



A LETTER FROM ALDERNEY

*By the former States of Jersey Deputy
and Planning Chief Officer, JOHN YOUNG,
now on a work contract in Alderney*

LIVING and working in Alderney is to travel back 50 years.

St Anne's densely packed historic cottages and narrow cobbled streets have little changed since Queen Victoria's day. Among them stands the Cathedral of the Channel Islands, St Anne's Church, designed by Sir Gilbert Scott. Historic buildings and traditional shop fronts line both sides of Victoria Street, which rivals even St Aubin. Here we find the butcher, baker, florist, fishmonger, post office and chemist, but no UK chain stores. It is a living street; people shop and take time to chat. Shops still close for lunch, handwritten signs like 'open 11- ish' or 'phone me if you want anything' are on display everywhere. There are no parking charges or traffic congestion.

Alderney's winter population of 1,800 people rises to 3,000 when second home owners return and visitors in the short summer season bring the Island to life. Alderney Week in August surpasses Jersey's Battle with its wackiness and sheer family fun. Its week-long carnival of events provides something for everybody. Some people call it madness but it bonds the whole community.

Alderney's environment is almost totally unspoilt with breathtaking seascapes. Burhou Island is home to its puffins. One of the largest gannet colonies in Europe can be seen and heard from the cliffs close offshore. All green zone land outside St Anne is protected from any development by law

and much of it is publicly accessible. Alderney, with its tracks across the open heaths and wild cliffs is ideal for walking along with fishing, sailing, cycling and outdoor pursuits. With no light pollution Alderney's night skies are heavenly.

Victorian forts dominate the coastline. Some are used as homes or holiday retreats; others stand as huge economic opportunities. Occupation structures are literally everywhere and many have been put to practical use. Lager Stylt, one of four forced labour camps in Alderney was the only SS concentration camp sited on British soil. Its ugly concrete gate pillars still stand carrying only a modest plaque serving as a testament to a very dark period in the Island's history. It will never be known for certain just how many people died in Alderney during the occupation. At least 400 people lost their lives here but other sources suggest a greater number. Unlike Jersey and Guernsey there were no local witnesses to tell the

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tale. Tragically, after Liberation many Russian prisoners who survived forced labour here ended their days in Stalin's Siberian gulags.

The Island currently faces huge economic challenges after the recession. Air fares have risen beyond many Islanders' pockets. Alderney's lifeline links to Guernsey and Southampton have been reduced to a minimal level; the link with Jersey is no more. With no ferry service serving Alderney, its population has declined in recent years and visitor numbers reduced. Many Islanders are highly critical about 'Aurigny, the Islanders' airline'.



Businesses viability has suffered. Some shops and hotels in St Anne are unoccupied but opportunity abounds and offers excellent value for prospective purchasers, compared to Jersey. There are no barriers to incomers setting up businesses or buying or leasing property in Alderney. New residents are welcomed, be they workers, retirees or affluent second home owners.

The States of Alderney is working hard to turn around the Island's economic fortunes but Alderney is dependent on Guernsey and taxes are paid to Guernsey. Political members in both Islands are working to provide incentives and encourage opportunities. Alderney is already well ahead of Jersey in

renewable energy. The new FAB (France, Alderney, Britain) cable route is now being surveyed in advance of construction in 2017 and is due to connect into the tidal power project expected to start generating power from the Alderney race early in the next decade, bringing financial benefits to the Island.

Having lived and worked in Alderney since last May as Alderney's Planning Officer with the task of reforming the Island's planning system, my experience has given me a different insight into resolving Jersey's problems. Retirement does not seem to apply here; people's skills are put to use well into their 80's. Alderney is resilient; it makes best use of its scarce resources and lives within its means.

I am even more convinced that greater inter-Island cooperation is essential to the future of all the Channel Islands. I hope in my further letters to report on these policy insights and my progress with planning reforms. In the meantime please do come up to visit our Northern Isle, despite the travel problems. Trust me - it is well worth the effort.

