan to bring in active travel to co-ordinate both the growth of domestic properties with commercial development it can have quite bad consequences in terms of our standard of living and the way we treat our roads.

665 Coming onto some of the other comments, I completely agree with Miss Bettison as well about the problem sometimes with the buy-to-rent development, and certainly we have seen that in Ramsey in terms of unaffordable rent. And so there is this conflict between building new houses, but the right houses for those families who need it or those single people who need it, we have seen the demographics, and actually making sure that they have got affordable rents as well.

680 I suppose what this comes down to is the need for flexibility. As the Chief Minister says, strategic reserves create this flexibility and responsiveness to changes and it is very difficult to predict what we will be faced with over the coming years.

685 But what I really admire in Mr Baker's amendment is the penultimate paragraph really, that the Minister of Policy and Reform will go away and do a piece of work to create a tool. The penultimate paragraph is:

to ensure the mechanism requires up to date and realistic forecasts for housing needs to be issued to support any proposed release of Strategic Reserves for development.

We know forecasts change. What we have as a forecast for population now may be very different in a year or two's time and we need that flexibility so we do not hold up development but we have sustainable development which is controlled and which is targeted to the right

690 areas, which is why we are discussing a strategic plan. These are very hard to get, but I think we have the backbone for it. What we need is to provide the tools to actually put the flesh on it, both now and in the future.

So with that, Mr President, I beg to second the amendment.

The President: Hon. Member for Douglas East, Mr Robertshaw.

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Mr Robertshaw: Thank you, Mr President.

I had not prepared a speech. I am very pleased that the Hon. Member for Middle has brought this motion forward, however. I feel that the debate is losing itself in unnecessary complexity, and I just wanted to try and add a sort of much more simplistic and straightforward contribution to the debate.

700 In order to do so, I wonder whether Hon. Members would humour me for a little while, and ask you all to pretend that we are all sitting in an exam room and we are all now being tested. We are tested on three things: we are tested on planning issues related to the built environment; the second exam question will relate to climate change; and a third question in our exam this morning will be about population growth.

705 And so let's go to the first question and the first question before us is that in terms of our built environment, students, you have a significant number that are empty and you have a significant number that are substandard and out of town you have a continued significant growth of new build. So the first challenge, dear students, is that you have got to find a way of dealing with that challenge. And so what you would do, as successful students, in order to answer that question would be to say you have to create significant advantages to direct more investment and funding into those areas that are substandard and you perhaps have to, as it were, put some restraint on the new build out of town, not to compress it or suppress it too much, but just to make sure that on the balance of economic investment it becomes very attractive to address the substandard properties. I would think that to answer it that way you would probably get a pass mark.

715 Then we go to the second question, and the second question is something called 'climate emergency' and this is a big initiative that then comes into the exam, and it reminds you that by the target date – and forgive me if I have not got these numbers absolutely right – but by 2050 80% of that build would still be there, and you are reminded, in the first question, that a significant amount of that accommodation was substandard. At that stage, as a pupil, as a student, you might panic a bit because you begin to see there is a real problem here. Not only have you got to apply significant advantages to investing in the old properties, but now you have got to significantly improve their insulation qualities etc. But you are reminded in the question that it is an emergency, and emergencies mean you take quite radical new positions and so you say to yourself, if you are going to answer this question successfully you are going to think of really innovative ways of making sure that that investment goes into the existing properties.

725 And then thirdly, the third question in your exam, dear pupils, this morning, is that you really need to see population growth continuing if it fits in with that that jurisdiction's overall policy. But you are reminded as a subtext of that question that the population growth is not occurring as quickly as you might hope, and you would be asked as a student, what are you going to do about it? This jurisdiction keeps talking about increasing the population but that population is miserable, erratic and unsatisfactory. And, as a student, you might very well say we have got to do at least as well, if not better, than other areas and we see other areas investing huge amounts of money in their towns and cities in order to make town living really attractive. And you recognise that within the exam paper if you have not addressed the town centre issues and you have not addressed the climate change issues then people are going to come to your location and say, 'We are not going to live there, this town centre is not attractive, it is not exciting, it is not a place I want to live.' But if you do – if you answer questions one and two

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740 correctly, then you are going to get the right answer to question three, and you will probably pass the exam.

So, now, returning to normality and back to the Court, Mr President, if I may. The brownfield site Select Committee did try to answer question one, to the best of its ability, but we have not yet answered question two, which is climate change, and we have not answered question three.

745 So I absolutely support Mr Shimmins in his motion this morning. I listened with interest to the Member for Ayre and Michael, but let's go back to the exam room, and without looking at any papers in front of you, what was it that the Member for Ayre and Michael actually said? I would like you to list all the things that he said and I would like you list all the proposals in the amendment ... Oh, I am not allowed to speak to it because it has not been seconded, has it?

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The Speaker: It has.

The President: It has been seconded, yes.

755 **Mr Robertshaw:** Thank you.

And I challenge you, because they are just words, they are just vanilla words. What we have got to capture – and I think that the Hon. Member for Middle captures the issue here – what it is that we have got to do to get our towns and villages looking really good and to be great places to live. In our minds we have got to really get hold of how it is that this climate emergency, in very pragmatic terms, is going to be dealt with. It is not just sitting here saying we want to do this, we have got to find pragmatic, well-thought-out and financially possible ways of dealing with it, and climate change sits within this. If we are serious about this 80% of current properties that are going to be here in 2050, just imagine the amount of money that we are really going to have to spend in current properties to make that work? If the Chief Minister says it is an emergency, and we have supported him, then we have got to start thinking of quite radical and exciting ways to respond.

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Finally, if you answer all the questions well and population growth starts again, then what you are going to find is that it becomes possible to return to perhaps expanding and using some of these areas that currently are not developed, because you have been successful with the centres. But you have to do the whole thing in sequence. It is not just a sort of waffle-waffle of bits and pieces of things that we think we need to deal with. Let's get a plan in our heads and let's deliver it.

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Thank you, Mr President.

775 **The President:** Hon. Member of Council, Mrs Poole-Wilson.

Mrs Poole-Wilson: Thank you, Mr President.

I have been listening with great interest to the debate so far and I particularly enjoyed the Hon. Member for Douglas, Mr Robertshaw's contribution, just then.

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The Minister for Policy and Reform spoke on Tuesday of the importance of evidence-based policy making and, Hon. Members, I believe that that is what Mr Shimmins' motion is actually about. It seeks to ensure that the Isle of Man Strategic Plan is grounded on a strong evidence base, and in this case he highlights, in particular, the data we have around what our actual housing need is. It is important because it then allows our Area Plans to be developed on a sound evidence base. And obviously this is important at the moment, as we are about to embark on the public inquiry into the Area Plan for the East.

And, like others who have spoken, I do not think that what Mr Shimmins is advocating here, with his motion, is at all out of line with what our current Strategic Plan is aiming at or its objectives. Perhaps it is worth us being reminded of what the overarching strategic aim is of our Strategic Plan. It is namely:

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To protect and improve the quality of the environment.

That is the overarching strategic aim we are looking to deliver. It is then underpinned by a number of strategic objectives. I am not going to read them all out, there are lots of them, but I think it is important to reflect on some of them which are pertinent to this debate this morning.

795 They are the, 'Efficient and sustainable use of resources.' Mr Robertshaw has spoken eloquently of the exam questions, the exam questions around our current housing stock and addressing the climate emergency. Surely, we are going to have to focus even more on the efficient and sustainable use of resources in our current built environment.

800 Another strategic objective is, 'To protect, maintain and enhance the built and social environment.' Another is, 'To promote the urban regeneration and the re-use of derelict and redundant sites.' and finally, one that I will reference is, 'To provide sufficient housing in appropriate locations to meet the needs of our community.'

805 Now, a difficulty seems to have arisen for us through the translation of some of these strategic objectives into strategic policies, such as the Strategic Policy 11, which is the one that articulates our housing need at the moment as amounting to 5,100 dwellings to be built over the Plan period of 2011 to 2026. Having specified that, we have set up a situation where we have now allowed the Strategic Plan to quote a number of dwellings across the Island which is disconnected with the current evidence on our population and housing need and also potentially disconnected with other strategic Government objectives, not least addressing the climate change emergency.

810 Given the overriding strategic aim I referred to, surely it makes sense – and this is why I think Mr Shimmins' motion is helpful – to ensure that this policy is tested now, not only against revised data and kept in line with our awareness of data, but is also tested against wider strategic objectives, such as addressing the climate change emergency.

815 I am also grateful to hear from the Chief Minister this morning that the Council of Ministers is supportive, absolutely, of development on brownfield sites, so surely these strategic housing policies do need to be kept in line with these wider considerations.

820 In terms of the climate change emergency, we do now have Prof. Curran undertaking the programme of work to come back to this hon. place with an action plan. Now, Prof. Curran, of course, has complete editorial control over the product of his workstream but land use and development is highly likely to be a part of how we address the climate emergency and so it would seem wholly wrong for our Strategic Plan not to be seen as a document that we can revisit, this Hon. Court can revisit, in order to make sure that it is connected with other strategic aims – developing on brownfield sites ahead of our greenfield and addressing the climate emergency.

825 Hon. Members, I recognise that the Hon. Member for Ayre and Michael, Mr Baker, has brought forth his amendment in a spirit of helpfulness and in trying to achieve sort of broader objectives about how this whole system works. I suppose my concern though is that it still does not pick up these wider strategic objectives about the importance of brownfield sites, about the importance of not only looking at poor housing need but looking at other areas that are coming forward like the climate emergency.

