

PROTECTING THE COUNTRYSIDE AND PROVIDING FOR PEOPLE

Report - March 2008 - James Godfrey

1. The States Strategic Plan 2006 – 2011 sets out a vision for Jersey in the future beyond any limitations suggested by its title. Within this plan there are a number of potential conflicts between strategies that may be employed to meet its objectives and commitments. An obvious conflict is between;
 - the need to grow the economy (measured by GVA) at a rate of 2% in real terms, and the demand this will place on the factors of production,and
 - the socio-demographic changes associated with an aging population, an increase in single person households and suggested requirements for inward migration to support the economy,with
 - the commitment to conserve, maintain and enhance the natural environment and working countryside.
 2. This 'conflict' needs to be managed by a combination of measures to:
 - **Increase economic activity**, and profitability, in the agricultural industry predominantly through utilising existing resources more efficiently.
 - **Investing in the urban environment** to ensure that it is a 'place of choice' to live and encourage a shift in aspirations that would be beneficial to community life and ease the pressure for green field development.
 - **Improve protection of natural areas and the farmed countryside** by better utilising existing powers.
 3. For the purpose of this paper it is worth rehearsing the arguments as to why protecting the countryside and natural environment is important. These can be divided into two broad areas, firstly the current issues including;
 - 3.1. *Diversification in the economy* – agriculture provides varied employment opportunities in a financially significant sector of the economy employing some 3% of the work force.
 - 3.2. *Economic contribution* – although the contribution of the sector to the Island's GVA only represents approximately 1.3% of the total this figure does not include some the 'hidden' contributions, for example the maintenance of roadside verges and the provision of north bound sea freight that undoubtedly reduces overall freight costs of goods imported into the Island.
 - 3.3. *Area of land occupied* – the farmed countryside and natural areas make up over two thirds of the surface area of Jersey, with agriculture alone occupying half the land area, and thus activities in this sector have a disproportionate effect on the appearance of the Island.
 - 3.4. *Draw for tourism* – the quality of the Island's 'beautiful scenery' scores the highest in both satisfaction surveys and as the key motivation to visit in the first place.
 - 3.5. *'Anchoring' of key people* – high net worth individuals and the most able staff, both in the finance industry and other sectors, tend to be highly mobile in their choice of places to live and work. There is good evidence that the quality of the Island's environment and its rural aspect plays a significant role in attracting these important individuals to locate and then remain in Jersey.
 - 3.6. *Quality of life* – the maintenance of a high quality environment and landscape is essential in ensuring a high quality of life for residents.
 - 3.7. *Important in the Island's heritage* – agriculture plays an important part in the Island's collective psyche as, in the absence of an industrial revolution, there remains a close link between the farming and wider community. This is reinforced by the intimate nature of the Jersey countryside whereby those living in rural areas have a closer contact with farming than is the case, for example, in the UK.
-

PROTECTING THE COUNTRYSIDE AND PROVIDING FOR PEOPLE

Report - March 2008 - James Godfrey

4. Secondly there are issues that will become more important in the future. It is clearly not possible to predict with certainty when, and to what degree, current trends will impact, however, the fact that they will have a significant affect is not disputed. These include:
- 4.1. *The growing importance of producing foodstuff* – with the world population set to increase by 50% over the next 50 years in an environment of increasing energy costs and reducing water supplies it is estimated that current agricultural land will have to produce double current yields to meet demand for improved diets.
 - 4.2. *The solutions to climate change* – it is well recognised that the management of land, natural and especially agricultural, will increasingly be called upon to help provide solutions to the climate change challenge.
 - 4.3. *The opportunities for tourism* – if actual climate change approaches the levels predicted in some scenarios it is likely that current traditional holiday destinations will become less attractive providing opportunities for the Island to market itself as an alternative destination.
5. There have been significant changes in Jersey's countryside, particularly in recent years, as a result of the evolving nature of the agricultural industry. The most important changes relate to both the number of farm holdings and the amount of land farmed. The reduction in the number of farm holdings is a feature of the drive to achieve economies of scale and is replicated throughout the developed world. There is little that can be done to address this issue and it is not of itself a particular problem as long as the industry is able to evolve. Of more concern is the availability of productive land for the industry to work:
- 5.1. *Decline in the area of agricultural land* – research shows that since the 1970's in excess of 10,000 verges, or over 25%, of the agricultural land bank has been 'lost' to farming. It is difficult to identify what has happened to this land due to the absence of data and changing methods of data collection, although the most likely causes are permanent development, reversion of marginal land or change of use for community projects.
 - 5.2. *Maintaining a land bank* – viability in agriculture is not simply about financial profitability but also the logistics of managing larger businesses within fixed resources. In essence there is a minimum scale of operation required and whilst it is difficult to be precise on these levels it is possible to make reasonable estimates based on current activity and short range forecasts:

Jersey Royal potatoes	15,500 vv
Local vegetable production	4,000 vv
Dairying	12,000 vv
Flowers	800 vv
Protected crops	280 vv
Total	33,000 vv
 - 5.3. *Diversification out of agriculture* – there has been a trend in recent years to allow, and even encourage, the diversification of land use out of agriculture most notably into 'commercial leisure' and private equestrian use.
 - 5.3.1. *'Commercial leisure'* developments, e.g. the "aMaizin Maze", can be beneficial in that they provide an out door facility for the public to enjoy and contribute to the economy. The key is that these are only permitted in the appropriate place, as opposed to activities that disrupt the more natural areas.
 - 5.3.2. *Equestrian use*, however, needs more careful consideration as there is a clear distinction between a commercial livery and private use. A commercial livery is an economic activity, however, it can be contended that private occupation of land for horses does not contribute anything to the economy and is taking up increasingly larger areas of prime productive agricultural land to the detriment of the industry.

