

THE ULTIMATE IN SMALL GOVERNMENT

From our own correspondent – **JOHN YOUNG**, formerly Chief Planning Officer in Jersey and then a St Brelade States Deputy. He has since been ‘Mr Planning’ in Alderney. Here is his dispatch from our more distant sister island to the north

ALDERNEY'S public sector is the ultimate in small government. Guernsey, as required by the Crown agreement, provides some revenue support to Alderney and funding for its school, hospital and airport. However public spending of more than £100,000 in Alderney needs approval from Guernsey. Thankfully, the Island has a community of volunteer organisations who provide many of its essential services. The community has needed to adapt to life within very limited resources.

After being devastated in the Second World War, Alderney recovered economically as a result of post war tourism. Like the other Channel Islands, tourism has since declined but Alderney doesn't have a large finance sector to fill the gap.

Since Guernsey acquired *Aurigny*, the Island's air links have reduced and their reliability deteriorated. The airline is loss making and fares have increased beyond the reach of many

islanders. Direct links to Jersey were severed. Capital investment in the airport to restore and widen Alderney's runway to improve service reliability is long overdue. Sadly, the Island is low down the Guernsey priority list. Consequently its resident population has declined to an unsustainable level.

Through necessity a high proportion of older residents are economically active, but its dependency ratio is high. Guernsey housing law discourages Alderney's young people. Those who are attend secondary school in Guernsey and have strong family connections are unable to live and work there when they leave school, despite them paying Guernsey tax. They either accept the limited job opportunities and lower earnings in Alderney or they leave for the UK.

Guernsey taxes also work against Alderney. It imposes TRP property tax and a high rate of stamp duty on property sales

in Alderney despite the depressed economy. The threshold of 90 days tax residence means that the third of Alderney houses, which are owned by second home owners, remain empty for most of the year, making it more difficult for local businesses to survive. Consequently local house prices have fallen severely. Many business and hotels have closed or are up for sale.

Despite these adversities, there are positive signs that Alderney's economy is set to improve once capital investment in its essential infrastructure happens and its transport links are improved; big efforts are being made by the community to arrest the decline. The States of Alderney are working to restore lost sea and air transport links to Jersey, France and UK. They are encouraging new residents and businesses to take up the many opportunities which offer extremely good value. Alderney's door is wide open to all.

There is big enthusiasm for the proposed new air service to Jersey which is planned to commence in June. There was excitement at the sea trial of a small ferry to Guernsey and Jersey and hopes prematurely raised when the possible acquisition of a vessel serving St Helena surfaced as a possibility.

Although dependent on improved air transport links, Fort Tourgis offers a restoration project on a truly magnificent coastal site. There is the opportunity for a marina and associated development in Braye Harbour widening its already strong appeal to yachtsmen. Arup have recently recognized the importance of Alderney's unique fortifications and heritage and recommended the Island seeks world heritage site status. It could offer Alderney the opportunity potential to transform local tourism.

Alderney has huge renewable energy resources and licensed its sea bed for utility scale exploitation. Estimates of gross yield are measured in many hundreds of millions of pounds. At the present the future of the France Alderney Britain cable (FAB), one of the EU funded of-gen energy interconnector projects, is yet to be decided by the States amidst strong local concerns, but in the longer term when the tidal technology matures, the potential benefit of its tidal energy resource in the Alderney race is likely to increase.

Despite the difficulty of Alderney achieving capital funding from Guernsey for the infrastructure investment it so desperately needs, the quality of life in Alderney offers compensation. The Island environment is unspoilt and spectacularly beautiful, its wildlife incredible and its heritage world class. Its people are welcoming and friendly. Everything has a human scale and its unique relaxed way of life redolent of 1950's Britain, is uplifting to the soul.

Having spent much of my last two years working with the people of Alderney and witnessed their resilience and adaptability, I have a lasting impression of a small community able to live within its means and a strong belief in putting people first, lessons which Jersey could do well to follow. It would also be good for Guernsey to reflect on its stewardship of Alderney to ensure the Island's long term future. The historic divisions which for so long have reinforced insular jealousies should be put aside by all our politicians. They need to work together more cooperatively on the huge post-Brexit challenges which face all Channel Islanders.

