

**PERSONAL STATEMENT TO BE MADE BY DEPUTY J.A.N. LE FONDRÉ
OF ST LAWRENCE ON TUESDAY 18th JANUARY 2011.**

I am making this statement concerning my removal as an Assistant Minister. It was an honour to be elected by the parishioners of St Lawrence to represent them in this Assembly. I have always tried to stick to my electoral commitments and responsibilities to them and to act with the integrity they would expect from someone with my professional background. I would like to thank Senator Le Sueur (and the former Senator Walker) for the opportunities of working with them and have enjoyed working under their leadership. I also express my thanks for the offer of a post as an additional Assistant Minister to Planning and Environment which I have chosen to decline. My primary role in Treasury over the last 5 years was for States property. I have worked closely with the professionals in the department, and consider that I have contributed significantly to its role. I am obviously disappointed at the turn of events that has resulted in my removal from that post in the last few days. However I do not wish to dwell on that as an issue.

Despite some negative media comment of which members may be aware, I have been very impressed with the overall level of professionalism and performance in the Property team. The results they have achieved are significant, particularly under what can at times be quite trying circumstances. Prior to my appointment the estate had been allowed to deteriorate through lack of investment. The estate was not statutorily compliant, and 3 years ago less than 50% of the requisite tests and inspections required to comply with our own laws were being carried out. Now it is approaching 90%. It is critical to have a proper base of information from which to operate the estate, and that is now in place. The first full property valuation was delivered in 2008, and a further interim valuation was completed this month. Equally a condition survey that was completed in 2008 identified over £125m of backlog works which need to be done. None of this generates headlines, does not win votes, but is necessary, and in the interests of the Public that we represent. All of this we delivered in the context of a 37% cut in the base budget of the Department. Other achievements delivered during my time, of a very wide remit, include :

- Roughly £12 - £13m worth of disposals, and there are some sizeable disposals in the pipeline.
- The estate is now statutorily compliant.
- The new dairy opened last year, at Howard Davis farm. Securing this site has been an intricate jig saw, involving a number of different parties, often with mutually exclusive views. I brought to this assembly 3 changes to the Law in order to achieve the result that we now have. I know this is of significant benefit to this Island. I have obtained the support of the TB Davis family, and have rejuvenated our links with them. As part of these achievements, issues surrounding the JSPCA Pet Cremator and the Acorn site have been resolved, with the latter benefiting from an investment of more than £1m in their facilities as a result.
- There are numerous other examples of completed projects, but I will just cite the refurbishment of the Central Market roof, and also the new Airport Control Tower, which was both designed, and project managed by parts of the department.
- In the last 2 years alone I have personally considered and signed over 200 Ministerial Decisions.
- Again, in the last 2 years, with the assistance of the Minister for Health and Social Services and her team at Health we have commenced the establishment of a strategy for the Health Portfolio. I am responsible for at least one property initiative that I hope will be emerging from that area in the next few months that has the potential to save several hundreds of thousands of pounds per annum. More significant schemes in that same area are presently progressing which should generate desperately needed funds for that department to replace hugely outmoded facilities, with hopefully no requirement to provide any further States funds.
- The JCG site has been another complicated jigsaw. I know there has been some public comment as to what is happening there, but often commercial confidentiality dictates what can and cannot

be said. Good progress has been made. The move of Centre Point to share the facilities with the St Helier community Centre at La Pouquelaye has added significant development value to the site. It is roughly 60% bigger than the previous scheme as a result. The 18 months of negotiations were finalised in February of last year. Initial planning proposals were presented to the Planning Minister in October for an exciting scheme which has the potential to stimulate regeneration in the area. He has made some recommendations, and I would hope that we will see a formal planning application, in April or May this year, with a view to then selling the site once planning permission has been obtained.

- I also need to touch on the office strategy which has absorbed a significant part of my time over the last year. This matter has been hugely frustrating for both myself and the department. However the initial Phase was, at the time of my removal, close to being capable of implementation as has previously been reported. It offers the first step of achieving significant savings that exist in the property portfolio. I will not dwell too much on the details as it is still under review. It unlocks a scheme that has been stalled for 10 years ; delivers annual savings of between 600 and 700 thousand pounds per annum ; avoids many millions of pounds of costs that we will otherwise have to spend on the existing buildings, and does not require any additional funding from existing cash resources. It starts to reduce the estate, provides space and cost reductions for a number of other departments, whilst applying the principles that I think members have long awaited, in terms of new office accommodation spatial standards, and the associated cost savings and cultural changes that arise.

Sir, the political direction of Property Holdings is not an easy job, and requires an understanding of a number of technical and legal issues that can arise from even the most apparently straight forward situation. I consider that I have brought the requisite skills and clarity to the decisions I have made, and the negotiations I have been involved in. I have no problem with criticism, and where it has arisen I have always tried to examine the circumstances in an objective manner. To assume one gets everything right all of the time would in my view hint at a certain level of arrogance, and I have always tried to recognise and learn from my mistakes. But I will ask that before members leap to any conclusion on something, that they speak to the Department, and get the facts direct from them first. As with many issues, sometimes all is not what it seems at first glance. The recent report of the Comptroller and Auditor General into the disposal of States Property assets is very positive in respect of Property Holdings. It effectively endorses the role of the department and the method in which it operates. What it also recommends is that the arrangements for the central oversight of States property transactions should be reinforced. When dealing with property that is potentially worth many millions of pounds it is critical that there is robust, objective and transparent oversight handled by experienced professionals tasked to do that job by this Assembly. That is not an excuse for delay, prevarication or second guessing, but let us learn from the past – much time is spent unravelling issues from previous less well thought through decisions, and trying to ensure that those same mistakes are not repeated in the future. Failure to require robust financial analysis of such transactions, is failing ourselves, and failing the wider public.

Before concluding Sir I do want to make direct reference to the team in Property Holdings. I have built a strong relationship with them over the past 5 years. I commend their professionalism and dedication to the roles that they perform. It has been a privilege to work with the officers and with the former and current heads of the department. However I do wish to pay particular tribute to the present Director of Property Holdings. In my opinion he is a most professional and objective individual, by whom the Island is exceptionally well served. His experience is significant, and his dedication is exemplary. He is committed to driving change often against the odds. Whilst not everyone will agree with everything that has been done, I trust that members do recognise that the Director of Property Holdings has a level professionalism and property knowledge that is second to none, and I thank him for his support during my term.

I wish to thank colleagues and the other individuals who have provided both advice and support, during my time as an Assistant Minister, and also more recently. Finally it just leaves me to wish the new Assistant Minister, the Connétable of St Peter, well in his new role. I consider that he has

a significant and experienced team within the department of Property Holdings, and I trust he will come in with an open mind, will get involved, will listen, and will learn from them in the same way that I have done, in the limited time remaining.