

CHAPTER 2  
CONTINENTAL ATTRACTIONS  
DOMESTIC SOLUTIONS

2.1 Introduction

Buildings should never be viewed in isolation from social and economic changes that operate locally, nationally and internationally. The reason why the Summerland project came to the drawing board in the 1960s can be explained by these changes (section 2.3). Before considering these changes, it is appropriate to provide a brief history of the site before construction work on Summerland began in October 1968.

2.2 Derby Castle

Historically, the site occupied by Summerland and the adjoining Aquadrome swimming baths from 1969-2006 had always been known as **Derby Castle**. Indeed, the re-development of the site in the 1960s was always referred to as the *Derby Castle Development Scheme*. This is also the place name used on the architects' plans for Summerland, which can be viewed in the Manx National Heritage Library in Douglas. Summerland was a name invented to sell a revolutionary design construct: it has architectural symbolism (chapter 3) but no historical context.

Derby Castle was at the northern end of Douglas Promenade. The first building on the site of Summerland was built around 1790 for the Seventh Duke of Atholl (Kelly, 1972). The castellated structure (hence the name Derby Castle) was a retreat for the Island's ruler as well as a fishing

lodge. With Castletown being the Island's capital at the time, Derby Castle was a backwater that was not even linked by road to Douglas. In the 1830s, Derby Castle was sold to Major Pollock, a Lancashire businessman. In 1877, the Douglas advocate Mr Alfred Laughton acquired the site.

Like most British seaside resorts, such as Bournemouth (Sherry, 1972) and Skegness (Pearson, 1968), Douglas grew rapidly in the late nineteenth century. This reflected the increasing mobility and affluence of working people in the industrial north at the time, together with the introduction of the August Bank Holiday in 1871 (Pimlott, 1976; Walton, 1983). The growth of 'Wakes Weeks', usually in August, when all the factories and mills in a town closed down, spurred this growth and meant working-class people were able to enjoy an annual holiday for the first time. Visitor numbers to the Isle of Man doubled from 90,000 in 1873 to 180,000 in 1884 (Corran, 1977), reaching a peak of 634,512 summer passenger arrivals in 1913 before the outbreak of the First World War (Kinvig, 1975). This 'visiting industry' has driven Douglas' economy for over 100 years, and has shaped the town's social and architectural identity (Elleray, 1989).

Mr Laughton had the foresight to recognise the growing importance of tourists to the town's economy, and created a pleasure park in the grounds of Derby Castle. To finance the venture, Laughton formed the private *Derby Castle Hotel and Pleasure Grounds Company* with six Douglas businessmen in 1878. His partners included John Brown, who was the Editor and Proprietor of the *Isle of Man Weekly Times* and *Daily Times*. This became a public company in 1884, with 90 other businessmen joining him in the venture (Kelly, 1972). A new pavilion was opened on the site in 1886. The

pavilion, which was designed by Douglas architect and surveyor Rennison, contained a large ballroom and theatre. The pavilion's main building measured 194 feet by 71 feet, with the ballroom capable of accommodating around 2,000 dancers (**figure 2.1**).



**Figure 2.1: Derby Castle Ballroom**  
(Source: *The Summerland Story*, 1972)

Laughton faced considerable opposition in obtaining an alcohol licence for the Derby Castle entertainment centre. Having obtained a six-day licence, he opened the centre on Sundays, supposedly serving tea, coffee and soft drinks only, and introduced the Island's first public concerts on a Sunday. Laughton's so-called 'sacred concerts' attracted the consternation of local vicars, who denounced them as "a desecration and a scandal" (Kelly, 1972, page 30). Nonetheless, the concerts soon became popular, and Derby Castle remained a popular meeting place for islanders and tourists alike in the late

Victorian era and beyond. Attractions in the grounds of the Castle included an early type of rollercoaster and regular firework displays.