835 So, for me, I think what we need to focus on today is, first of all, making sure that we do enable the Strategic Plan to be reviewed and updated as it needs to be in line with up-to-date evidence. But we also need to recognise as a precedent that the Strategic Plan is so important it should be capable of being revisited when it needs to be, and it will need to be revisited when we get the output of the climate change action plan.

840 I think, Hon. Members, this morning we must show ourselves able to do what we say we do, which is to adopt a planned monitor and manage approach. The Strategic Plan stated we needed 5,100 dwellings in the Plan period to 2026, monitoring of evidence and data shows that this is an inflated figure. So now we must manage and managing I think is taking the opportunity to revisit the Strategic Plan, think about how we should develop the housing policies sitting in it in order

that Area Plans can be developed on a sound basis taking account of the current position on data and also wider strategic objectives.

Thank you, Mr President.

845 **The President:** Hon. Member for Onchan, Mr Callister, to speak on the amendment.

Mr Callister: Yes, thank you, Mr President.

I will only be talking on the amendment. It is more of a question, really. My hon. colleague from Ayre and Michael, Mr Baker, quoted the Town and Country Planning Act 1999, which I am
850 really grateful for. He also mentioned page 67; now, on that page it clearly says that:

Such sites will only be released for development when the Department considers that there is sufficient evidence to justify [such action].

Strategic sites will be subject to detailed planning briefings and methodology, etc. My question really is – I think Mr Thomas, the Minister for Policy and Reform, who has not spoken yet, may be able to clarify exactly what he means about these sites – how will they be released? What sort of consultation will take place before? I know Mr Baker and Dr Allinson have said
855 there are controls in place. What are these controls? Who will make the decision of making these sites available and on what evidence will that be in order to make sure that these sites are released at the appropriate moment, at the appropriate time and not suddenly just released at the end of this inquiry?

From my discussions with the Cabinet Office and with planning officers, they are expecting a large number of planning applications to be submitted at the end of this process. So what I need
860 to make sure, and I think we need something on *Hansard* to actually explain this process, but also to give a message in respect to people who hold those particular strategic reserve sites exactly what they can and cannot do once this inquiry has concluded.

Thank you, Mr President.

865

The President: Hon. Member of Council, Mr Cretney.

Mr Cretney: Yes. Thank you, Mr President.

I think there have been a number of important discussions during this sitting of Tynwald in
870 July and this is, certainly as far as I am concerned, one of the most important ones. I think my contribution will be limited to that we need to learn from history in all these kinds of things.

I made representation when the Douglas Local Plan was introduced and much of the emphasis there was that the centre of Douglas should become the place where all office development would be centred and there would be fewer parking standards than there would
875 be elsewhere. As a result, a number of the houses in that area were taken over for office purposes and the result of that, in my opinion, and I think history has proven this, was that the town became less of an attractive place to live. Also in the town there are properties – and there were then properties – which were not going to be used for the purpose for which they were originally built. There were lots of boarding houses in certain areas and, yes, they provided poor-
880 quality flats ultimately, but I would have always liked to see a more ambitious project taken.

I think the time is still appropriate that an ambitious project in terms of some of the areas where these buildings, which are certainly never going to be used for the purpose for which they were built and are now certainly not going to comply with the modern standards – and certainly those which are required in terms of our future environmental necessities. So I do hope,
885 although it has taken a very long time, that is still something which will happen.

What happened was in the mid-late 1980s we received much very welcome economic growth, because prior to that we were not in a good place. When I was elected there were virtually no reserves, there were 3,000 people out of work. It was not a good place. So we got

890 the economic growth and with the economic growth came new residents and that was fine. We
have always welcomed people to the Isle of Man, in my opinion. But what we did get from the
Government was knee-jerk housing developments and they came with their own problems. The
one that I most recall in terms of the problems that came was that young Manx people had to
stand outside Douglas Town Hall, and elsewhere, in a queue, to see if they could be considered
895 for one of these first-time buyer houses that were going to be made available. And that, in my
opinion, caused much social division, and that is something we need to try and avoid in the
future. We need to learn from that and not go down that road again.

I always supported the initiative in relation to younger, economically active people coming to
the Island because we needed, again, to learn from history where the previous policy had been
to encourage retired people from various places to come to the Isle of Man and, whilst they
900 brought their money with them, they were all obviously just going to become a burden on the
National Health Service, etc. and all the other things that come with that. Whereas with young,
economically active people you have got more chance of them benefiting the economy, which is
obviously what we need. I think that policy is as appropriate today as it was when Miles Walker
was the person who headlined that and made sure that was something that should be
905 happening.

But what we need to do, and what we need to again learn from history, is that when you get
your economically active people then there are obviously things that come with that – schools,
where there had to be a number of developments in terms of schooling for young people.

So the purpose of my input is to try and learn from history.

910 There was also better Government support for young people too, in my opinion, in relation
to mortgages, etc. I do not know what the situation is now but it became the case that the
private sector was expected to meet all that demand. I am not sure that is always as helpful as it
could be. I think some people have had difficulty in terms of the amount of money that they had
to have as a deposit, etc. to get on the housing list in the first place.

915 Another issue, if we do not get planning right, is that we have a certain number of people on
the Island who own swathes of properties and those properties, in my opinion, should be for
first-time buyers. They were built as first-time buyers' properties and that is the purpose for
which they should be used, they should not just there as an investment income vehicle for
people. I think that is very unfair on young Manx people who are trying to start off in life and I
920 do not know how you do that, via Planning, etc. but there must be something that can be done
to try and assist them.

The other point I wanted to make is that I was responsible – well, I do not know whether it
was successful or not – in bringing the Southern Local Plan to Tynwald, which met some
opposition as all these plans do –

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The Speaker: From the Southern Members!

Mr Cretney: Yes, from the Southern Members! (*Interjections*) I remember it well,
Mr Speaker. But one of the things that was supposed to come after that was in relation to
930 Castletown – and he is not here at the moment, but I welcomed the input from the Hon.
Member for Arbory, Castletown and Malew this morning in relation to Castletown, because I
think there has been a particular issue over the years, and certainly the former Hon. Member for
Castletown, Richie Ronan and his predecessor, Tony Brown, were keen to emphasise to this
Court and elsewhere that young people did not have the proper opportunity in Castletown
935 because, unlike other places, the town centre in Castletown is one which has been cherished
and the properties in the town centre have been ones which would seem to be attractive. They
were ahead of the game, in my opinion. And so, as such, young people from Castletown have
had to go elsewhere and I think that is very unfair.

So what was going to happen following the Southern Local Plan – and I would like from the
940 Hon. Member if he could just indicate that what he is saying is not going to affect what Richie

Ronan was trying to do, and that was he had assurance from the planners that they would then follow on with a review of the housing needs, in particular for Castletown. In my opinion that problem still exists, and I would just like him to assure me that his proposal will not detrimentally affect that.

945 I think that is all I have to say. I welcome, from both, from the amendment as well. I think this Court is at its best when we consider such important matters and I think this has been a really ... Mr Shimmins was asked yesterday whether his debate was going to be one in which people participate and whether it was going to be ... It has been; it is important. I am glad that so many Members have taken part and let's make sure we get it right for the future.

950

The President: Hon. Member for Douglas South, Mrs Beecroft.

Mrs Beecroft: Thank you, Mr President.

955 I was not actually going to speak today, I have been listening to the debate with real interest and it has been a fascinating one. But there are a couple of points that I believe have been omitted which I would like to make. I would firstly like to congratulate Mr Shimmins on bringing this motion forward because, if he had not, we would not be having this debate today which, as I said, I have found extremely interesting.

960 Firstly, actually, I would like to start with the previous speaker's comments as we are of a similar generation and I am sure that he will remember, like me, that in our day this is how young people got on to the housing ladder, by buying the older properties in town that needed work doing on them. They were usually of a larger size than the current first-time buyers so they were perfectly adequate family homes. So when they bought them they could stay in them for quite a long time, if not forever. Obviously they had the energy to do them up, and the will, and everything else that was going; everybody worked extremely hard and was terribly proud to own their first home because prior to our generation it was almost unheard of for a working-class person to own a house on the Isle of Man, there were just no lending facilities for them. So it was really something quite special in those days.

970 As I say, people took great pride and spent so much time and money, and they were perfect for younger people either with children or planning on a family. I think it is really sad now that we have so many empty properties in Douglas Town Centre and I think, really, Government needs to find a way of assisting those people back into those properties. Because often enough the way the lending structure is at the moment – and I am sure I do not need to tell Mr Shimmins this at all – but it is easier to get a mortgage on a new property that is on the outskirts of town, because then you have got a 10-year guarantee and all the rest of it.

975 But to try and get a mortgage on an older property that needs significant work doing to it, it really is very, very difficult for young people. I think it is sad because, as I say, often enough, these older properties when they are done up give them so much more space and so much of a better environment to bring children up.

980 But apart from that it has an awful lot of other advantages: people living in town do not tend to take their cars to work with them – if indeed they have a car. They walk to work. So you have the health benefits of people walking more and of children walking more because they walk to school; and of children, actually, being able to walk to the different activities within the town centre without needing to be ferried about by their parents as they get older. So the children get the health benefits as well.

