STATEMENT FROM BEMUDA NATIONAL TRUST, BEST AND BERMUDA AUDUBON SOCIETY IN RESPONSE TO WESTEND’S ADVERT OF THURSDAY 17 AUGUST, 2023

We are baffled by Westend’s claim in Thursday’s advert that ‘none of the land where we are proposing to build units is currently “protected green space”’. If that were true, there would be no need for a Special Development Order at all, they could simply put in a regular planning application for the development.

The fact is that five acres on which they propose to build units is presently green space that is zoned Recreational, which is a Conservation Base Zone that is protected from residential and tourism development. The map showing two circled areas where they are seeking a change of zoning from recreational to residential or tourism is inaccurate and misleading. It fails to include two additional areas – the South Road Town Homes and a couple of the Northern Hilltop Villas - totalling 2.2 acres, which are also presently zoned recreational.

If Gencom provides misinformation on something so basic and easily checked, how can we be sure that the other information they provide is correct, including their calculations of economic benefit and the argued necessity to build so many units for a viable tourism product.

When Gencom states that 60% of the property will remain green space, they are talking about the golf course. The world-class golf course is one of the hotel’s biggest tourism assets. The ‘slight reconfigurations to a number of holes’ to create space to build villas in the middle of the course will absolutely change the experience of playing that course. If Gencom is really in the business of creating a first-class tourism product why would they risk tinkering with the one first-class asset they already have? It only makes sense if the real motivation is maximizing profits for investors.

The environmental lobby was accused of fearmongering and exaggeration when we fought the SDO for Tucker’s Point in 2011. But many Bermudians were appalled at the recent development at Shark Hole on Harrington Sound Road, where a narrow strip of coastline has been carved up to build a large private house for an overseas owner. That was protected coastal reserve given away for development in the 2011 SDO. Their argument then was the same as now: that redevelopment of the hotel absolutely depended on permission to build multiple units on protected land. If Tucker’s Point is already the success story that Gencom claims, it seems that success did not after all depend on those pieces of land that are only now being sold off for development.

We all want to see the Fairmont Southampton hotel reopened and a thriving and successful year-round resort on the property. We are not saying no to any new development, just that the developer should be limited to the 130 units approved in the 2009 SDO.