Competition from other entertainment venues in Douglas, such as the Palace Ballroom, the Marina Dance Hall and the Falcon Cliff Pavilion, grew throughout the 1890s, the result of which was a halving in the value of Derby Castle Company shares (Kniveton *et al.*, 1996). When the Castle Mona estate came on the market, the Derby Castle Company and others were concerned that it would be bought by a rival company who would develop the site into a new entertainment venue. Consequently, Mr Brown formed a syndicate of businessmen to acquire the Castle Mona estate. This resulted in the merger of the existing Palace, Marina, Falcon Cliff and Derby Castle companies in 1898. Previously bitter rivals had thus amalgamated to prevent new players from entering the Douglas entertainment scene and fragmenting income even further.

During the First World War, the Derby Castle ballroom was used as a factory. Local women were employed as machinists to produce garments and ballonets, the latter being used in the construction of airships (Kniveton *et al.*, 1996). In the Second World War, Derby Castle (including the ballroom) was used to store carpets and floor coverings, which were removed from Douglas' seafront hotels and guesthouses during the war. This was because many of these buildings were converted into internment camps for people of Germanic origin who were thought to be a risk to national security (Kelly, 1972; Kniveton *et al.*, 1996).

### 2.3 Post 1945 changes

Despite a short-lived resurgence in tourist arrivals immediately after the War in the late 1940s when totals exceeded 600,000 per year, the number of visitors to the Isle of Man began to decline from the early 1950s and remained at around the 475,000 level during the 1960s when Summerland was being planned (Kinvig, 1975). From the late 1950s onwards, the Manx business community feared that the rise of cheap package holidays to Mediterranean resorts would further accelerate the downward trend in tourist arrivals to the Island. There was thus a fear that the Isle of Man would degenerate into "a geriatric colony well off the tourist cash trail" (Herbstein *et al.*, 1973, page 3). Their concerns were justified in the light of trends that subsequently emerged in travel patterns during the late 1960s and early 1970s. For instance, whilst the number of holidays taken in Great Britain by its residents rose by 21% over the period 1966-72, the corresponding increase in the number of foreign holidays taken by UK residents was 46% (Social Trends, 1973, page 97). The increase in the total number of holidays taken at home and abroad largely reflected the increased annual paid holiday entitlement of the average British worker. For example, in 1966, more than 60% of British full-time adult male manual workers had only two weeks' paid holiday; by 1972, 75% of this group were entitled to at least three weeks' annual leave (Social Trends, 1973, page 97).

The growth of foreign package holidays provided strong competition to established British seaside resorts from the 1960s onwards, making them both uncompetitive economically and socially unfashionable, especially for younger age groups. Foreign travel was largely confined to upper and

middle-income groups before 1960. It was not until the 1960s that foreign holidays began to become more of the norm rather than the exception for many working-class families. The 1960s thus saw a drift away from holidays spent in traditional British seaside resorts by lower income, but more especially younger age groups, to foreign destinations. As a result, many people that had been satisfied with a holiday at a UK resort at the beginning of the 1960s had abandoned the British seaside by the end of the 1960s. In particular, the increase in British visitors to Spain during the late 1960s and early 1970s was dramatic. In 1966, Spain accounted for 17.9% of all holidays taken by UK residents abroad; by 1972, that figure had risen to 33.9% (Social Trends, 1973, page 97).

#### 2.4 Countering the attractions of the Mediterranean

In the post 1945 period, an air of decay set in at the Derby Castle entertainment centre. The facilities had become outdated and the buildings too antiquated to be modernised. The decaying site was bought by Douglas Corporation in October 1964 for £85,000 (Kniveton *et al.*, 1996). The Derby Castle site was earmarked by the Corporation for an ambitious and futuristic entertainment and leisure complex, which it was hoped would counter the attractions of the Mediterranean. The aim of the project was to cater for a wider variety of leisure tastes and age groups than the existing Derby Castle, and so stem the drift of tourists away from the Island to Mediterranean shores. Ironically, the site was supposedly believed to be cursed. This so-called Derby Castle Curse said that should the original Derby Castle buildings be demolished any replacement building would be cursed (Alan Spencer, Personal Communication)! In May 1966, Mr Kaneen,

a Member of the House of Keys (MHK), stressed the need for the Isle of Man to respond to changing leisure habits.

