

Concern about sustainability is deep-rooted and here to stay

After completing two terms as Deputy for St Brelade No 1, during which time he spent four years as Environment Minister, John Young is stepping away from the States Assembly. He spoke to **James Jeune** about some of his eco achievements – and what remains for future generations to accomplish

'ONE of the most impressive things I've found is when you go to schools – and I have been to a lot of schools and talked to secondary- and primary-school children – is that they get it. They absolutely understand it; they are passionate about it and they are educating their parents,' said former Environment Minister John Young, speaking from Gorey on a sunny day.

Although the outgoing minister believes there is still work to be done, he also thinks the public – and young Islanders

in particular – are conscious of Jersey's environmental goals.

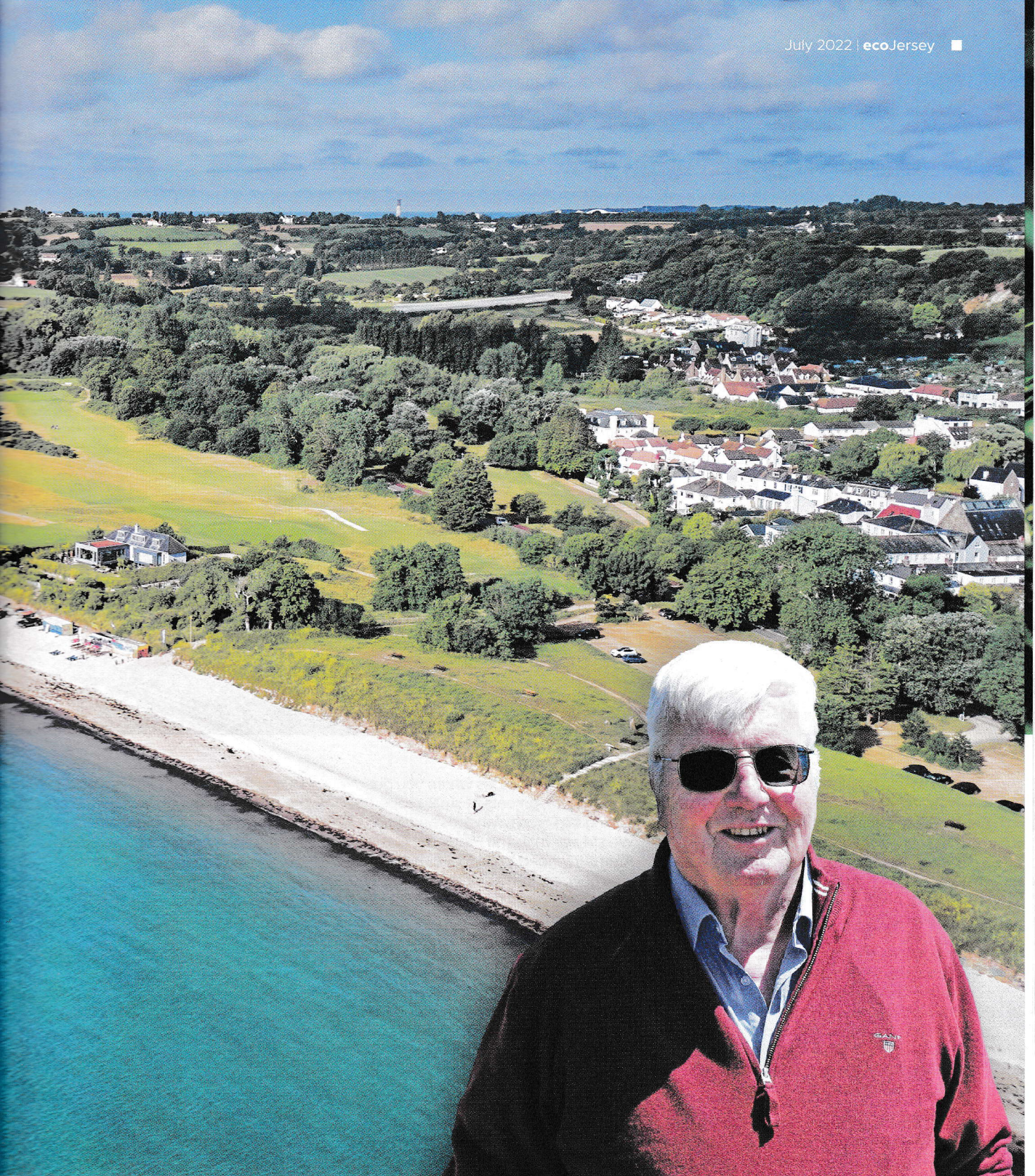
Mr Young, who has decided not to seek re-election this year, said that several foundations, which could help the next government to achieve a sustainable future for the Island, had been put in place.