PROTECTING THE COUNTRYSIDE AND PROVIDING FOR PEOPLE

Report - March 2008 - James Godfrey

6. A growing population places increased demands on the environment in general and the countryside in particular, and these must be managed to prevent long term damage to the Island's natural areas and its visual character.
 - 6.1. *Demand for recreational land use* – there are regular calls specifically to permit the development of additional golf courses in the Island, more so than general calls to increase public access to the countryside. Thus these two issues need to be considered separately:
 - 6.1.1. *Public access* – it is felt that in general terms there are considerable opportunities available to enjoy access to the rural and natural areas in Jersey. An extended network of footpaths provides an excellent resource although more use should be made of it by improving maintenance and infrastructure items. Access to natural areas needs to be carefully managed to avoid disturbance to sensitive areas and a well managed footpath network can achieve this. Access to farmed land is a more complex issue in the Jersey situation with its unusual pattern of land ownership and occupation. The farmed landscape is best described as a 'long distance view of someone else's factory floor' and as such issues of damage and liability mean that in the Jersey situation it is better to enable access through the existing network of footpaths rather than create new ones, especially with financial constraints requiring maximum efficiency of resources.
 - 6.1.2. *Golf courses* – these represent an exclusive and inefficient use of land for public access. A minimum of 150 verges is required for an 18 hole course which subsequently can be used by no more than 70 people at a time, representing around 1 person per acre. By comparison a 'country park' facility can provide for many times that number. With regard to economic benefit of golf it is generally recognised that profitability arises from the associated facilities rather than the course. The fact that there is demand is in itself not necessarily a sufficient argument to increase supply.
 - 6.2. *Pressure on natural environment* – whilst the Island has a history of supporting a relatively high population it is obvious that as the number increases in absolute terms there will be an increase in the pressure on the environment which can only be mitigated by changes in behaviour and aspiration together with careful resource management.
 - 6.3. *Increase in the built up area* – the population was estimated at 88,200 in 2005, a growth of 16% over the preceding 25 years and that growth rate coupled with an aging population and the growth in single person households presents unprecedented challenges and consequential pressure to re-zone land for building development. An examination of the "State of Jersey" report graphically illustrates the increase in the developed area since 1935 and many feel that the trend of building on green field sites is unsustainable.
7. Balancing these demands is not a simple task, however if certain parameters are agreed then a logical set of priorities can be extrapolated and the emphasis of future policy can be deduced.
 - 7.1. There is a desire to retain a high proportion of the Island's land mass as either natural or farmed land and this requires a distinct suite of powers, most of which are in place already but probably they need to be increased in use and/or improved in application in support of a comprehensive Island Plan:
 - 7.1.1. Natural areas can be protected as Sites of Special Interest and this instrument could be used more widely, perhaps coupled with an increased use of preservation orders for specific features.
 - 7.1.2. Agricultural land is protected through existing legislation although it is doubted whether there is sufficient emphasis on enforcement as there is considerable evidence of land being taken out of agriculture and often assimilated into domestic curtilage or used for other activities than agriculture.
 - 7.2. As previously explained in order to maintain a viable agricultural industry there must be an emphasis on maintaining the 'land bank'.
 - 7.3. The agricultural industry has a proven track record of productivity and maximising value. Indeed the sale value output of agricultural land in the Island is some 10 times higher than that of the UK which shows the successful concentration in the Island on high value crops.

PROTECTING THE COUNTRYSIDE AND PROVIDING FOR PEOPLE

Report - March 2008 - James Godfrey

- 7.4. Some of the future issues identified above will further help improve the economic activity of the industry, however there are also opportunities in the short term to improve output and profitability in the two main sectors;
- 7.4.1. Arable sector; investment should be maintained in strengthening the Island brand which commands a premium in the market, research should be undertaken into the development of alternative 'break' and 'catch' crops to enable better utilisation of land in between the dominant 'cash' crop of the Jersey Royal, encouragement should be given to the better use of manure crops to soak up nitrogen and fertilise the following crop and research into possible nitrogen fixing from GM technology.
- 7.4.2. Dairy sector; assistance should be given to upgrading the genetic merit of the dairy herd to improve efficiency and open new markets for exports, support should be given to the development of a range of 'value added' products, the implementation of the sector's recovery plan should be expedited to deliver significant efficiency gains
- 7.5. To ease the pressure in developing 'green field' sites encouragement must be given for people to consider alternative lifestyle aspirations in terms of living accommodation. This can be done through the improvement and regeneration of large parts of St Helier with the aim of restoring the idea of urban living as being an aspirational lifestyle choice as opposed to a poor alternative to a 'house with a garden in the country'.
- 7.6. Housing densities may also have to increase which, in time, would become accepted. In many continental countries living in apartments is the preferred choice over houses not so much driven by cost as by convenience often linked to transport availability and the sense of communal 'town' living.
- 7.7. There is significant 'brown field' capacity in and around St Helier suitable for development. This must be used efficiently and as the first choice rather than 'green field' sites. The availability of these sites needs to be encouraged, possibly through the introduction of a development levy that could be phased so as to bring sites forward quicker than might otherwise be the case.
- 7.8. Consideration should also be given to encouraging multi generational living by ensuring that new build houses have a capacity for 'dower' type extensions to be added or retained within those properties that have them. This would serve to assist with the care of the elderly, provide 'down sizing options', provide young working families with greater family support and increase efficiency of capital in the housing stock.