“The generation that we have today that go on holidays, the young people with plenty of money in their pockets, they want everything laid on for them...They won’t walk like they used to do when I was a young fellow, walk out...just to go through the glen [the Island’s wooded valleys]...We must realise we are catering for a new generation of people, and what we have got to do is to provide amusements...to give them the incentive to come to the Isle of Man instead of spending their money in Spain or Italy.”

There was the need for the Island to “grasp the nettle and step forward into the future” (Mr Simcocks MHK). Entertainment facilities in Douglas in the 1960s were generally viewed as being inadequate, with the “locals grumbling because the cinemas have been closed, and the dance halls have been closed” (Mr Anderson MHK). Mr Burke MHK reminded Tynwald (The Isle of Man Parliament) in October 1968 of the findings of the 1955 *Visiting Industry Commission Report*, which recommended that “there was a great need in Douglas for a[n] [indoor] swimming baths [and] indoor entertainment for the visitors in the event of inclement weather”. The view that the Island would be unable to compete against package holidays to the Mediterranean was compounded by a succession of poor summers during the early 1960s. McGain (1988) used temperature, sunshine and rainfall values to calculate a summer (May to September) index for Douglas from 1880 to 1986. Higher index values denote better summer weather conditions.

This index was below its long-term mean level for five consecutive years (1961-65), denoting worse than average summer weather conditions. “Heaven help us this year if the weather is as it is now, with the amenities that we have to offer”, argued Mr Coupe in Tynwald in April 1966.

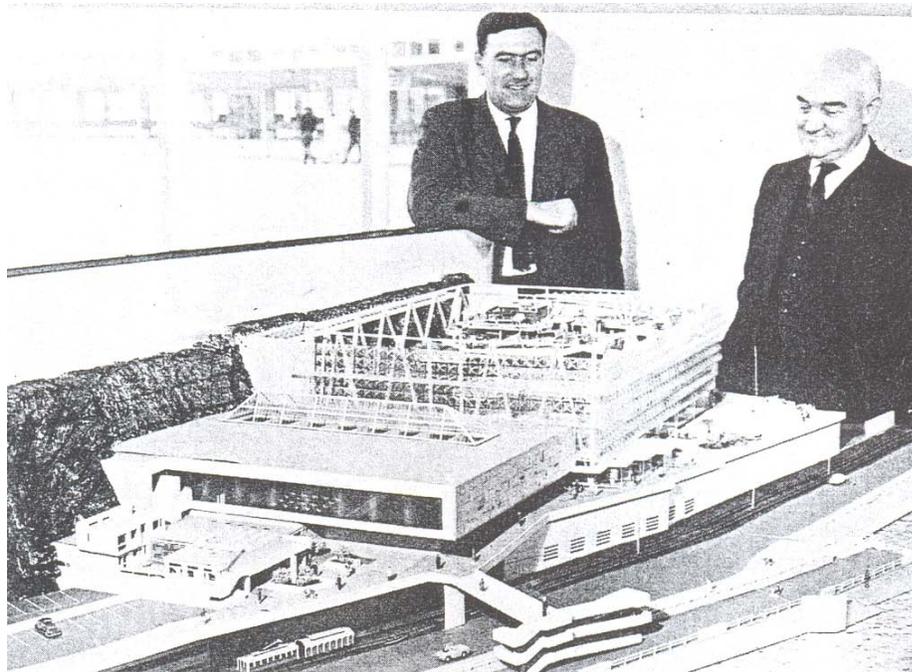
## 2.5 The Derby Castle Development Scheme

The transition from the *conceptual* plans for the Derby Castle site to the material reality of the Aquadrome and Summerland was not a smooth process. The Derby Castle Scheme was mired in controversy from the start, and caused much concern to the Island’s parliament as costs escalated considerably in the late 1960s. The original proposals centred on using the site for the Isle of Man’s second casino, but these plans fell through when Tynwald’s Gaming Board allowed a second casino to operate in the former Palace Ballroom (Kniveton *et al.*, 1996). The Corporation then started negotiations with Manchester developers Shearer Estates Ltd to build a traditional entertainment complex on the site that would be illuminated at night. These negotiations broke down when the terms offered by the developers were different to those expected by Douglas Corporation. Furthermore, some Tynwald members had visited a scheme completed by Shearer Estates in Morecambe in Lancashire and “were not satisfied with it” (Mr Corkish MHK, 15th October 1968). Douglas Corporation paid Shearer Estates £5,000 and the agreement was brought to an end in March 1965.