One such foundation, he explained, was the Bridging Island Plan – a four-year strategy approved by the States Assembly in March, which contains a wide

range of policies governing development and environmental protections.

'The Island Plan was the number-one thing; it had to be replaced. It was well overdue and the policies were not right in a whole suite of areas so, first of all, I set about winning the resources to do that job because I knew it wasn't a small task,' he said.

Indeed, the former Deputy took on a significant workload both during and in the lead-up to the Bridging Island Plan



debate, something which many of his fellow States Members acknowledged in their closing speeches at the time.

'From August last year until March this year, I worked 100% on the Island Plan. Not a day went by when I didn't have meetings with officers, with stakeholders and with others about it. It was really hard,' he said.

A strong feature of the debate was the constant back and forth between parish representatives over fields put forward – and in some cases withdrawn – for development, each of which required extensive consideration and research. ►



► 'When you fly into Jersey, what do you see? Very much a generally undeveloped landscape of open countryside and coast but you also see quite defined, clear pockets of settlements. Therefore, anybody looking at that would say development has been controlled,' said Mr Young.

'In contrast, if you look to our sister island, you will not see that. You will see pepper-potting of developments – what they call ribbon development' – all over. What we have been able to do is work to preserve the areas of the countryside [with] policies like the Green Zone and Coastal National Park.

'The Island Plan, in my view, puts in place a framework of policies that do support looking after our environment,' he added.

One such policy, which Mr Young said he had worked 'really hard' to achieve, was the new Protected Coastal Area designation, which provides the highest level of protections for landscape and seascape character and encompasses the Coastal National Park.

'Now there was a bit of a debate and argument about that in the run-up. Originally, it was launched as an extension of the Coastal National Park. Of course, that's the area where the highest degree of planning controls bite. That is very restrictive on what people can develop,' he said.

'Yet we still find places where you get mega-developments of small properties turning into gross mansions and so on. We still see that. The Protected Coastal Area is intended to deal with that. That area now is one-third of the Island's land area and I think, in time, people will see the importance of that.'

Another strategy approved during Mr Young's stint as Environment Minister was the Carbon Neutral Roadmap, a multi-million-pound delivery plan intended to guide the Island towards carbon neutrality by 2030 and align with global targets of being net zero by 2050.

'It's a massive achievement,' he said. 'We have set some clear policy objectives, we've set the mechanics with timelines and money and agreed who is responsible for it,' he added.

Included within the roadmap are policies to incentivise the purchase of electric vehicles, ban the sale of new petrol and diesel cars and small vans in 2030 and prohibit the installation of new oil, gas and coal boilers from 2026.

And while Jersey is yet to achieve its long-term goal of sustainability, Mr Young – who was once chief officer of the former Planning and Environment Department and also worked for three years as Alderney's planning officer – noted that the public appeared to be on board with the concept.

'During the work on climate change, I think the citizens' assembly was very successful, and I have seen real engagement with this subject across all different sectors. Businesses are factoring it into their business strategies and community groups are seeking to engage and do things,' he said.

'I think the message for the longer term is that, at some point, Jersey will need to think about living within its means as an island and not try to reinvent itself as some grand economic powerhouse. You can't, unfortunately, detach the issue of the balance of economic growth, economic activity and the environment without considering the taxation systems,' he added.

Regardless of who takes up the position of Environment Minister, or the pressing nature of other issues – such as the cost of living – that will need political attention, Mr Young remains confident that sustainability will remain on the agenda.

'These things are deep-rooted and they are not going to go away. Yes, there are economic pressures but we have got to learn to live within our means,' he said.

'It's a long-term goal and that's what I shall be watching. I feel very positive about the future and believe that people who live in Jersey absolutely love Jersey, and I think that is so important.'