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PRESS RELEASE

No: 306/2013

Date: 7th May 2013

Opposition attitude to Sunborn exposes their political hypocrisy

The comments made by the Opposition regarding the plans to locate a luxury Sunborn floating hotel in Ocean Village reveal a degree of inconsistency and political hypocrisy which is beyond belief.

It should be made clear at the outset that what was a done deal for very many years was the planning policy of the GSD Government where meetings were conducted in secret, the agenda was not published, the minutes were not published, objectors had no right to object and where Government projects were not presented or discussed by the Development and Planning Commission at all. In fact, the public and the Town Planning department only found out what was happening when building or demolition works commenced.

Secondly, the Opposition have questioned the impact of the proposed floating hotel project on the local hotel industry. This newly found concern is totally inconsistent with what they did in office. When they were in Government they once trumpeted that there were seven hotels in the pipeline and that negotiations were advanced with two of them on the old yacht club site and next to the multi-storey car park in Devil's Tower Road. They never explained the impact of their policy of seven new hotels on the existing local hotel industry. Moreover, as recently as last year in a meeting of Parliament, the Opposition were still pressing the Government on the status of the new hotel projects that we had inherited from them.

Thirdly, the Sunborn floating hotel went to planning as a Government project because there was an argument to be had as to whether a ship in a marina in Gibraltar needed to go before the Development and Planning Commission at all. The existing use of the site is a marina used for the berthing of vessels. The berthing of a floating hotel, which is a vessel, is not materially different to the berthing of any other large ship. The use of the vessel as a hotel would also not be dissimilar to any other large vessel with its associated servicing, crew movements and occupants. The Government took the policy decision, despite these arguments, that the vessel should go before the Development and Planning Commission in the interests of an open and public process.

Fourthly, this is not the first time that a floating hotel docks in Gibraltar. It will be recalled that under the previous administration a floating hotel was used to provide accommodation for the international IAAF 100km road race. The hotels complained at the time that the then GSD Government had not advised them of their intention to bring and pay for this vessel.

Fifthly, the Sunborn is a privately owned floating hotel project which will be anchored in a private marina which the Government is helping to facilitate at a logistic level because we see the benefit of bringing a £150 million investment to Gibraltar that will result in the creation of over 150 jobs.

The Minister with responsibility for Tourism Neil Costa said:

“This is a super-luxury five/six star hotel project. There is nothing like it in Gibraltar where the highest offering is four star. It is clear that the owners of the vessel are targeting a different sector of the tourism market that Gibraltar does not enjoy at present. Given that it was their policy in Government to attract more hotels to Gibraltar, and that they once spoke of seven new hotels, the Opposition should welcome this private initiative and stop moaning about it.”

Commenting on the matter, the Acting Chief Minister, and Minister with responsibility for planning Dr Joseph Garcia said:

“It is obvious that the Opposition continue to operate on a mantra of “do as I say and not as I did” as if they had never been in Government before. It is inevitable that everything they say now will be measured against their own actions in the past. They continue to run with a string of circular and often contradictory arguments on almost every conceivable issue and appear intent in ignoring the fact that in so doing they are often being critical of their own actions in Government. The Government will continue to remind people of this inconsistency and will continue to implement our policies and our electoral commitments as well. We have a duty to do both of these things together.”