## *The Architects*

Despite the negotiations with Shearer Estates Ltd breaking down, the Isle of Man Government was committed at this early stage to the innovative re-development of the Derby Castle site and promised the Corporation £320,000 towards the cost of an indoor swimming pool (the Aquadrome). The brief given by Douglas Corporation (the client) to interested architects was deliberately vague, and stated only that any scheme on the 700ft long site must include a championship sized swimming pool.

In August 1965, new proposals were put before the Finance Committee of Douglas Corporation. These proposals took the form of sketch plans, drawings and a model (**figure 2.2** and **figure 2.3**) prepared by Douglas architect, James Philipps Lomas. A proposal had also been submitted by another Douglas firm. To quote the words of Douglas' Borough Engineer, Mr Lomas' practice was awarded the contract because his ideas were "rather more imaginative" than the other firm. At the time when the brochure was presented to Douglas Corporation, there was no precedent for Summerland in either Europe or America (Byrom, 1971).



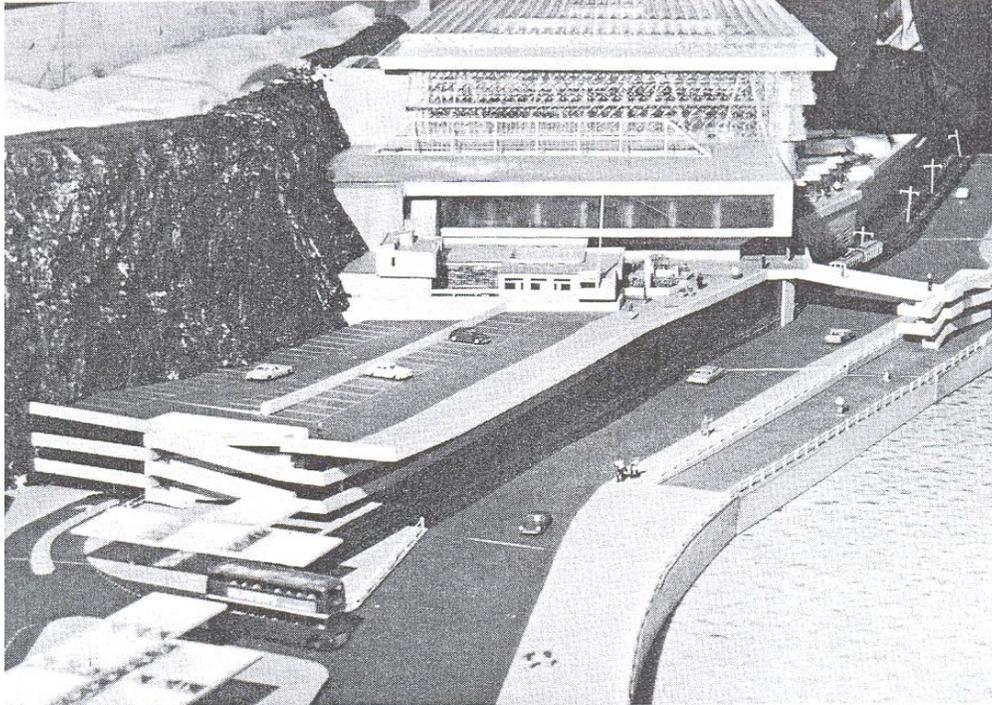
**Figure 2.2: Summerland’s principal architects Mr James Philipps Lomas (right) and Mr Brian Gelling (left) looking at a model of Summerland and the Aquadrome, which was produced before building work started in October 1968.**

