



JERSEY'S ENVIRONMENT -

Who is its friend? Hard to find one in government, in the opinion of JOHN YOUNG

ENVIRONMENTAL policy generally tends to mirror our economy. In boom times when resources allow, politicians support the environment. In a recession, the environment is first in line for budget cuts. Jersey is no different. Today our environment does not warrant a mention in the Council of Ministers strategic plan. Finance and the economy dominate. Jersey is changing irrevocably.

During the 1980's boom an environmental adviser was established at the heart of Government to develop sustainable government policies. The States approved an Environmental charter. The former IDC role was expanded to include responsibility for the environment. Resources were released to build a team to introduce best environmental practice and set up a new regulatory framework.

Hearts and mind were won in support of our environment. In 2002, a new Island Plan set strong new planning policies. A new planning law was passed with stronger powers. The agricultural and land control functions moved to the department from the agriculture department, as did water resources from public works. New legislation for water resource management, water pollution, and wildlife protection followed. As the first Council of Ministers took up office, hopes were high that Jersey would put its special environment first.

Sadly that promise has been lost. Things started to go wrong as Jersey replaced Committees with Ministers. Despite the poacher/gamekeeper conflict, public services and the environment roles were merged, only to be unmerged a year later. The States ducked the vital question of how one Minister who was responsible for planning and development could at the same time protect the environment. The fudge of having an assistant minister with no teeth still remains despite several States debates.

Today, planning decisions have been delegated to Planning officers and a States appointed Planning Committee, which incredibly has no part in setting planning policy. The assistant minister role is even more diluted, as the two politicians share other roles. We have no political champion for the environment. The damaging consequences for Jersey are now becoming very apparent.

Conserving our historic town, its history and culture is vital, not only to town residents and businesses but to developing Tourism. With 25% of Jersey's land area now developed and with uncontrolled population growth, it is no wonder that our historic town of St Helier is under such pressure to accommodate

high density housing development. The recent cultural strategy produced by Jersey Heritage bemoaned the loss of heritage buildings and damage to the streetscape. The States themselves through SOJDC promote a finance-led alternative vision for St Helier, wall-to-wall offices, sterile streets and fast food joints at the waterfront. This is far removed from the Andrews Downie waterfront vision of a world class waterfront in 1990.

The States show no sign of any environmental policy initiatives. The energy policy in 2014 identified the huge opportunities available for renewable energy, energy conservation and electric vehicles. There are no signs of any implementation. Town traffic is close to gridlock; the air in town is polluted by toxic vehicle fumes, now similar to UK cities. We need to face the real costs of the traffic borne by the environment. Old vehicles are the worst polluters; our vehicle population now exceeds the number of people in Jersey.

Cheap motoring is no longer sustainable. Increased charges can finance public transport. Will the town road network come to a complete halt before we face the reality?

The recent state of the environment report was truly shocking, reporting red lights to the nitrate level in our water supplies which are the highest in Europe, ground water pollution from pesticides, and heavy metal run off from urban areas. There is a huge decline of our wildlife through loss of habitat. Our recycling of waste falls well short of our capability.

We can no longer afford to take our environment for granted. At the last by-election there was no focus on green policy issues. Understandably the short term crisis we face took priority.

But all of us need to look to the longer term future of Jersey. We must be open to more radical policies which have long term environmental benefit. We have to control our population. We need States priorities to give greater priority to environment.

We all need to ensure the environment we pass on to future generations is at least as good as that we have enjoyed.

