

Section 3

Property

Background

Parliament Buildings is a beautiful and historic building which is appreciated by visitors from around the world and is a fitting location for the Northern Ireland Assembly. It was opened in 1932 to meet the needs of a Parliament and is now accommodates the Assembly. In September 2001 the Commission purchased Ormiston House. Following extensive and continuing consultation with local residents, the Commission submitted an application for planning permission in respect of Crown development approval for development of temporary accommodation. This application is currently being processed.

Public Access

Making Parliament Buildings available to every section of the Northern Ireland community continues to be a key priority for the Commission. The Events Co-ordination Office has played a major role in facilitating this.

During 2002-03, 14,961 guests attended 468 functions, and there were 949 tours for 24,169 visitors. Groups facilitated included representatives from the arts, education, health, voluntary, environment and business sectors. In addition many school, youth, church and community groups were hosted at Parliament Buildings.

Tours of Parliament Buildings continued to be very popular and at times there were more requests than we could accommodate. In responding to this, a 'virtual tour' was launched on the Assembly's web site in January 2003.



[Virtual Tour homepage for Parliament Buildings](#)

Property Refurbishment

The Commission approved a number of works projects that have considerably enhanced the infrastructure of Parliament Buildings.

These include:

- Repair to plasterwork and mouldings on the Great Hall ceiling;
- Examination and repair of the ornamental chandeliers;
- Refurbishment of the Lower Ground Floor corridor, which included new flooring throughout, panelling of walls and ceiling panels to permit access to mechanical services;
- Creation of three additional offices on the fourth floor;
- Refurbishment of six offices for the Legal Services directorate, five offices for the Security branch and two offices for the Hansard directorate;

- Installation of new external light fittings, encompassing the upper plateau car parking areas and approach roads; and
- Provision of two parenting rooms.

Environmental Issues

The year of the World Summit on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg (26 August to 4 September 2002) provided the backdrop for a number of important steps in the Commission's plans to reduce the environmental impact of the day-to-day operations at Parliament Buildings.

At a meeting on 7 May, the Assembly Commission agreed the establishment of an Environmental Best Practice Committee to oversee the development, implementation and review of an environmental management plan and charter. The new Committee also takes on responsibility for environmental awareness and related training and communication issues.

Recycling efforts at Parliament Buildings continue to raise money for local charities. The Northern Ireland Hospice benefits from the recycling of print cartridges, and Bryson House benefits from our 'cash for cans' scheme.

During a visit to Parliament Buildings by the UK Sustainable Development Commission on 12 March 2002, the chairman, Jonathon Porritt CBE, under-took to help the Assembly 'in its aim to make the housekeeping operations of the Assembly more sustainable'. Mr Porritt is a leading writer, broadcaster and commentator on sustainable development and is a key adviser to Prime Minister Tony Blair.

The Commission drew on more environmental expertise on 8 May 2002 when Kevin Lyons, Rutgers University, New Jersey, was the keynote speaker at a seminar on green procurement. The event was sponsored by the Commission, with the support of the World Wide Fund for Nature. Assembly Members,



Rev Robert Coulter MLA, and Mr Arthur Moir, Clerk to the Assembly, accept an Environment and Heritage Service award from Mr Dermot Nesbitt MLA, Minister of the Environment



Ormiston House

council chief executives and academics listened to Mr Lyons as he demonstrated environmentally friendly and cost-effective methods of procurement. Dr Dara O'Hagan, speaking for the Commission, said "green procurement could demonstrate a tangible commitment to the agenda of the UN summit in Johannesburg."

In September, the Commission was informed that the United Nations Under-Secretary General, Klaus Töpfer, had invited the Assembly's Research Officer on the environment to assist the UN Secretariat at the World Summit on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg.

On 22 May 2002 the Commission received a conservation award from the Environment and Heritage Service to mark the high conservation standard of Parliament Buildings.

Long-Term Planning

ORMISTON HOUSE

As a result of the pressure on accommodation in Parliament Buildings, it has become necessary to relocate some staff to temporary offices in the Stormont estate.

The development of the Ormiston House site will reduce the pressure on Parliament Buildings. It is the Commission's intention to locate around 150 staff in temporary offices on the Ormiston House site. A Planning Service decision is currently awaited in respect of Crown development approval for temporary office accommodation. A substantial amount of remedial work to the roof of Ormiston House has been carried out in order to fully protect the value of this asset.