**(Source: *The Summerland Story*, 1972)**

Mr Lomas read architecture at Liverpool University between 1931-6, a career path inspired by his father who also ran an architectural practice on the Isle of Man. After serving as a Lieutenant Colonel in the Royal Navy during the Second World War, he established his own architectural practice in Douglas in 1946. Mr Lomas’ office was at Ballabrooie House on Peel Road; Mr Lomas was the senior partner in the firm. The firm rarely involved more than six ‘technical people’, of whom only Mr Lomas and his assistant Mr Brian Gelling were qualified as architects (SFC Report, Paragraph 22, Page 7). Mr Lomas’ firm had undertaken no work outside of the Island at the time of the Derby Castle Development Scheme. Mr Gelling

had previously worked as an assistant at Gillinson, Barnett and Partners for around six years. Gillinson's firm was based in Leeds in Yorkshire and was founded in 1951, and specialised in the design of leisure and recreation buildings and indoor shopping centres. The firm employed around 140 people, 12 of which worked on the design of Summerland. As Mr Lomas became aware of the design expertise of the leisure research unit of Gillinson, Barnett and Partners through Mr Gelling, he asked Douglas Corporation for the Leeds based firm to be appointed as associate architects for the Aquadrome and Summerland. Despite Mr Lomas being Summerland's principal architect, it was agreed that the associate architects would produce the working drawings and carry out all the research, consultation and investigation into the use of materials. In a brief commentary to accompany a photograph of the model of Summerland, the *Royal Institute of British Architects Journal* (1968: 469) said:

“A casino [never built], pools for recreational swimming, and excellent refreshment facilities, combine to make [Summerland] a serious rival counter-attraction to the weather and overseas travel; and indicates recreational trends now being considered by many such seaside resorts.”



**Figure 2.3: Another view of the model of the Derby Castle Development Scheme. The multi-storey car park in the foreground was never built. (Reproduced in the *Royal Institute of British Architects Journal*, October 1968, page 469)**

Whilst recognising that finance considerably influenced the design and construction of Summerland and the Aquadrome, the decision was taken in this chapter to separate out the constructional details (section 2.6) from the financial details (section 2.7). Extensive commentary is also provided in this chapter about what was said in Tynwald about the scheme during the 1960s (section 2.8).

## 2.6 The timetable for construction

There were three stages to the Derby Castle Scheme: the Aquadrome (stage 1), Summerland (stage 2) and a 163-space multi-storey car park (stage 3) to be placed at the town (southern) end of the site. Stages one and two were successfully completed, but the car park was never built.

### *The Aquadrome*

At a meeting of Douglas Corporation's Finance Committee held on 17th October 1966, the decision was taken to invite contractors to submit tenders for the construction of the Aquadrome by 30th November 1966. The timetable envisaged by Mr Lomas, the architect, was for the construction of the Aquadrome to begin in early January 1967. It was hoped the swimming baths would be completed by Whitsun 1968, thus making the facility available for the 1968 summer season. Eight tenders were received and considered by the Finance Committee on 1st December 1966. The Committee took Mr Lomas' advice and accepted a fixed price contract from Manx contractors Parkinsons Ltd. Built to a brutalist concrete design, the Aquadrome took over two years to build (114 week contract) and opened in 1969. The Aquadrome had few windows, with natural daylight entering the swimming pools through the west wall (**figure 2.4**) and a large acrylic roof light. During the Aquadrome's construction, the builders encountered considerable engineering problems in dealing with abnormal foundations and stabilising the cliff face (**figure 2.4** and **figure 2.5**).



**Figure 2.4: The main and teaching pools of the Aquadrome  
(Source: Trust House Forte Colour Souvenir Guide)**



**Figure 2.5: The cliff face formed the Aquadrome's fourth wall. Note the extensive bolting required to stabilise the cliff face  
(Photograph: Ricky Rooney and James Turpin)**