985 And it is not just those health benefits, it is the health benefits that everybody in the congested area of Douglas will benefit from because there are not so many cars being driven around the town centre, because more and more people would be living in it. So you are cutting down on the traffic congestion and you are cutting down on the emissions, which is good for your health but it is also good for the climate emergency that we talk about.

990 Not only that, if you live in town you are much more likely to walk to the shop in town, whereas if you are out of town and you need to drive in and it is only for something small, you

995 are probably actually not going to bother, because the effort of getting into a congested town
centre when you only need a small amount of whatever it is that you are going to buy, you are
probably going to say, 'Oh, I will leave it to another day' or 'I'll get it online' – or whatever. But if
you live in the area and you go out for a walk, or whatever, you are probably going to buy those
things. I know that is how we all behaved in the past, so I know that is what happens – if they
are on your doorstep you are going to use them. So I think this will help generate the town
centre's retail centres as well.

1000 If I may finish, with the Court's indulgence, on a more flippant note as it is the last debate, I
have to say that I totally agree with Mrs Poole-Wilson's enjoyment of Mr Robertshaw's
contribution, but I would ask him: I am sure I heard him say that the current population is
miserable, etc. Did he actually mean the current population *growth*? (**Mr Robertshaw:** Yes –)
Because I have not noticed us all being terribly miserable! (*Laughter*)

1005 **Mr Robertshaw:** Mr President, may I be allowed to answer in the affirmative, please? Forgive
me, yes of *course*, I did! Obviously, I failed the exam, Mr President, I am sorry. (*Laughter*)

The President: Hon. Member of Council, Mrs Lord-Brennan.

1010 **Mrs Lord-Brennan:** Thank you, Mr President.

1015 First of all, traffic was one of the things that were mentioned by the hon. mover. The
information that I have is that if the developments go ahead to the extent that has been
indicated, what we will be looking at with Douglas is traffic being very similar to that which they
have in London, which I really do not think is what people want. It has been described to me as
being 'dramatically terrible'.

1020 This is the sort of thing that has come from modelling – so thank goodness that we have this
sort of modelling where it is able to happen. And, to cope with it, I do not know if we will be
looking at flyovers and all these things – I do not know. But what I have been told is that we
would really be requiring major junctions to be improved because we would have terrible traffic
problems.

1025 On the good side, this should give some impetus to have active travel, a little bit more focus,
it should be really important because we are going to need it, because it is probably going to be
so slow to go everywhere that we are definitely going to need to be able to move faster than the
cars!

1030 The second point is about strategic development really, and strategic plans, because actually
it is *really* important to be able to re-evaluate and monitor different information and different
figures that come along, so that there is the flex to alter what you do with strategy. I guess in
some ways that is what makes strategy a bit different from just having a static plan. So the hon.
mover made that point, and I think that is really what we are being asked to support in the
motion; and it does not mean, for the needs of additional housing, that would be completely
ruled out because of course there are other tools in order to increase the housing if we felt that
is what was needed. So we can just have that scoped.

1035 So what would those other tools be? I am going to move on to the third point now which is
legislation. One of those tools – it could be the *only* tool, I am not sure – would be the national
policy directives as outlined in the Town and Country Planning (Amendment) Bill and this would
allow the Council of Ministers by order to issue a national planning policy directive that, as a
statutory document, would need to be laid before Tynwald in draft form, I think, and then
approved, as a minimum. There is also the point that there would be reporting about any of
1040 these national policy directives that would be laid before Tynwald in section 5(8):

The Cabinet Office shall prepare a report to be laid before Tynwald on the third anniversary of this section coming
into operation and every third anniversary thereafter.

1045 So there is the idea of this bringing together of the things that have been approved, orders that have been approved as national policy directives that we would have as Tynwald, and then be able to look back in some period of time to see actually when they were all brought into effect and I suppose maybe how they are working – I am not sure what would be included in the report, I have not had the chance to read all of it.

1050 The frequency of this report was amended in the House of Keys. It was going to be the second anniversary of the coming into operation of that section and it was amended in Keys to be the third anniversary, so that shows you actually what we might be looking at, I think. And the Hon. Member of Council, I do not know where he has gone, and some other people have made comments about actually certain things were brought in many, many years ago and there were efforts to try and deal with it then and actually that was difficult, so what we are doing is maybe looking back and thinking, 'Ah, what have we done?'

1055 So the point I am making about these national policy directives is that if we do not support, as Tynwald, the original motion, and in that way we have just put a very clear but very rational, 'Actually, we need a bit of a check on this' – and I think that is fine. If we do not do that, then the other mechanism that might be relied upon would be the national policy directives and whilst they would be laid before Tynwald, in my view it just makes comeback or revision – it is secondary legislation, after all – a little bit more difficult. I suppose that is a similar point that the original mover was making about dealing with this legally as opposed to actually Tynwald setting its mind to it here and using this as an opportunity to think, quite simply, do we need to revise the figures?

1060 It seems to me that supporting Mr Shimmins' motion will be the most robust debate we can have about it, I think, that way; and I just wanted to highlight that point about the recent legislation in the Town and Country Planning (Amendment) Bill.

1065 Thank you, Mr President.

The President: Hon. Member for Garff, Mrs Caine.

Mrs Caine: Thank you, Mr President.

1070 I would like to thank the Member for Middle, Mr Shimmins for bringing this motion today. The issue of planning is one that really matters to people evidenced, as he said, by the turnout at the pre-inquiry hearing this morning.

1075 This Government has hung its hat on evidence-based policymaking so it is incomprehensible to me why a factual error in our strategic plan would not be corrected at the first opportunity. **(A Member:** Hear, hear.) The key issue is the overestimation of projected population growth and that figure of the 5,100 new dwellings.

1080 If only the Strategic Plan could be updated according to census and property market data instead of retaining a figure that is out of sync with the latest information. It is not short-term politics to want to have accurate figures reflected in our strategic plan. We all value the natural beauty of this Island that has led to it achieving UNESCO Biosphere Reserve status. The Chief Minister said his administration will be reviewing our Strategic Plan in good time. Well, now *is* a good time – ahead of the Area Plan for the East.

1085 It is a good time because people's confidence in the current Strategic Plan ... In fact, the credibility of the whole planning process is lost when people do not have confidence that it is based on actual need.

1090 Planning is an emotive subject. People are very attached to particular areas of our Island and we need to guard the remaining 6% of undeveloped land very jealously and zealously. **(Mr Henderson:** Hear, hear.) Of course planning policies should encourage regeneration of brownfield sites but a responsible Government also needs to look to the future and ensure sustainable growth. The designation of strategic reserves is upsetting because there is a belief that once designated for development green fields will be built on. A link to actual population growth before green field sites are released for development would be welcome.

I have to say I commend the Member for Middle for bringing this before us today and I would like to say I will be fully supporting him.

1095 Thank you, Mr President.

The President: Hon. Member of Council, Mrs Sharpe.

Mrs Sharpe: Thank you, Mr President, I will be very brief.

1100 I will be supporting Mr Shimmins' amendment because it is simple and it gets to the nub of the issue. Basically, it is how many housing units do we *really* need on the Island and where is the best place to put them?

He puts a timescale on this so if we vote for his motion we will have an answer in October 2019.

1105 I do not doubt Mr Baker has the Island's best interests at heart with his amendment but, as the Hon. Member for Douglas East, Mr Robertshaw, pointed out there are a lot of words here. I would argue there are too many words and there are too many disparate points to consider at this late stage.

So I would say vote for Mr Shimmins' motion and keep it simple and keep it focused.

1110 Thank you, Mr President.

The President: Hon. Member for Douglas East, Miss Bettison, to speak to the amendment.

Miss Bettison: Thank you, Mr President.

1115 I wanted to rise just to make a couple of points, reading through Mr Baker's amendment in a bit more detail.

I think the first three points no-one would disagree with at all, actually. I think they are very sensible, just outlining the basics around what we are trying to achieve. And then when we get down to the bits around the national policy directives – that is, I suppose, around a choice of what we think is the best way to manage this – for me, there are a couple of points I want to pick out.

In bullet point 5 where it says:

it can be difficult to release land for development ...

it is not saying it is always difficult and it is not saying it has to be difficult; it is saying it *can* be when it is not allocated, and that:

it is perhaps easier to allocate land but have some form of brake on its release;

1125 Perhaps it is, perhaps it is not, but it seems a little bit vague to be hanging our hat on something that is not really nailing down the detail.

It then goes on to say:

further notes that the use of Strategic Reserves can be a useful ... tool ...

I think we all understand that there is absolutely a time and a place, but it is about how much strategic reserve that we need.

1130 Then he talked about what he is actually calling on to happen and it seems to me that rather than changing what we are doing based on the evidence while we can, we are seeking simply to manage the incorrect information and the decisions that have been taken off the back of that, which seems a very back-to-front way to be focusing on our planning policy and ensuring that we have the right capacity within our national property portfolio to see what is available for people to build, and what we are looking at in terms of our strategic reserves.

1135

1140 There is no talk of exploration of the reason for the change in numbers and actually doing some sort of interrogation on that data to understand the direction we are travelling in, and why we are where we are; or looking at the numbers of houses needed and assessment of the updated evidence papers that have been recently submitted in June that Mr Shimmins' motion talked so eloquently about.

