

STATEMENT BY THE GSLP/LIBERAL OPPOSITION 110/2005
16 November 2005

Shadow Minister for Culture The Hon Steven Linares

In a statement yesterday the Government announced that what they described as the “extensive refurbishment” of Ince’s Hall Theatre has now been completed. This is precisely one of the things that they were urged to do years ago by many people instead of embarking on the expensive financial fiasco of the Theatre Royal project, which was one of the Government’s flagship developments.

The public will recall that what was planned as a renovation and a restoration ended up being a practically total demolition of the Theatre Royal. Today all there is to show for the millions of pounds that have been spent is a hole in the ground.

Despite the Government’s decision to abandon the Theatre Royal project from the form that it was originally intended to take, the costs continue to mount up on two fronts.

Firstly, there were complaints of technical problems with the buildings adjacent to the hole in the ground. The Government confirmed at the last meeting of the House of Assembly, in response to a question from Shadow Minister for Culture Steven Linares that they have appointed the structural engineering section of the Technical Services Department to regularly monitor the condition of the site. They explained that any works deemed necessary are then instructed through No.6 Convent Place and carried out by GJBS which maintain the site in a clean order. Although no fixed sum of money is allocated for this, there is no doubt that more funds have had to be spent.

The second on-going expense of the project is the rent, which continues to be paid regardless of the fact that the work on the site has been stopped. This was originally £60,000 a year, which comes to £5000 a month. However, the last Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure show that the rent has gone up by 10% to £66,000. This also means that more money is being spent even though the project itself has been halted.

Commenting on the matter, Shadow Minister for Culture Steven Linares said: “The Theatre Royal has turned out to be a financial black hole into which public money continues to be poured. The site stands as testimony to the lack of proper planning and the financial mismanagement of the GSD Government.”

Steven Linares added: “The Government did not listen to words of caution regarding the Theatre Royal project. They said it was a “vision thing”. Mr Caruana’s “vision” has cost Gibraltar millions of pounds to date and the bill continues to increase. It would have been much more sensible to have refurbished Ince’s Hall Theatre from the outset without having embarked on the Theatre Royal folly.”

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