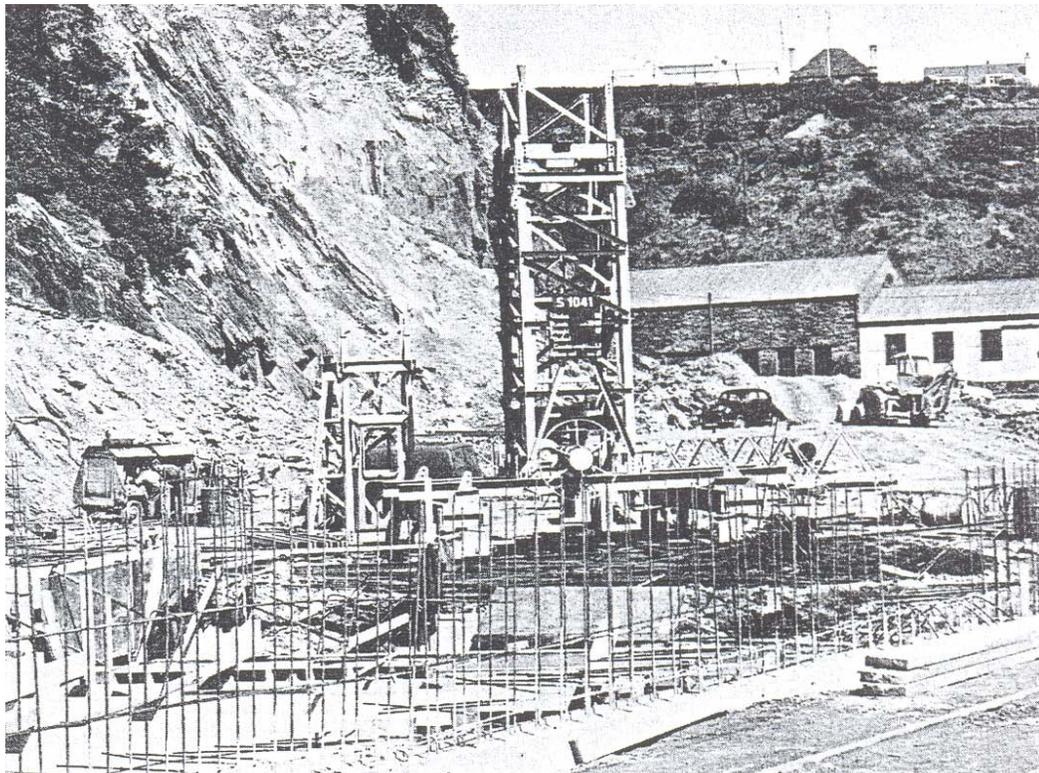
There were two entrances to the Aquadrome. At street level, there was the remedial entrance for persons using the aerotone, sauna, steam, hot, cold plunge, slipper, Vichy douche, massage, Russian vapour and Turkish baths. Some facilities on this level, such as an aerotone bath, did not appear on the original plans and were added during the constructional phase because they had proved to be profitable additions to swimming baths in mainland Britain. The entrance to the Aquadrome's heated salty sea water main pool (with diving boards) and learners' pool was 27 feet above street level, and was reached by climbing an external staircase close to the remedial entrance or using the footbridge over King Edward Road. There was permanent seating for 500 spectators in tiers around the pools. The Aquadrome suffered extensive water damage, as firemen struggled to get the Summerland blaze under control. After the fire, the spectators sitting in the seats around the pools would have required swimming costumes as much as the swimmers they were watching (John Webb, 1974)! The Aquadrome was run and managed by staff employed by Douglas Corporation.