So for me, to sum up just on this amendment, it would encourage us to carry on with the current incorrect figures; to look at future mechanisms which may be too late for the Eastern Area Plan in some circumstance; and only seek to try and prevent release of strategic reserve sites rather than reducing our number actually in line with our actual need.

1145 So I am not sure, for me, this achieves what we should be trying to achieve and I think that Mr Shimmins' original motion, for me, provides a far better opportunity to actually get this right. Thank you, Mr President.

1150 **The President:** Hon. Member, Mr Cregeen.

Mr Cregeen: Thank you, Mr President.

I was relatively relaxed on this and it is just that following on from the question from the Hon. Member of Council, Mr Cretney about how this will affect areas outside of Douglas – let's say Castletown and the south and the north – the Hon. Member said that he cannot see this affecting the developments out there. But when you read the motion it does say the 'Strategic Area Plan'. So it will, according to the wording – I know he said his intention is that it does not, but the wording in here does read as if it will affect the Castletown area.

1155 So that is my concern: his intention, as I thought he indicated to the Hon. Member of Council, was that it would not affect it, I am just concerned that the wording seems to think that it will.

1160 **The President:** Hon. Member for Douglas Central, Mrs Corlett.

Mrs Corlett: Thank you, Mr President.

1165 The debate around this motion has enabled the voicing of our many concerns around planning, traffic, empty properties, brownfield sites, green field sites – to name a few. I share these concerns but I have got no wish to repeat what has already been said so therefore I am just going to concentrate on the words of the motion.

So it is: to 'note the updated evidence papers which reduce the number of housing units required' – that is a given.

1170 To ask 'the Minister for Policy and Reform to report in October the reasons for the change in the number of houses required'. This is a request for information and surely that is not unreasonable.

With 'reference to the division of housing between the four regional Area Plans' – again, that is not an unreasonable request.

1175 And: 'notes the urgency of amending the Strategic Plan to reflect the current assessment of the Island's needs' – future needs, I think, is really what is important there. But as there is a reduction in need of over 44% in the updated Area Plan for the East, surely that does deserve further explanation and, quite possibly, amending.

Therefore, I will be supporting Mr Shimmins' motion.

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The President: Hon. Member for Douglas Central, Mr Thomas.

The Minister for Policy and Reform (Mr Thomas): Thank you, Mr President.

1185 I think the point I will start with in my remarks is to go back to some of the early words that Mr Shimmins said because they were important and they set the tone of this debate, and I *really* appreciate that. So what Mr Shimmins said was that he wanted a helpful debate; he wanted a

grown-up, adult debate; he wanted due consideration – he did not want anything that was lazy. And that is what we have achieved.

1190 We are very nearly in line with the time for the pre-inquiry meeting which is scheduled from 9.30 a.m. to 12.30 p.m. on the third day of Tynwald by somebody else, nothing to do with me; and I apologise, if I need to, for that timing. But I actually think the *Hansard* of today's session will be very helpful for the inspection process and I think in part that is what the purpose of today's motion was, and I am sure *Hansard* can be read very carefully.

1195 There are some issues that I will pick up in some people's contributions. It is not for me to thank people for it but I have noted down here everybody's contributions.

1200 The next point to say is that I just picked up on a point that Mrs Sharpe said, which is that Mr Baker's amendment had a lot of words. Well, I can absolutely assure everybody in this Hon. Court that there are an awful lot of words in the documents that 300 people have submitted to the independent inspector, and in the documents that the Cabinet Office has been submitting to the independent inspector since the end of June and is continuing to submit, as promised this morning, until 9th August – which actually address most of the issues that have been raised, I submit. But that is for the independent inspector to make up his mind.

1205 To be very specific about some points, Mr Callister asked me a very specific point. I do not want to comment on any specific areas but perhaps it is something to do with the strategic reserves that have been in the Onchan area in the existing plan and have been rolled over into the draft plan and, if so, the release conditions for the strategic reserves are actually specified in the draft Area Plan for the East which builds on those that were specified in the Area Plan for the South in terms of methodology, which build on those specified in the Strategic Plan.

1210 So when Mr Callister has his one-to-one meeting, which will be welcomed on our side with the planning policy officers, they will go through very precisely which site it is he means and what he can do to make sure that the constituents present their position in the best way, because it is obviously very important for all of us that we do not get into compromising ourselves outside this Hon. Court by taking one set of constituents against another. It is very important for us that we remember we are politicians, not advocates for particular interests. 1215 That is all covered in Annex 6 to our Standing Orders to remind Members that we do not want to be in the position of being advocates when it comes to public processes going on outside Tynwald Court.

1220 But, Mr Callister, you made a very good point: we do need to be precise about the release of strategic reserves, about development briefs and particular sites. That is why I am so respectful of Mr Baker's amendment, like I am so often when Mr Baker offers wisdom and wise words inside the debates. What he did yesterday was he engaged fully with the future and how things might be, with all the officers involved, and what we have laid out in a way is a work plan for the next two or three years – intensively at the moment, but later on subsequently about how, in the spirit of Mrs Lord-Brennan's idea, we could use the national policy directives. But there are 1225 other alternatives because, as I have just said in response to Mr Callister's question, we already do lay out strategic reserve conditions. It is not just at the Airport where we have strategic reserves, we have other ones around Colby and we have other ones in other parts of the Island. So there is already an established methodology.

1230 I just want to pick up on a few more points of substance. The first one is that the question has been asked about what the population will be in 2026, given what it is now. Essentially, that is covered in the draft Area Plan for the East, paragraphs 1.7.1 and 1.7.2 which were published in May 2018. I address these remarks in particular to the lawyer amongst us, Mrs Poole-Wilson, because she focused on this and she will be interested in the legal remarks. So, in essence:

1.7.1 The Isle of Man Strategic Plan 2016 covers the period from 2011 to 2026. The Area Plan for the East matches this time span, as it represents the implementation of the strategic policies. This is known as the 'plan period'. It is anticipated that a full review of the Isle of Man Strategic Plan will begin ahead of the 2021 Full Census, in time duly incorporating any findings.

So that is already urgent – 2021 is urgent in planning for 10 years, for 20 years. It continues:

1.7.2 Whilst the Area Plan for the East will follow the current timescale in place for the Isle of Man Strategic Plan ... this does not mean that the lifetime of the Plan or relevance of the Proposals within the Plan will automatically come to an end in 2026. Continuity is ensured, so that planning is orderly, and transitions between statutory plans take place smoothly. The Plan contains 'Strategic Reserve' sites for both Residential and Employment uses which are intended for development in the longer-term (beyond 2026) or possibly before that, should there be a demonstrable need. The arrangements for the future release of such Reserve Sites have been set out in the relevant Chapters identifying the Proposal Sites.

1235 So already, in May 2018, building on what was there in 2013 with the Southern Area Plan and building on what was there in 2007 with the Strategic Plan, we cover just as the Chief Minister said. What this plan is all about is planning, monitoring thoroughly and then managing in the light of the monitoring and the plan. The plan can be changed and it will be changed through the management in the light of monitoring.

1240 Now, I just want to read from another document which is one of the many documents – I think, many of which the mover has read, but not all of them, from something I am going to say in a minute. Basically paragraph 6.2 of PIP 1, the Public Inquiry Paper 1, the covering report, deals with many of the excellent issues that have been raised in today's debate, although they are not actually covered in the motion on the paper, but they are covered. So, for instance, it
1245 says in paragraph 6.2 of that document that was before the public inspector and the inquiry:

6.2 Cabinet Office is supportive of Government's broad aims of reducing car-use ...

lots of us will be happy,

... encouraging active travel ...

lots of us will be happy,

... and supporting sustainable transport options and climate change mitigation. It continues to working closely with DOI and DEFA to see how the refinement of the East Plan can help to fulfil this.

– and so on, and so on.

1250 The proposed changes put forward in PIP 5, which is another paper that is before the inquiry inspector, is very relevant. It makes the phrase first coined in Manx planning legislation in 2007 of 'plan, monitor and manage', and it says:

... given the broad agenda of tackling Climate Change, delivering the Biodiversity Strategy ...

– which Mr Henderson brought to our attention,

... and integrating green infrastructure.

It says quite clearly that the Cabinet Office regards:

The Area Plan for the East [as] a tool to help achieve these broad Government goals and many more.

1255 Section 2 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1999 puts planning at the heart of Government policy. It has to respond to environmental issues, social issues and economic issues. Planners are being empowered by today's debate to listen to us as politicians, to wait to see what policies actually come forward in October from Government about brownfield sites. At the moment we have put down an interim report about the fact that compulsory purchase
1260 improvement is going on; about the fact that a development agency and special-purpose vehicle companies to develop brownfield sites is going on, which we will debate in October; and it also talks about putting together certain parts of the assets of Government into one place to be managed better. So that is all work in progress and we will tackle that.

1265 Mr Henderson, quite rightly, on Tuesday morning reminded me of the Empty Homes Initiative Interim Report 2001 which I actually had on my computer by half past twelve on Tuesday morning. I hope both of us can thank Ms Thompson down in the in the library for bringing to my attention all four reports involved and also the *Hansards* around those reports. Mr Henderson can be pleased that the ideas that were put down in 2000 in the Isle of Man are more or less the ones that have been adopted in Scotland, for instance.

1270 So they have Empty Homes Officers in, I think, it is 22 councils in Scotland. It is not exactly a smaller government, we need more people perhaps. But anyhow, they actually have £10 million on loan from Government to help these empty homes to be refurbished. They actually have massive policies and that is something that we can think about.

