

## The Saturday Interview

# The 71-year-old with a new job and no intention of slowing down

FOR most people, reaching the landmark 'three score years and ten' signals a change in the pace of life: a time to slow down, to spend the pension pot on exotic holidays and take on childcare duties for grateful working offspring.

At 71 years of age, Environment Minister John Young takes his grandfatherly duties very seriously but rather than putting his feet up after a working life in local government, he is relishing his second term as Deputy for St Brelade No 1. He previously represented the district from 2011 to 2014.

"There is a job to be done and I am certainly not ready for retirement," he said. "I have still got the energy and strength and I want to use that to deliver something substantial by sorting out planning and environment in Jersey. I'm going to give it my best shot."

He is back in very familiar territory with an office on the top floor of the States offices at South Hill. From 1991 to 2004 Deputy Young was the chief officer of the former Planning and Environment (P&E). In between being a Deputy he worked for three years as Alderney's Planning Officer to produce the island's 2017 Land Use Plan.

Deputy Young was born in Camden

Environment Minister John Young is back as a St Brelade Deputy and raring to go as the new Environment Minister with a broad range of responsibilities. He spoke to **Paula Thelwell**

Town in London in 1946 in the baby boom that followed soldiers, like his father, returning home from fighting in the Second World War. On finishing his education he trained as a public finance accountant, working in local government in London and around the UK before moving to the Island in 1979 to work in the States Treasury.

Today he lives in St Brelade with his wife, Jean. His daughter and son, with four children between them, are here and he also has two-stepdaughters.

"Moving to Jersey was the best thing I ever did," he said.

He was finance director at the Gener-

al Hospital before moving to P&E. Those were the days of the committee system of government, and the then Planning president, Senator Nigel Quérée, and vice-president Deputy Alastair Layzell put the environment first.

It is also top of Deputy Young's political agenda, even if the word comes last in the title of the new department – Growth, Housing and Island Environment – under which the minister, and his many responsibilities sit.

He agrees that these three pillars of government sit incongruously alongside each other, as how can you protect the Island environment when the States are

committed to economic growth and building more homes?

Top of his list is reinforcing the protection of the Jersey Coastal National Park – approved by the States in 2011 – that covers 16 per cent of the Island's land mass along the coastline in eight parishes. It stretches from Noirmont to St Ouen's Bay and includes the sand dunes and heathland at Les Landes. It continues along the north coast, taking in the inland valleys at Grève de Lecq, Mourier Valley and Rozel, and around the coast to the Royal Bay of Grouville and Grouville Marsh. The park also encompasses the Paternosters, Ecréhous and Minquiers offshore reefs. It is a recognised planning zone in which there is a presumption against any form of new development.

"Although we have already got what is a quite stringent level of protection for the Coastal National Park and backed up in the Island Plan, I still want to look at strengthening that for the longer term, in particular in the [forthcoming] review of the Island Plan," he said.

"I particularly want to look at setting limits on the size of developments on the coast. I am talking about houses of 20,000 square feet, what people refer to as mansion houses, that are the very sort of properties that are detrimental to the character of Jersey."

"But changing these policies would have to be agreed by the States, so it is my job to come up with proposals to put forward for public consultation and a planning inquiry before taking it to the States for Members to decide."

Deputy Young has already taken action to reinforce the National Park's regulatory framework. When the National Trust for Jersey failed to buy a strip of coastal duneland between Le Braye Café and El Tico, he began the process of making it a Site of Special Interest. He subsequently instructed Environment to do the same for all areas on the bay's shoreline that fit the criteria because of their natural and ecological value for the Island, but which have not yet been afforded this added level of protection from inappropriate development and activities.

It isn't just the size of these multi-million-pound 'Grand Designs' that have pooped up along the coast and inland to dominate the landscape that concern him. Deputy Young is keen that new ar-



■ Deputy Young in St Ouen's Bay  
Picture: DAVID FERGUSON

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chitecture, while embracing new trends, respects the vernacular.

"I have had meetings with the Jersey Architecture Commission to ask them to look at how we can make new buildings in Jersey respect their surroundings, and in particular adopt the principles that new and "place-making" buildings have to enhance the character of the particular area."

"I have asked them to see what we can do to ensure that Jersey does not become like everywhere else in the UK. Jersey still has lots of individual locations with a definite character, such as Gorey and St Aubin, which I want to see become "conservation areas."

"There is law change in the drafting that could give us the powers to make these areas outstanding and that is a priority for me. It will mean we can have selective policies in areas of local character where developments will have to respect those policies."

"This is likely to put him at odds with Locate Jersey, whose job is to entice wealthy immigrants to Jersey. When that includes Russian oligarchs who are used to getting

their way, there could be clash between 'growth' and 'environment'.

Deputy Young acknowledges that when the super-rich relocate here they aren't in the market for a quaint fisherman's cottage or a bungalow in the suburbs of St Helier. They want a property that reflects their international standing.

"Do we want to see the beauty of Jersey change irrevocably?" he asked. "Change is inevitable but it should be beneficial and not damaging and there are already too many examples of damaging developments in the Island."

Another item on his list of priorities is to arrange a meeting at Locate Jersey to, in his words, 'have a dialogue about this'.

Notwithstanding his planning experience, the scope of his ministerial responsibilities is remarkable. It includes farming, plant health, invasive and endangered species, noxious weeds, water quality management, sea fisheries, aqua-farming, regulating the uses of agri-chemicals, the States vet service and pet passports, building regulations, environmental health, Sites of Special Interest, bat and butterfly monitoring and Jersey Met.

"I haven't been made "Minister for the Drought" yet but if we are to have one maybe it will be me," he quipped. "I am used to being a Jack of all trades and I can multi-task and, moreover, I can do strategy and I'm hot on detail but I can't do everything."

He is at pains to point that he isn't a one-man band. His assistant minister is Deputy Gregory Guida and the politicians on the planning applications committee deal with most building applications.

"As well as all this I have got my constituency work and my electorate to represent," he said. "I am a Deputy because people trust me to help them. That is why I want to do it and that is what makes me a politician."

When he isn't busy with his many, many responsibilities – or spending time with his family – Deputy Young has quite a few hobbies and interests. He likes to take his boat out to sea and walk the coastal footpaths, when he isn't reading historical novels or attending auctions or indulging his 50-year long passion for riding motorbikes.

He also enjoys all sorts of music, from classical to festivals. He's stopped going to Glastonbury – but that's more to do with not being able to get tickets than his advancing years.

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■ Reg Langlois and Deputy Young get into the groove for the Queen's Diamond Jubilee at the St Brelade Country Fete in Reg's Garden in 2012, during the Deputy's first term