### *Summerland*

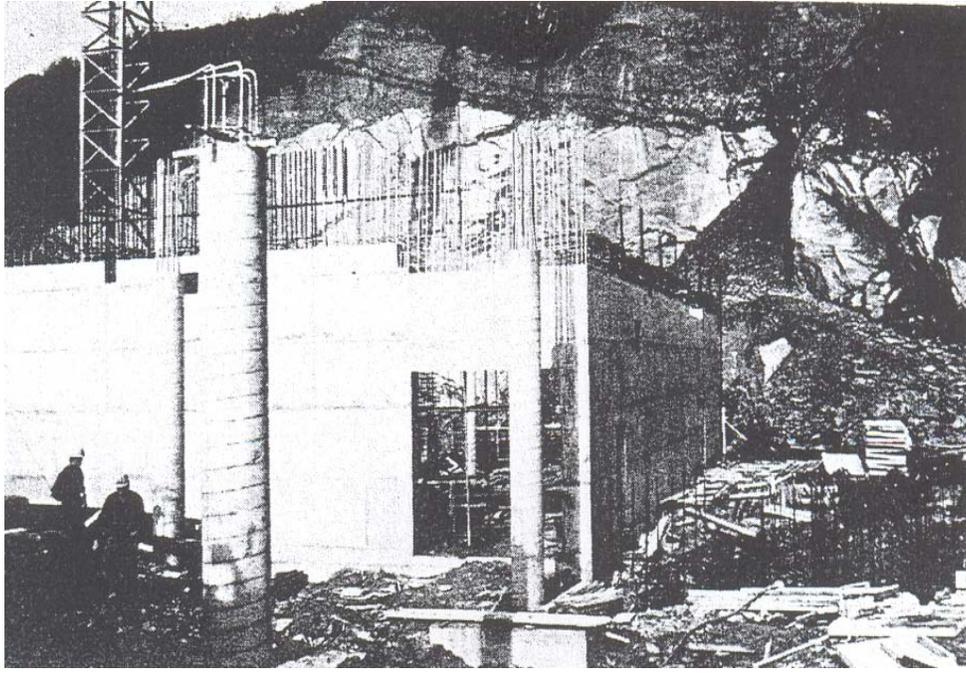
In October 1966, Mr Lomas informed the Finance Committee that further detailed design work was required on Summerland before the building's tenancy (renting out to a private company) could be considered. At this stage, it was hoped Summerland would open in the summer of 1969. In March 1968, Douglas Corporation's Derby Castle Sub-Committee studied a report from Mr Lomas about Summerland (stage 2 of the development scheme). Despite the added expense (section 2.8), the decision was taken to

construct Summerland according to the original 1965 plans rather than scale back the plans so as the costs did not exceed the 1965 budget.

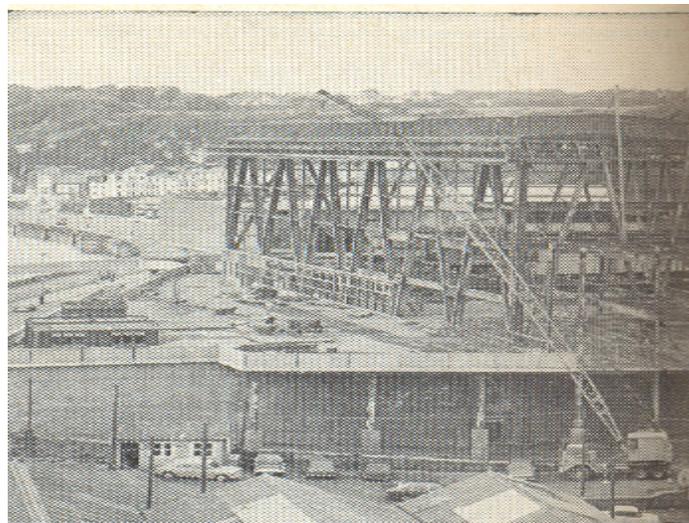
The construction of Summerland finally began in October 1968 (figures 2.6-2.9). The building programme was disrupted in 1969 and 1970 by a lack of information about how the probable tenant would sub-divide the space inside the building. By August 1970, a tenancy agreement between a private company and Douglas Corporation had still not been signed.



**Figure 2.6: The site before the construction of Summerland began. The unstable cliff face is clearly visible. The Manx Electric Railway's sheds can also be seen in the background of the photograph (Source: *The Summerland Story*, 1972).**



**Figure 2.7: The eastern end of Summerland begins to take shape**  
(Source: *The Summerland Story*, 1972)



**Figure 2.8: The V shaped steel frame of Summerland's upper four floors nears completion. The lowest three floors were built out of reinforced concrete** (Source: *Royal Institute of British Architects Journal*, July 1974)

In a letter to the Town Clerk written in early August 1970, Mr Lomas, the principal architect, expressed his irritation about the Corporation's failure to finalise the tenancy.

