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Opposition did not progress new housing for eight years

It is incredible that the Opposition should have the cheek to start nitpicking at the housing programme of the Government when the present situation stems directly from the failure of the previous GSD administration to provide houses for our people in a timely manner.

This Government inherited a combined waiting list of 1415 people when we were elected in December 2011. When the GSD came into office there were 400 people on the housing waiting list. Therefore the number of people on the list more than trebled during their time in office. This happened because in their first two terms they did not lay a brick to house people on the waiting list. It was not until after the first eight years that they took this problem seriously. It is therefore incredible that the Opposition should seek to criticise the record of this Government after only two years when they did precious little in two whole terms. This was even acknowledged publicly by Mr Caruana himself during the count for the 2003 general election.

Moreover, it will be recalled that expensive, luxury developments went up all over Gibraltar under the GSD before they moved on with more affordable or low-cost housing.

In contrast, this Government has made housing our people a priority and have moved on this front first. Three housing schemes have gone out to tender and have been awarded. The first at the Aerial Farm site is for 564 flats and construction is already well under way. The second project at the Coach Park site has already been allocated and this is for a further 380 flats of which about 60 will be for pensioner rental. A further pensioner's block of 72 flats will also be constructed in Europort Avenue. This makes a total of 1016 flats progressed in barely two years in Government, compared with the poor record of the first two GSD administrations which did not come anywhere near this in eight years. The Opposition would do well to maintain a prudent silence on this issue next time.

Commenting on the matter, the Minister for Housing Paul Balban said:

“In their rush to criticise the Government, the Opposition have added up the number of flats wrongly (564 and 380 do not make 994) and have forgotten to mention the Europort Avenue housing scheme completely. They have also ignored that not all the flats in the Coach Park scheme will be for sale. The Government has already announced that there will be a block specifically for rental by elderly persons. It is quite amazing how the Opposition can get basic facts and figures wrong even when these have been explained by the Government in public time and again. This does not inspire much confidence in their ability to get anything right. They have also conveniently forgotten that 450 people have already been allocated a flat since 9 December 2011.

What the Opposition cannot do is to conveniently airbrush away their dismal record in Government which saw the waiting list multiply by three and little of substance done to house our people in eight years. This Government, in sharp contrast, has made housing our number one priority.

The manifesto commitment that the Government has, as everyone knows, is to house everyone who was in the housing list and on the pre-list on the day that we were elected. This we are confident that we will do.”