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Opinion piece: Engage stakeholders early on review of Guernsey's Island Development Plan

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In this opinion piece, Senior Planning Consultant Chris Crew shares his views on some of the challenges faced by Guernsey's Development and Planning Authority (DPA) in the context of the upcoming review of the Island Development Plan (IDP).

Deputy Victoria Oliver's frustration in a recent Guernsey Press article over the "tightrope" the DPA has to walk when considering applications involving greenfield development will be familiar to decision-makers in many jurisdictions.

Guernsey's planning system

Guernsey's planning system requires decisions to be made in accordance with the Island Development Plan (the IDP), with limited scope for departure from adopted policies.

The IDP's Principal Aim is:

"To ensure land use policies are in place that are consistent with the Strategic Land Use Plan and which help to maintain and create a socially inclusive, healthy and economically strong Island, while balancing these objectives with the protection and enhancement of Guernsey's built and natural environment and the need to use land wisely."

To make best use of land and natural resources, the IDP also provides that its policies:

"...have an emphasis towards encouraging brownfield development in the interests of the most effective and efficient use of land and protection of the environment, although it is accepted that some greenfield development may be required to meet the social and economic requirements of the States."

The dilemma facing the DPA

Large-scale and strategically important developments often involve greenfield land and are invariably contentious. Recent proposals for new schools, the redevelopment of La Grande Mare Hotel and residential development at Pointues Rocques are confirmation of this.

But the IDP also allows for a range of smaller-scale forms of development which can result in the change in character or loss of greenfield land, including the change of use of agricultural land to domestic garden.

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This presents DPA representatives with a dilemma; how to balance often-competing social, economic and environmental factors, and how best to engage with other Deputies, developers and the wider community in a way that inspires confidence in the system.

Risks associated with a piecemeal review of the IDP

The upcoming review of the IDP is intended to tackle specific policy areas, rather than developing an entirely new framework; a "refresh", as described by DPA member Deputy Sasha Kazantseva-Miller. This is understandable, given the time and resources that a wholesale review would demand and the likely need for the States of Guernsey to revisit its Strategic Land Use Plan ahead of that.

The risk, however, is that a piecemeal review may not make Deputy Oliver's tightrope any easier to walk. Given the urgent need to tackle the housing crisis, and the bold aspirations for development of Guernsey's east coast, failure to convince those critical politicians, developers and Islanders that the "failing" IDP has been fixed could leave the DPA no better off than it is today.

The DPA will therefore need to ensure that it engages with those parties at the earliest opportunity and convince them that the review will go far enough to deliver positive change.

If you need any advice or have questions about any aspect of planning please contact Chris Crew.

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