1275 Of *course* it relates to the climate change initiative because one of the biggest incentives would be energy efficiency measures – cut Dr Allinson’s profits, but make it easier for people in fuel poverty and improve the condition of the housing. So of course it is linked. But that is not what is actually in front of us today, it is a much more simple motion, but it is incredibly important that planning makes it possible.

1280 How much do I need to go on? Do I need to – ? (*Interjections*)

The President: You need as long as you need to make your case.

1285 **Mr Thomas:** I am going to answer, at the very least, the five questions of Mr Shimmins and the three questions of Mr Robertshaw; and the three questions of Mr Robertshaw I think I have answered. We are on the same page, they are all Government policies, we need to make progress, and planning can bring them together.

1290 In terms of the five questions of Mr Shimmins, I am pretty much in line with the answers that he would expect: of course we want to prioritise urban generation over the brownfield sites, that is why Tynwald resolved unanimously to do exactly that and that is why Government is working so hard across Government to achieve that. Of course we want to get the vacancy rate down if it is possible, and once we understand it a bit more – and we will understand it a bit more.

1295 A slightly misleading comment from Mr Shimmins – and I hate to even mention it – but there is quite a bit of coverage of vacancy rates in the document that has already been submitted, and the independent inspector has been promised another paper by 9th August which will actually have incredibly detailed analysis of the vacancy rates because – as Mr Henderson was aware of in 2000 and as I was aware of in 2011 – it is a massive issue that we have got to tackle.

1300 Of course we want to plan for the East development and we want to deal with making sure that the population reflects reality and is included in the sites in a realistic way, and that is why the Cabinet Office has submitted accurate evidence papers on housing and population to the independent inspector’s inquiry.

1305 One thing I think Mr Shimmins might have missed, and all of this Hon. Court might have missed, is that last week we published Update 11 to the Residential Land Availability Study which actually gives information about conversions, about windfalls and about planning permission take-up for the whole Island. So the data that I have been calling for and that I can present back in October if the motion passes, has actually been made available in public for the whole Island in the last week. We have also got the Employment Land Availability up there which I also can refer to in October if this motion passes.

1310 There are just a couple of small points. One more small point in terms of Mr Shimmins’ original motion – having made the general point that some of the things that people have talked about today is not really on the paper of the motion – but the debate today was wonderful because it gave us a really accurate summary of what people are thinking and how Government needs to work better across Government. That is, that on the first note the words could be slightly refined, because what we have done is the Strategic Plan is not changed it is just that the

1315 housing needs up to 2026 are changed and that thereafter they can be incorporated. It is a very small point but I think it might be helpful for the inspector.

Active Travel is all there, SYSTRA's data is evidenced. And with that, Mr President, Hon. Members, I basically think I can sit down and we can conclude this debate to say that the consensus around this Court has to be along the lines of what is set out in Mr Baker's amendment, which is that we all want to achieve a buzzing Island through sustainable development.

I have actually got here the population targets, the optimum population for each of us who got elected in the 2016 General Election, and lots of constituencies ... And that was a question that Isle of Man Newspapers asked us: what should the population be optimally in the Isle of Man? And lots of us sitting here who got elected, including everybody in some constituencies, put it around 100,000.

There is no doubt about it, Hon. Members, having a few more people as long as they are living in the right place and doing the right things is a lot better for us. It means that we can have a seven-screen cinema; it means we can have cheaper fares on the airlines; it means we can have better restaurants; it means we can have better leisure facilities. It is all for the good. That is what we have got to be doing.

Planning is an important part of it, just like the Chief Minister laid out. Whatever the vote today, you have got a very sensible proposal for the next two or three years in planning terms. Like Quing, that yoke that joins things together, Planning has to work with this Tynwald Court's intentions for the population, and this Tynwald Court's intentions for the Isle of Man, and it can work together. And that is what this debate is all about today, regardless of the vote.

I will be voting for Mr Baker's helpful drafting of what might happen in the future. The debate today has been very rich and will be very helpful.

1340 **The President:** Hon. Members, I have had an indication from two more Members who wish to speak. I shall review the position of course as we move towards lunchtime.

Mr Peake, Hon. Member.

Mr Peake: Thank you very much, Mr President.

1345 Thank you for letting me speak, I was just waiting to hear my good friend from Douglas Central, Mr Thomas – interested to hear his voice. A lot of detail there, as you would expect.

But it is just really about a simple thing and what has been identified. There is a view that has been expressed in the public and a view expressed by the Hon. Member for Middle, Mr Shimmins, that the figures just did not seem to tally and it was taking us down a different path. He has brought that to our attention and that is what the motion is today.

1350 So I will be supporting the original motion. I think the idea that if you do want to amend things if there is a change in population, and if it has not gone the way you expect it to go, you need to be able to make that change. That is what he is asking today: for that to be considered and to come back in October along with all the other things that Minister Thomas has promised that are coming back in October as well. So it would be great to do that.

1355 We have heard a lot today about Castletown. I think that was a very good point because a lot of regeneration money went into there. I think it is good that the town now is, hopefully, getting some houses there. It is good that young people will be able live in their town. It is all a good thing. Sustainable communities is what it is about. (**A Member:** Hear, hear.) A lot of talk about environmental; there are a lot of changes coming down the line which we can embrace; but at the heart of it will be sustainable communities. Active Travel will play its part because we will be living closer to where we work. It is all good news and I am really looking forward to it.

1360 Mr Baker's amendment, with respect, there is a lot of detail and a lot of work gone into that, so thank you very much for doing that. But I am just sticking with the original motion, the simple idea of looking at the figures and adjusting that.

1365 Thank you very much, Mr President, for allowing me to speak.

The President: Hon. Member for Ramsey, Mr Hooper.

Mr Hooper: Thank you very much, Mr President.

1370 I came in this morning not expecting to contribute to this but we have been going back and forth and I think the key issue feels to have got a little bit lost in some of the debates. So I am just going to try and put this back into a little bit of perspective.

I think the Minister for Policy and Reform is absolutely right when he says the Strategic Plan is a long-term plan with no specific end date ... If you just give me one second. Yes, that is fine.

1375 So I am going to be tabling a short amendment which simply adds an extra bullet point on to Mr Baker's amendment, and I will explain why I am doing that. So the Strategic Plan, as the Minister said, is a long-term plan and it does not have an end date, so trying to pin us down to a very specific number of houses based on a forecast that was done today could tie our hands a little bit too much when looking to the future. But, equally, I completely appreciate the concerns
1380 that have been raised by the Hon. Member for Middle, Mr Shimmins when he brought the motion, that we could end up zoning too much land for residential use and then have problems with the strategic reserves being released perhaps inappropriately and encouraging too much development on greenfield sites.

Now, I think Mr Baker's proposals in his amendment actually set out quite a clear route for
1385 managing that process of releasing the strategic reserves. So I am quite taken by many of the things he has put in that amendment. But unfortunately – and this is the amendment that I am circulating just to add one extra bullet point – what I think this does not do is actually say that we should be making sure that the area plans are reflective of what our actual housing need is. And this, for me, comes from a little bit of concern that when you look at the new evidence
1390 paper that was published it has a lot of language in it that talks about the implications of this new data and what this new data is supposed to be telling us. But in spite of all this new data we are still seeing and hearing from the Minister an unwillingness, I think, to accept that this new data means the area plan numbers may need to change.

I think that could be because of the way that this debate has been framed. We are talking
1395 about changing the *Strategic Plan* at the moment. Now, is that actually necessary? I would argue that it probably is not necessary to change the Strategic Plan itself. And the reason for that, predominantly, is because of two reasons, really.

The first one is that these new evidence papers are built around a lot of assumptions which I think are quite valid and those assumptions do incorporate the new Government push and drive
1400 to increase our resident population. The Strategic Plan talks about 500 extra people *per annum* which the Cabinet Office's latest paper still describes as 'the most relevant figure to use', even after we have launched the Locate strategy. So I think in that respect the Strategic Plan is quite valid.

But the reason I think we do not need to worry about changing the Strategic Plan is because
1405 on page 4 of the Strategic Plan the last paragraph says quite clearly:

... should any future Area Plan result in proposals which are contrary to any provisions of this Strategic Plan ... the Area Plan provisions shall prevail.

Which means we do not need to change the Strategic Plan, we just need to make sure the area plans that come forward are absolutely right, because those provisions will prevail over the numbers and the policies in the Strategic Plan.

Now, the Strategic Plan is very clear about how strategic reserves are released. It says they
1410 will only be released 'where need cannot be met by existing allocation'. So we have got that covered.

The key thing for me, then, is making sure those existing allocations are right and are based on the right numbers. My worry with not having something in this amendment that is very specific about this is that the Planning Office and the Minister go away and end up zoning land

1415 for residential use for two and a half thousand properties, and then some strategic reserve on
top of that in case we need more. What we really should be looking to do is zone enough land
for the 1,400 or 1,500 properties that are outlined as potentially needed; I think 1,407
properties is the upper limit of what the new data shows might be needed. So we should zone
land for that amount of properties and then the rest can be strategic reserves which have the
1420 conditions and protections for release that are built into them, that the Strategic Plan already
outlines and that Mr Baker is proposing here. So I am not as concerned, I think, about the
strategic reserve process as Mr Shimmins seems to be. I think we can build appropriate controls
around that.

