



Deputy Kirsten Morel,  
Chairman,  
Economic and International Affairs scrutiny Panel.

21/09/2019

Dear Deputy Morel,

Thank you for your letter of 20 September requesting a written submission to the Economic and International Affairs Scrutiny Panel. A request which is most welcome and we are pleased to respond to.

Before I do, I would like to emphasise the Opera House's importance to Island life, educationally, culturally as well as making a contribution to the well-being and health of the community.

The Opera House is the only fully fledged theatre in the Channel Islands possessing all the necessary equipment and machinery that a 625 seat theatre requires. It has been active for 150 years and is a very important part of our cultural heritage.

The present performance programme provides for spectacular local productions such as *Cats* and *Les Miserables* performed by local people including children, we also have a variety of other shows, from top-class comedians, popular music bands, dance, drama by visiting companies, to screenings of world-class performances from the National Theatre in London, the Grand Met in New York, ballet from Sydney Australia; in this regard the world could be said to be our oyster.

That we are able to produce these high quality but no risk, screenings is not thanks to funding from the States but is thanks to funding from a very generous anonymous donor who has enabled us to expand our repertoire at no financial risk.

I have mentioned the health and well-being of the community and would like to expand on that a little. Many local residents, including children, have performed or perform on the stage at the Opera House, be that through amateur productions or the Eisteddfod, there must be thousands of people who have benefited from this experience, improving their self-assurance, self-confidence, education, happiness, humour, ambition, a desire to do better and better themselves, a broadening of personal tastes, even possibly less dependency on smart phones, and social media. Many of these benefits are under the radar but nevertheless should be recognised and taken into account.

Performing on the stage is fun, it overcomes shyness, it boosts self-confidence, forms friendships, heightens feelings of self-worth, negates feelings of being worthless, gives a sense of achievement. It is not far-fetched to say that enjoying any performance as a member of the audience, or actually participating in any performance, can lift one's spirits and be of benefit to one's state of mind, something not irrelevant to the present concerns regarding mental health problems.

It is important to recognise that the Opera House makes a really important and tangible contribution to island life and deserves to be promoted and cherished, rather than relatively neglected as in past years under previous government administrations, I say this while very much welcoming the help and views expressed by the present administration.

A new and very enlightened relationship now exists between us and the economic development department and we very much hope that this will develop into tangible benefits arising from the government plan review. There are three areas in particular that need close attention and these are, urgent maintenance of the building, replacement of outdated theatre equipment, establishing a headcount of senior staff to enable succession planning and avoiding some staff having to perform two people's jobs to a degree that is beyond our duty of care to our employees, who incidentally, do not benefit from any pension rights into the bargain.

In order to give your panel an indication of what work is urgently needed and what is less urgent but needed as soon as practical, I have attached a schedule which may surprise you in its scope. The reason for this is that no proper

provision for maintenance after the big refurbishment was ever made. While we have done whatever we could within our budget, the fact that our grant has been frozen since 2013 and the previous property services department have been most unhelpful, we are now confronted by a large backlog of work.

While I have written this letter to acquaint you with the background of our present problems, no part of it should be taken as criticism of the approach being taken by, what is to us, a new administration and I would urge your Panel to support their proposals, in the expectation that this will lead to more support for the irreplaceable Opera House.

Should you or any members of your Panel wish to visit backstage areas that are not open to the public, I would be very happy to show you around.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Pierre Horsfall". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

Pierre Horsfall CBE.

Chairman.

## Indicative Opera House maintenance schedule.

1. Exterior building maintenance and painting
- 2 Theatre equipment such as dimmer racks.
- 3 Furnishings , seats in upper bar almost beyond use.
- 4 Dock doors need replacing.
- 5 Improve disabled access through main doors to foyer.
- 6 Refurbish dressing rooms.
- 7 Box office and stalls bar in desperate need of renewal.
- 8 Auditorium seating, which was second hand, will soon need replacing.
- 9 The auditorium will itself soon need redecorating. Ideally a sinking fund should have been established at the time of the major refurbishment of the theatre.
- 10 A full survey of the Opera House has recently been commissioned by Property Services and will probably reveal more work that is needed.

P Horsfall

23/09/2019