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New developments show Gibraltar has become a victim of its own success

It is a bit rich for the Opposition to complain about the pace of development in Gibraltar when many of the construction projects currently underway were authorised by them when they were in office. Indeed, after the present administration was elected in 2011 we had to negotiate with developers to get them to reduce the scale, the height and the massing of projects which had been pre-agreed with the GSD.

This is once again typical of the attitude of the Opposition who continue to jump onto every conceivable bandwagon without giving serious thought to the consequences of what they are now saying. It is a blatant case of do as I say not as I do.

It is true that development and construction will cause disruption to those in the vicinity of the site. Sadly, Gibraltar is a very small place and this impact is often greater than that felt in a larger country.

However, the fact that foreign and Gibraltarian developers want to invest their money in Gibraltar is a sign of the confidence that exists in our country despite the impact of our departure from the European Union. This in turn generates employment and economic growth which is of benefit to everyone. Gibraltar has become a victim of its own success.

This Government negotiated with the developers of King's Wharf and the developers of the Mid-Town development in order to reduce the scale and the height of these projects, even though these matters had already been approved by the GSD themselves when they were in Government. This included getting the developers to return part of the plot in order to provide a public car park at Mid-Town, and a waterfront promenade open to the public at King's Wharf. It is therefore hypocritical for the Opposition to now say that there should be more areas open to the public and then to have done precisely the reverse when they had the chance.

In addition to this, there were agreements concluded between the GSD Government and the Ocean Village group in respect of a number of developments in different locations.

The reclaimed land between Eastern Beach and Catalan Bay has been earmarked for development by successive Governments of Gibraltar for high-rise development on the basis that this is outside the old town and the city walls. The proposal for the development of this site was known as Sovereign Bay in 2005 and as Bluewater in 2015. It is therefore absurd that Mr Hammond should criticise an Expressions of Interest for a development in the south-western corner of the plot which has been conditioned as low-rise when they intended to develop the area with higher buildings!



It is also quite astonishing that the Opposition should claim that there is a lack of an overall plan. The overall plan that exists is the 2009 Development Plan which was put in place by them when they were the Government. The guidelines for the development of Gibraltar, including the old town, are contained in that document. It is particularly relevant to recall that the old town was particularly neglected and abandoned by the GSD. In the last seven years, buildings and sites in the old town have been put out to tender for redevelopment and this has led to the renewal and rebirth of different areas. An obvious example is Police Barracks, which has been transformed from a rat-infested eyesore into sensitively developed homes for many people. The Government has itself led by example with the refurbishment of the old St Bernard's Hospital and its conversion into two new schools. Government estates and dwellings have also been given a facelift. Given the condition of the Upper Town and the difficult access, this is a vast project which will take decades. It does not make any sense for the Opposition to object to such urban renewal when this will benefit the community at large in the long run.

Mr Hammond has also been critical of Government's own projects at Europa Point. He may probably not even be aware that when his party was in Government they negotiated for an iconic restaurant at Europa Point which would have obscured the views from the platform. This Government did away with those plans and provided an open area and interpretation centre instead. The Government also established Commonwealth Park as an open green area in the centre of town and a further open area in Governor's Parade which the previous administration had earmarked for a building.

The Government has concentrated on building affordable homes for our people, in providing new school buildings for our children, in constructing a new Primary Care Centre for our elderly and infirm, and in new sporting facilities which will be a legacy beyond the Island Games. The Opposition should tell the public which of these they would have sacrificed - new homes, new schools, new health centre or new sporting facilities. They cannot be all things to all men.