But I think really what this debate should be around, and I think what I am trying to get at, is
1425 that the key issue is when we are zoning this land how much of that land in each of these area
plans ... Because this is not just about the Eastern Area Plan, this is going to be about the new
Northern Plan as well that comes forward. When we are zoning all of this land for development
we should be clear that the land that is zoned for immediate release, for want of a better
phrase, reflects the realistic forecasts in housing needs that the Cabinet Office is preparing and
1430 that they have already said they will update annually – that is already built into a lot of this
planning process, annual and regular updates. And then if the Strategic Plan says we might need
an extra thousand on top of that if our population explodes, and we need to reserve some land
strategically in order to do that, we should be free to do that provided that it is then only
released as and when the other land is already used up, which I think is what Mr Baker's
1435 amendment is getting at and it is what it already says in the Strategic Plan.

So in proposing this I do not really want to reopen this whole debate, I am just trying to find a
middle ground here between the two amendments, on the one hand recognising that there is
new data, and this new data shows that we do have a reduced number of houses needed in the
east and north across the Island, and that the area plans that are coming forward should reflect
1440 that reduction in need. But equally, then, acknowledging that the key issue really is flexibility
and making sure that we can provide developers and the Island with long-term certainty, and I
do agree with the idea that has been put forward that the strategic reserve system does actually
support that certainty and that long-term development.

So hopefully Hon. Members will now be getting a copy of the amendment that I have just
1445 drafted and, like I say, it is simply to add on to the end of Mr Baker's motion just one additional
bullet point which is trying to really cross the bridge between Mr Shimmins' original proposals
and the proposals Mr Baker has put forward.

I hope that there is anyone who has not spoken, actually, who can second this; and if not
then so be it.

1450 Mr President, with that I beg to move the amendment that I have just tabled. Thank you.

To add at the end of Mr Baker's amendment the words:

- *'ensure that land zoned for residential use in each of the Area Plans reflects the up-to-date and realistic forecast for housing need.'*

The President: Now, that amendment has been moved and it has been circulated. I would
add that an electronic version did go out a little bit earlier to Members during the course of the
debate.

I have no-one else left on my list ... Miss August-Hanson.

1455

Miss August-Hanson: Thank you, Mr President.

I would like to second the Hon. Member for Ramsey, Mr Hooper's move. I think that it makes
an eminently sensible compromise between the motion itself and also Mr Baker's.

I would like to just remind the Minister for Policy and Reform that in April 2019 in his
1460 statement to this place on Planning he said that the Cabinet Office is committed to evidence-
based planning. And I sincerely hope that is the case. Thank you.

The President: Hon. Member, Mrs. Poole-Wilson, to speak to the latest amendment.

Mrs Poole-Wilson: Thank you, Mr President.

1465 I did just want to comment on the amendment which I recognise the Hon. Member for Ramsey, Mr Hooper, has brought forward in a spirit of being constructive and, as he says, creating a bridge.

1470 My worry, and it was brought out at the initial pre-inquiry meeting this morning, was there are already questions – legal questions – to be answered about the interaction between the Strategic Plan and the Area Plan for the East. The start point is that any Area Plan must be formed in general conformity with the Strategic Plan. So I recognise the paragraph 4 that he has referenced that the Area Plan, if it happens to step outside the bounds of the Strategic Plan, then takes precedence. But the danger is here we end up in a bit of a circular situation because if the legal advice that goes back to the Chair of this inquiry says, ‘No, actually you cannot bring forward recommendations that step outside the current restrictions of the Strategic Plan’, you go nowhere.

1480 I mean, I think, unfortunately housing policy 11 is too restrictive anyway by *prescribing* a number. It would be far better as a strategic policy if it reflected what we have all been talking about, which is the need to be dynamic and responsive to data, and other factors that come forward within a planned period, that may actually alter the number of houses that we want at any one time and therefore the land that we go forward and zone through the Area Plan. So I think that is the fundamental problem we have.

1485 But I would suggest that Mr Shimmins’ initial motion allows for this to happen. I would suggest that in reviewing the Strategic Plan at this point if the motion is agreed to by this Hon. Court that there is an opportunity actually for the Cabinet Office to *not* put a number in, and to actually be more responsive by talking about a more data-led approach and the ability to be responsive.

So I understand Mr Hooper’s sort of helpful suggestion but I am not sure it is going to help because of the circular nature in which the Strategic Plan and the Area Plans interacts.

1490 Thank you, Mr President.

The President: Mr Baker to speak to the amendment

Mr Baker: Thank you, Mr President.

1495 I am just happy to stand and commit my support to my hon. friend from Ramsey’s amendment which I think is eminently sensible and I see as enhancing my amendment; and I think it does speak to the spirit of the issue.

1500 I have heard lots of people talk about complexity. This *is* complex and that is why it is taking quite a lot of words and quite a lot of elements, and actually Mr Hooper has recognised that the original motion needed some more words to actually fine-tune it and I commend him for that.

The President: Mr Thomas to speak to the amendment.

The Minister for Policy and Reform (Mr Thomas): Thank you, Mr President.

1505 So I did not use some of the only report I had actually from the meeting that Mr Shimmins, Mr Callister, Mrs Poole-Wilson and Mrs Caine attended this morning. But Mr Shimmins referred to it earlier and I did get a little answer about what exactly was the response.

1510 Mr Shimmins made a really good point. Mr Shimmins said right at the beginning that this is a legal process and he reported that Cabinet Office has an advocate, a barrister, speaking on our behalf because this is a legal process. And what the inspector said, according to the report I have in front of me – which is not definitive in any way; it is just the report that has got to me – is that the inspector said that he will not question the validity of the Strategic Plan. However, he would

accept arguments from the public regarding it, he will make his own recommendations, and then it will be up to the Cabinet Office and ultimately Tynwald to consider and accept them.

1515 So that is on the table and that is why, in line with the suggestion from Miss August-Hanson, this is entirely evidence-based. If you go to the web page we have got thousands of pages of evidence about this – numerical, quantitative data and qualitative data. We do have 11 updates now to our Residential Land Availability and one Employment Land Availability, updated two years later. We have got so much evidence which will now be under the inspection of everybody
1520 who cares about this, from developers to neighbourhood groups, to Government employees from all round Government.

So I am speaking solely to the amendment. It sounds like what Mr Hooper has added is more or less in line exactly with what will happen. So in that sense there is a slight ambiguity about the meaning of the word 'realistic'. But, just as Mr Baker's first reaction was I am being advised,
1525 it is more or less a description of the plan, monitor and manage approach. So it seems that is the process that is going on so why would we not accept it as an addition?

The last point is that I do not want to go as far as what Mrs Poole-Wilson has said, because that is not the meaning of what is on the paper in front of you. We had that in the Action Plan Consultation and that was called 'Option B'. Option B was going back to the system that existed
1530 in the Isle of Man until 2006 and existed elsewhere until the 1990s or thereabouts in the British Islands. What that was about was 'predict in the short term and then fill that prediction', and that was a bit too constraining. What we needed was a long-run strategic plan for Infrastructure so we do not have flyovers and all those other things that Mr Shimmins was frightening us with very slightly. We do not want to go back to Option B. The Manx public agrees, only 20%, one in
1535 five of the Manx public actually said they wanted that option. What they wanted was what we currently have: three out five of them said they liked the current approach of the public being involved in the strategic plan development process.

So it seems I can support but, based on the advice I have got, the addition of the amendment.

1540 Thank you very much, Mr President.

The President: Now, Hon. Members, if the Court (*Interjection*) ... Are there any other speakers? Mr Cregeen to speak to the amendment.

1545 **Mr Cregeen:** Oh, sorry, thank you, Mr President.
I was going to suggest that we sit to the end of this Item.

Mr Malarkey: I second that!

1550 **The President:** Well, I was just about to say that, Hon. Member. (*Laughter*)

Mr Malarkey: Good!

The President: If the Court wishes, I can call on the mover to reply to the debate now.
1555 Alternatively we return at 2.30 p.m.

Is the Court content? (**Members:** Agreed.)

I call on the Hon. Member for Middle, Mr Shimmins.

Mr Shimmins: Thank you, Mr President.

1560 I would like to thank everybody for such valued and varied contributions to the debate today. I am so glad that we had so many people speaking on this important issue.

I have got quite a few points to make, so I hope that Members will bear with me. I would like to structure them in a particular order, so perhaps if I look at the amendments first and then I

1565 will cover the specific points about Castletown, which a few Members have raised, and then I will go through some of the individual contributions, which many people have made.

1570 First of all, to Mr Baker's amendment, sir, I very much appreciate this; the amendment is very well intentioned. It does follow that kind of trend, which I highlighted previously, about bringing amendments to water down motions, but it is well intentioned and we agree on many aspects. There is actually not much to disagree with in this, I think, in terms of that overall long-term strategic approach and it raises a number of good points but what it kind of lacks is the public confidence issue. What it does not actually deal with is the fact that our plan, our Strategic Plan, which is filtering to the Eastern Area Plan, is based on these figures which are overestimates. So it does not tackle that, and I think that is unfortunate because I think it is really important we regain public confidence in this issue.

