

STATEMENT BY THE GSLP/LIBERAL OPPOSITION 37/2007 21 March 2007

It is clear that the Government are intent in destroying the character of Gibraltar with the construction of multi-storey buildings in the wrong location. The Opposition are surprised to note that a planning permit has been issued to Lord Napier Mews Ltd for the construction of an eight storey office complex in the car park next to the sports stadium in Bayside Road. This company has links with the Ocean Village group.

This goes to the heart of the criticisms of the planning policy of the Government that the Opposition has been making. There will now be an office block adjacent to a sports centre, opposite a school, next to marina and near a number of new residential developments. The continued absence of a development plan with proper zoning of land use means that the ad hoc approach to planning on the part of the Government continues unabated.

In October last year, the Government told Parliament that even though this development had been advertised in the media, the developers had at the time not yet made a formal request to seek their permission to proceed with the scheme. The consent of the Government as the landlord was required prior to the project being placed before the development and planning commission.

The Government also made it known, in answer to questions from Shadow Minister for Trade and Industry Dr Joseph Garcia that there had been 48 letters of representation from the public in response to this project. They also said that the Government needed to undergo a negotiation regarding the premium for the site so therefore they were not willing to consider it as at present. The Minister added that there was a will to consent in principle but maybe not in its present format or presentation.

The issue was raised again at the last meeting of Parliament where the Minister advised that a planning permit was in the process of being issued following amendments to the original scheme. The amendments included a reduction from nine storeys to eight fronting Bayside Road and the means of access were also revised.

The Opposition find it difficult to comprehend how the Government allowed the developers to advertise a project on a plot of Government land, even though they did not have planning permission or landlord's consent, and had not even had the courtesy to make a formal request before the adverts appeared.

This confirms the widely held perception that Gibraltar is a free for all in development terms.

It is worth pointing out that owing to the dust pollution that was coming from one of the building sites in Bayside Road this week, a classroom in Bayside

Comprehensive School had to be evacuated. The Government now want to have another building site directly opposite the school.

It is also very unusual that having not been willing to consider a nine storey building, the Government is now perfectly content with an eight storey structure. First, the visual impact of the structure will be the same whether there are eight storeys or nine. Secondly, the building will remove one of the last large open areas in that part of Gibraltar, following the construction of the Tradewinds and Ocean Village developments further down the road.

The Government are responsible for transforming Gibraltar into a concrete jungle.

ENDS