

STATEMENT BY THE GSLP/LIBERAL OPPOSITION

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The refusal of the Government to accept political responsibility for the delays to Waterport Terraces including Albert Risso House for the elderly is totally unacceptable. Given that the developer of the project is a Government-owned company, the plain fact is that the blame for the delays must rest squarely on their shoulders.

It will be recalled that Waterport Terraces was supposed to be completed in three phases from January to June 2007. The completion dates were pushed back several times in newsletters sent by the developers and in answers to questions in Parliament. On the eve of the 2007 general election, the Government, in order to win votes, announced unrealistic completion dates and gave the impression that there would be widespread compensation to the purchasers for the delays. The dates were not met and after the election it was clarified that not all purchasers would be entitled to compensation. In 2008, the Government said that completion was expected in the first quarter of 2009. This did not happen either and the completion dates were moved further and further back.

In the latest information available, in answer to questions from Shadow Housing Minister Charles Bruzon, the Government told the last meeting of Parliament that Albert Risso House was expected to be completed around June 2010 and that there were three blocks at Waterport Terraces which had not yet been handed over by the contractor. The blocks in question comprised a total of 92 flats, where completion was expected at the end of this month.

The Chief Minister again showed a flippant disregard and a lack of humanity and respect for those persons who are waiting for a flat and he refused to accept any political responsibility for the delays. Mr Caruana told Parliament, when pressed by Mr Bruzon, that although his responsibilities “at the head of the Government of Gibraltar are very deep and wide and varied, laying bricks on building sites of which the Government is the developer, has not yet been explained to me as one of the Chief Minister’s or any Minister’s responsibility.” It should be obvious that being asked to take political responsibility is not asking Mr Caruana to go down and lay the bricks himself, although nobody would be surprised to see him down at the site laying bricks since he has boasted that he personally supervised this building site as if he were the clerk of works.

The Opposition consider that it is an insult to every person who has waited for a flat for all this time for the Chief Minister of Gibraltar to show such a cold disregard for their concerns. It will be recalled that Mr Caruana is also on record

as having said that he “has never made any promise, nor even a commitment, to any purchaser about any completion date.” On that occasion he then attempted to redefine the meaning of the word “promise”.

Commenting on the matter, Shadow Housing Minister Charles Bruzon said:

“It is wrong and inappropriate for Mr Caruana to wash his hands of the delays and of the problems that this has created for many people in such an insensitive and high-handed manner. There are many of them who have entered into bridging loans and who have had to continue paying month after month a sum of money which will not count towards the final mortgage. There are others who have had to place their lives on hold while they waited for the completion of their flats.

It saddens me to see that, instead of showing some humility all that Mr Caruana seems to be able to do is mock the plight of the affected persons by saying that he has not made any promises and that it is not his job to lay the bricks.”

ENDS