1575 He talked about the Strategic Plan needing to have flexibility, at the moment it does not really have that. And I can see that his suggestions about using strategic reserves, again, are well-intentioned, but a number of people talked about strategic reserves as a way that we can cope if there is future demand, it is a long-term approach. What it also does is create long-term blight, it can absolutely cause real problems for communities when that happens and I question, really, whether one of the great points that comes out is the national policy directives which I really like in his amendment in terms of we recently passed the Town and Country Bill ... is that still waiting consent? That provides for the Council of Ministers to bring forward – if suddenly we see things really taking off and we have insufficient homes – the national policy directives will enable the Council of Ministers to bring forward development so there is no danger that we will run out of capacity, which I think was what the strategic reserves are designed to do. I absolutely appreciate his amendment, but I do not believe that strategic reserves are the appropriate tool to manage this supply and demand in the future, and remember it is a very long-term future that we are looking at, based on the data that we have seen so far.

1585 Unfortunately it does not also necessarily address some of the key points which are not in my motion, but I referred to in my remarks, in terms of the very high number of vacant properties on the Island, which need to be factored in to all of our deliberations on this. I personally very much appreciate the fact that what Mr Baker has done has highlighted the significant opportunity that the national policy directives present the Council of Ministers in terms of managing the potential should we see a big population influx and we have no capacity, but broadly I think vacant properties need to be prioritised as part of that solution. If that is not possible, for whatever reason, then national policy directives are a much better way to do that because what they do not do is you are not blighting communities for decades, and I think that is a real concern with the current situation that we have.

1590 The other aspect, unfortunately, with Mr Baker's amendment, is there are no timescales in it which is, I think, unfortunate, no firm timescales. I also think he said that this is not just a one off, his proposal does actually have a lot of merit in terms of it provides a more continuous process. I do not think anyone would think that I view this just as a one-off correction but it provides me the opportunity just to cover that point because what I would envisage is we would absolutely look at our census data and we should be replanning our strategy every five years, because we get five-year data, why wouldn't we do that? The problem we have now is we produce the Strategic Plan and the numbers before we had the census; that is the nub of this very unfortunate situation which we have, which is why we do not really have public confidence. So I see this as a five-year rolling process, and I know that the Minister for Policy and Reform has plans to make the census a more continuous process, with other sources of data, which I think we would all very much welcome.

1600 So, Hon. Members, those are my main points on the well-intentioned amendment from Mr Baker, but unfortunately I cannot support it.

1605 In terms of the amendment from Mr Hooper, again, this builds on the many fine points that are in Mr Baker's amendment and I think tackle the issue which I am really concerned about in terms of the way that, because the Strategic Plan numbers are flawed, it effectively drives the

Area Plan numbers, so what Mr Hooper is suggesting is that we ensure that the Area Plan reflects up-to-date and realistic forecasts for housing need. The problem we have is it cannot because of the legal straightjacket which I talked about at the beginning of this debate. If I cast your thoughts back to then, I explained that the Strategic Plan numbers are agreed by this Court and can only be amended by this Court and the Area Plan allocations which are driven by those Strategic Plan numbers have to come back to this Court. So unfortunately, as my hon. friend of Council confirmed, this really does not work legally. It is questionable whether it will work, there are a lot of questions on this and my view is that my original motion actually removes that legal concern because if we bring back what we think is a realistic Strategic Plan housing unit allocation then that can be used for this Hon. Court to say actually those figures are overinflated, so that is the crux of this and that is why I think we had to have that debate today.

So hopefully that covers my views on both the amendments, which are very well intentioned. Unfortunately one does not work legally and the other one just does not go far enough in terms of delivering what we really need.

Turning now to Castletown, and I think this was first raised by Mr Cretney, Hon. Member of Council, and he recalled the Castletown Local Area Plan, which fell out of the Southern Area Plan process so it is kind of the Strategic Plan, the Southern Plan and the Castletown Area Plan all driven from the top, and he raised some concerns, which I think were echoed by the comments from Mr Moorhouse and Mr Cregeen. And, in actual fact, I had a good conversation this morning with Richard Ronan, who contacted me directly with his concerns, which was really helpful and I explained that the amendment–

The President: Mr Thomas, are you...?

Mr Thomas: If the speaker would...?

Mr Shimmins: Yes.

Mr Thomas: I am just minded that there is actually a very live planning application to do with this process, so it might be better if we do not talk about that in this Court. That is why I avoided the question in my summing up remarks.

The President: Yes, we must refrain from reference to any live planning application.

Mr Shimmins: Thank you.

I welcome that, I was not going to talk about, and I have never talked about specific sites. I am talking about the overall strategic position, but I welcome that guidance from the Minister.

The reason that I put in the motion to look at the division of the housing between the four Area Plan regions was because, at that time Mr Thomas, or rather the Cabinet Office, had not published the Residential Land Availability Study, if you recall, which he covered in one of his contributions. And the aspect of that is not in any way – and do I see that the motion in any way – impacts on the Castletown Area Plan. What the motion does is we should take account of what is already progressing, so what is progressing in Castletown will progress regardless. But it is important that we look at the overall strategic number, it needs to be updated for a variety of reasons, not just the population increase but actually a lot of things have happened: we have had a lot of building in the west and a lot of building in the south, so that is why that is in.

I absolutely support the Castletown Plan, this in no way interacts with that, so I hope that provides an answer to the Members for Castletown who were concerned about that, but that is certainly not the case and it is not the impact of this motion and in many ways it is very supportive, I would suggest. So I hope that covers the Castletown situation.

Whilst I am on Mr Cretney, he made some excellent points about learning from history (**Mr Thomas:** Hear, hear.) and I thought it just reiterated to me Mr Henderson's comments in

1670 terms of we have been here before and before things have been watered down, they have drifted, things have not happened, and he talked about ambitious projects and he talked about the need to link with climate change. I absolutely agree with both of those sentiments, we need to be ambitious if we are going to support the growth of young, economically active people, which he also mentioned and the regeneration of our urban centres, particularly in Douglas.

1675 Clare Bettison, thank you very much for seconding the motion and raising some good points. Miss Bettison, the Hon. Member for Douglas East, confirmed that the vacant property issue is particularly profound in her constituency – that properties left in poor condition were affecting the morale of the people that are still in the constituency so that is why we need to tackle this because otherwise you end up in a downward spiral, Hon. Members, so I was really interested to hear that. She also raised the issue of public confidence in the Strategic Plan numbers and she said that the vacancy rate is not the rate that we want to be increasing, and I thought that was a
1680 very powerful comment.

Mr Callister, from Onchan, he was very interested in the population trends, which is what this motion really is about in terms of making sure that our plan is aligning to reality. He also pointed out that in Onchan he had seen a number of dilapidated properties and constituents had contacted him about that and how that was impacting the whole area in which they were and so I think that was another call for action on the vacant properties, which provide a great
1685 opportunity for us to provide that growth.

Mr Henderson, thank you very much to the Member of Council. He stated that the wording of the motion does not deviate from Government policy, he felt it was very helpful and he did not think there should be any ‘fierce resistance’, were the words that he used. He recalled when
1690 he had brought his motion and it had been watered down and amended and ultimately he hoped that this motion would not meet the same fate. I share your hopes, Mr Henderson. He also highlighted the impact on our precious natural environment that we get by concreting over the countryside so thank you very much for your contribution.

1695 It was then great to hear from the Chief Minister, it was great to hear his commitment and the commitment of the Council of Ministers to support brownfield sites. He also felt that the Strategic Plan was not about a short-term outlook, I absolutely agree with that. The Strategic Plan needs to be not what happens in the next couple of years, but it also needs to be flexible and the issue that we have is that we are making long-term decisions now on a Strategic Plan which is disconnected from reality and we are going to be making decisions in the short-term on
1700 the east, on the west and on the north, so that is 83% of the population on the Island, we are going to make decisions on in the short-term, and that is really why I think it is so important that we have the correct data.

One point that the Chief Minister made was that he was heartened by the vast amount of evidence that the independent inspector had heard about brownfield sites, the inspector did not say that, so I am sorry if I miscommunicated that. What the inspector said was there is a vast
1705 amount of evidence about the overall population projections being so far ahead of reality, and that was what was driving the Strategic Plan. And, again, he felt that the strategic reserve potentially creates uncertainty. I would argue otherwise, I think it creates blight and I think the national policy directives are a much more effective tool which can be brought forward in a considered manner, should the need arise.
1710

Mr Moorhouse was concerned that the motion would limit choice. I do not believe it does limit choice. Mr Moorhouse also confirmed that vacant properties were an issue in Castletown so I think that was really helpful. We have heard right across the Island that they are an issue so thank you, Mr Moorhouse, for that.

1715 Dr Allinson, Member of the Cabinet Office, thank you very much for your contributions. He also highlighted there are a lot of vacant properties in Ramsey and that is a real concern for people in Ramsey. I absolutely share Dr Allinson’s frustration about the planning issues on commercial development on brownfield land in Ramsey and I really hope that can be resolved. He felt that strategic reserves provide responsiveness and flexibility, no they do not. They blight

1720 and they blight communities for decades. National policy directives are the way to manage this
issue.

Mr Robertshaw, absolutely, his exam questions, I think what he showed with that was that
these things are all interlinked, and in strategic planning it is critically important to get the right
numbers and it must reflect the realities of population growth and of the climate change
1725 emergency, so thank you very much for that contribution.

Mrs Poole-Wilson talked about evidenced-based policy decision making. And that was a
commitment made by the Minister for Policy and Reform in his statement in April 2019, I have it
here, evidence-based policy decision making, 'We have evidence that the population is
projected to be 6,000 less than Strategic Plan numbers', so we must change the Strategic Plan
1730 unit numbers, otherwise we are just not applying evidence-based policy decision making, is the
point that Mrs Poole-Wilson was making.

