

STATEMENT TO BE MADE BY THE PRESIDENT OF THE ENVIRONMENT AND PUBLIC SERVICES COMMITTEE ON 23rd NOVEMBER 2004

Just over three months ago, a Working Group was formed, under the chairmanship of the Assistant Director, Design and Conservation, to review all of the coastal historic fortifications, towers, defensive structures, guardhouses and other pre-Second World War structures which are in the public ownership, with the objective of making an assessment of their present condition, the estimated cost of remedial/refurbishment works, their value to the Island and their future use. Special emphasis is being placed on their value to the tourism industry, either directly as structures suitable for holiday lets or event venues, or, indirectly as heritage sites with an historic significance which brings value to the Island generally.

The Group has representatives from Tourism, Public Services, Planning, Historic Buildings, Property Services and Jersey Heritage who are each assessing these buildings and structures from their own departmental perspective. It is estimated that the initial work of this Group will take another six months to complete before informed recommendations can be made for their future use.

Icho Tower has been leased to members of the same families for about 80 years. Seymour Tower has been leased to members of a separate family for over 40 years. The most recent leases were for nine years terminating on 28th September 2004, and included the lessees having responsibility for keeping the premises in good tidy order and for the maintenance and repair of the interior including the exterior roofs and inside faces of the top parapet.

Whilst Seymour Tower has been repaired in recent years, Icho Tower is in poor condition with an estimated £60,000 plus needed for repair works. There are currently only very limited funds available within the Public Services Department for the maintenance of all the coastal historic buildings in its administration and part of the Review Group's task will be to identify ways of ensuring, either through public or private means how these structures can be maintained in reasonable condition for future generations. This may involve sponsorship, sale or giving longer lease agreements to enable lessees some security for major capital investment in significant renovation work.

With this in mind, the Director of Property Services made the decision, under powers delegated to him by the Committee for the approval of certain land and property transactions, to extend the existing leases for one year at the existing rent pending the recommendations of the Working Group, which will report to the Committee some time next year. They were also approved by the Treasurer of the States under delegated powers granted by the Finance and Economics Committee.

These decisions, along with other delegated approvals, are reported to the Committee on a regular monthly basis, but because of the recent change in the Environment and Public Services Committee and the subsequent backlog of items, these were only included in the Committee agenda for 4th November. Consequently, they had not been noted either by myself or by other members of the Committee prior to the States meeting last Tuesday. In the meantime, they had been approved by the Treasurer of the States, noted by the Finance and Economics Committee, and included in Supplementary Papers last Tuesday as land transactions approved under Standing Orders. I can only apologise that I was not in a position to be able to respond to Members' questions in respect of these properties at the time and I have asked the department officers to agree a procedure with the Greffier of the States to ensure that in future the Committee has noted such decisions before they are included in States Papers.