

STATEMENT BY THE GSLP/LIBERAL OPPOSITION

76/2007 23 July 2007

EMBARGOED UNTIL MONDAY 23 JULY 2007

The Opposition has received representations from traders who are concerned that the Ocean Village development will have a negative impact on business in Main Street once it is complete. It is understood that one of the aims of the project is to provide an all-in-one shopping and eating experience for tourists which will involve specifically targeting coach passengers.

This follows a further application for planning permission by the Ocean Village group for the construction of commercial premises with residential on top on the site of an existing car showroom at Waterport. The location of the proposed development is known as CP1301 and 1301A.

The businesses that will set up in the new commercial development, in addition to those setting up in the other premises that already exist, will probably enjoy exemption from trade licensing. If that were the case, existing traders will have little or no notice of what businesses intend to set up in the area or of what products they intend to sell. Moreover, it is clear that the location is in a direct line from the access into Gibraltar by coach and cruise tourists.

The Opposition has long been expressing concern about the continuing fall in that the number of coaches that come to Gibraltar and the number of coach visitors. There were 14,763 coaches that came into Gibraltar in the year 2000. This was an average of 1230 a month. The 9522 coaches that came to Gibraltar last year, compares very unfavourably with the 2000 figure. In 2006 the average was 794 coaches a month.

In fact, the number of tourist coaches coming into Gibraltar has fallen every year since 2000 and the latest figures which have been made available to the Opposition show that they continue to fall. The inability of the Government to tackle this problem reflects the lack of importance which they seem attach to it and means that the existing coach tourist cake is getting smaller, and that the plan now is for this smaller cake to be shared between more businesses.

If this were not bad enough, it is obvious from statements made by Ocean Village that the objective is for coach tourists to use the boardwalk that has been constructed behind Watergardens in order to access the commercial facilities that will be made available in that area. This means, for example, that a proportion of tourists who presently walk in front of Watergardens, and past the commercial premises there, will now be encouraged to walk behind Watergardens thereby completely avoiding the existing businesses.

The Opposition understand that there is a place for new commercial developments, but care must be taken to protect established traders who have been doing business in Gibraltar for many years. The Government, through their control over the planning process, have shown little or no interest in protecting those people who have been the backbone of the commercial economy of Gibraltar over so many years.

ENDS