She also pointed out that the Strategic Plan needed to align to other agreed Government
policies, including the climate change emergency, and that land use and development are going
to be an intrinsic part of that climate change emergency, so we must be able to revisit the
Strategic Plan and it needs to be capable and it needs to be flexible. That is the issue we have
1735 got, at the moment with the Strategic Plan it is very difficult to amend it, it has got to come back
to this Hon. Court.

Mrs Beecroft, thank you for your contributions. You reminded us of a previous trend that
actually many people on the Island used to buy property in town centres that they would 'do
up', for want of a better word, and you said it was sad that we had so many empty houses in
1740 Douglas. I think everyone feels that way. I think that just shows why we need to do something
about it.

You brought some real colour, I think, to the debate and you also joined up some of the
things that Mr Robertshaw was talking about in terms of how in-town development really helps
in terms of the climate change emergency. You raised an interesting point about finance, in
terms of it is much easier to finance a new-build property, you are absolutely right. So if we
recognise that that presents an opportunity, in my view, for policy development to say what can
we do to encourage that trend of people refurbishing, redeveloping in the towns, if that is what we
1745 want. So I think you are highlighting what went on in the past, but also some real opportunities
for us as we look to the, future.

The President: May I remind you, Hon. Member, to address the Court through the Chair, not
to address Members directly.

1755 **Mr Shimmins:** Thank you, Mr President.

Mrs Lord-Brennan highlighted the traffic. We have not talked a great deal about traffic, but I
think all of us would know that our constituents know it is a big issue. It certainly is a big issue
for me and many others, I suspect, in terms of the traffic. You described it as going to be
dramatically terrible and that is another reason why the strategic reserves really ... I question
1760 whether they make sense because what are we going to do, to do that?

You also highlighted that national policy directives were the way to go. I think so.

Thank you to Mrs Caine. You made a number of great points, including now is a good time for
a review of the Strategic Plan. Why would you not review the Strategic Plan before you are
about to conduct Area Plans on 83% of the population? Why would you not do that? That is
1765 what the public cannot understand and that is what my motion addresses. It gets the public back
on side.

She also said strategic reserves will be built on, and I think we know that is true.

Mrs Sharpe was very straightforward and to the point. She said, how many housing units do
we really need? Keep it simple. That is what this motion does.

1770 Mrs Corlett: thank you for your contribution. You highlighted that this is not unreasonable. It is a sensible way forward. So thank you, and we need a plan to reflect the need. I absolutely agree.

1775 Mr Thomas, thank you very much for your insightful contribution. Mr Thomas is supportive of the amendment from Mr Baker. He advised I think that it had been put together with the Cabinet Office Planning team, which I understand was keen to make sure that it was workable.

I do not believe that an urgent review ... He talked about 2021 being an urgent review. I do not believe that is urgent. Urgent is *now*, because we are about to embark on the Area Plans for the East, the West and the North. 2021 is too late.

1780 **The President:** Mr Moorhouse, do you have a point of order?

Mr Moorhouse: Can I seek a point of clarification, please?

The President: If it is to the mover, you can ask him to give way.

1785 **Mr Moorhouse:** Could I seek a point of clarification, please.

Would it be possible for me to ask the Clerk for his advice on whether the opinions you have given would actually have any legal standing, regarding the impact of what would happen in other areas such as Castletown?

1790 **The President:** I do not think it is appropriate to reopen the debate in this way. No. Hon. Member.

Mr Shimmins: Thank you, Mr President.

1795 Let me just try and give you some more reassurance on that occasion, then, because the Castletown Housing Plan has been agreed; the Southern Plan has been agreed. What this motion says is it asks for the Cabinet Office to come back with the reasons for the change in the number of housing units in the Strategic Plan.

1800 So the Southern Plan and Castletown Plan are done. The Strategic Plan is going to drive the Eastern, the Western and the Northern Plans. So I really hope that that provides the reassurance. The reason that the four Area Plan regions were in is about the residential land area survey.

I will keep moving on, because I am conscious that time is moving.

1805 **The President:** Please move on. I think you can take it that you have thanked Members for their contributions. If there are additional points ...

1810 **Mr Shimmins:** There are a couple of additional points I would like to make, if you do not mind, Mr President. (**The President:** Okay.) I do think this is important, so please bear with me, Hon. Members.

1815 Mr Thomas asked if I had read the Cabinet Office papers. He suggested that there were so many, I might not have. I can assure him that I have read the papers, particularly about the PIP 1, paragraph 6.2 on climate change, supporting active travel and reducing cars. That is why I am so strongly opposing the strategic reserves, because they run contrary to the Cabinet Office evidence.

I am very excited to see the brownfield sites update in October. So I am really pleased to hear that, thank you very much, that is coming forward.

1820 Thank you very much, Hon. Members. I think that's me. I would very much appreciate it if you would support the motion. This is to regain the confidence of the people of the Isle of Man in our planning process and it does not deviate from Government policy. It is really important, as we embark on what is likely to be a lengthy Inquiry, and then the Western and the Northern

Plans, that we have the confidence of the people of this Island that we have got our numbers correct.

So I beg to move. Thank you.

1825

The President: Hon. Members, the motion before the Court is at Item 44. To that we have two amendments.

I take the amendment in the name of Mr Hooper first, which amends the amendment of Mr Baker. Mr Hooper's amendment: those in favour, say aye; against, no. The ayes have it.

A division was called for and electronic voting resulted as follows:

In the Keys – Ayes 16, Noes 6

FOR

Dr Allinson
Mr Ashford
Mr Baker
Miss Bettison
Mr Boot
Mrs Caine
Mr Cannan
Mrs Corlett
Mr Cregeen
Mr Harmer
Mr Hooper
Mr Malarkey
Mr Quayle
Mr Skelly
Mr Speaker
Mr Thomas

AGAINST

Mrs Beecroft
Mr Callister
Mr Moorhouse
Mr Peake
Mr Robertshaw
Mr Shimmins

1830

The Speaker: Mr President, 16 for, 6 against.

In the Council – Ayes 2, Noes 6

FOR

Miss August-Hanson
The Lord Bishop

AGAINST

Mr Cretney
Mr Crookall
Mr Henderson
Mrs Lord-Brennan
Mrs Poole-Wilson
Mrs Sharpe

The President: And in the Council, 2 for and 6 against. The amendment therefore fails to carry.

I put Mr Baker's amendment. Those in favour, say aye; against, no. The ayes have it.

A division was called for and electronic voting resulted as follows:

In the Keys – Ayes 13, Noes 9

FOR

Dr Allinson
Mr Ashford
Mr Baker
Mr Boot
Mr Cannan

AGAINST

Mrs Beecroft
Miss Bettison
Mrs Caine
Mr Callister
Mrs Corlett

Mr Cregeen
Mr Harmer
Mr Hooper
Mr Malarkey
Mr Moorhouse
Mr Quayle
Mr Skelly
Mr Thomas

Mr Peake
Mr Robertshaw
Mr Shimmins
Mr Speaker

The Speaker: Mr President, in the Keys, 13 for, 9 against.

In the Council – Ayes 0, Noes 8

FOR
None

AGAINST
Miss August-Hanson
Mr Cretney
Mr Crookall
Mr Henderson
The Lord Bishop
Mrs Lord-Brennan
Mrs Poole-Wilson
Mrs Sharpe

1835 **The President:** In the Council, no votes for and 8 against. The Branches are in disagreement, it fails to carry.

Mr Baker: Mr President, under Standing Orders, may I call for a combined vote?
(Interjections)

1840

The President: At the next sitting?

Mr Baker: Sorry, at the next sitting.

1845

The President: A combined vote – you may.

Mr Baker: Thank you.

The Speaker: That's it.

1850

The President: That halts the voting process, Hon. Members. A combined vote on Mr Baker's motion next sitting.

**45. Civil Service Terms and Conditions –
Structural Review of Civil Service Terms and Conditions Above Executive Officer Level –
Motion not moved**

The Hon Member for Onchan (Ms Edge) to move:

*That the Structural Review of Civil Service Terms and Conditions Above Executive Officer Level
[\[GD No 2018/0034\]](#) be received.*

[Motion not moved.]

**Thanks to staff and officers;
good wishes to Members**

The President: We have completed what has been quite a lengthy two-and-a-half day session, and our final sitting, and of course the end of the current session.

1855 During the parliamentary session, we have made a number of important decisions and passed a number of very significant measures, and assisting us in doing that of course, we must thank our support staff, both in the Tynwald office, parliamentary staff, (**A Member:** Hear, hear.) but also officers and members of the Civil Service on whom we rely for advice and support. On your behalf, I thank them for the support of our work.

1860 Our work, parliamentary and government, continues notwithstanding the sittings are in abeyance for a period. Contrary to widespread belief, the work continues, but nonetheless I trust that you will take the opportunity to recharge your batteries at some point and spend time with your families during this summer period. Thank you, Hon. Members.

1865 Council will now withdraw and leave the House of Keys to transact such business as Mr Speaker may place before it.

The Council withdrew.

House of Keys

The Speaker: Thank you, Hon. Members.

There is no further business to put before the House. We therefore stand adjourned until 15th October at 10 30 in this Chamber.

Thank you.

The House adjourned at 1.32 p.m.