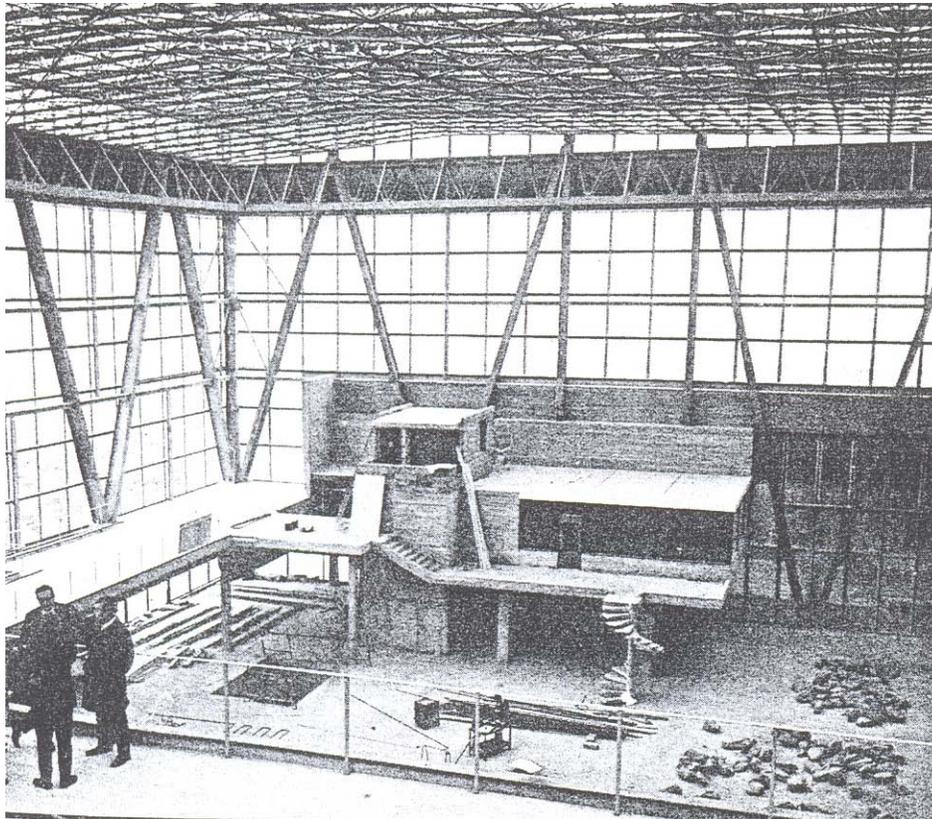
“Letters received from Gardner Merchant Limited...suggest that they require to re-negotiate the terms of the lease. It is quite impossible to assess the length of time this will take. The same letters infer that the Trust Houses Forte Group do not have the same ideas as were originally worked out with Gardner Merchant Limited regarding internal planning of the building.”



**Figure 2.9: Summerland and the Aquadrome – the finished building  
(Postcard supplied by Jonathan Corkill)**

The architects became increasingly concerned that the contract agreed with Manx contractors Parkinsons would over-run its 19th December 1970 completion date. They warned the Derby Castle Sub-Committee on 31st July 1970 that Douglas Corporation “will be faced with heavy charges” from Parkinsons if the contract over-runs. The architects suggested that this could be avoided by modifying the terms of the existing contract with Parkinsons, so that the December 1970 completion date could be achieved. The modified contract omitted the building’s furnishings and fittings, and required Parkinsons to complete the shell only by December 1970. A new contract for the fitting out of the interior would then be signed later with the tenant.

In December 1970, the building’s shell had been completed. Summerland was now secure against the weather, but was bare in terms of furniture and fittings (**figure 2.10**). The only services provided at this stage were drainage and plumbing. There were few subdivided spaces, apart from toilets and a staircase at the building’s northeastern corner (the NE Service Staircase).



**Figure 2.10: The shell of Summerland’s four upper floors. Much work remained to be done before the summer 1971 opening date. This photograph is looking down on the Solarium floor from one of the terraces. The building’s main entrance is in the left background.**

**(Source: *The Summerland Story*, 1972)**

A 21-year tenancy agreement was finally signed between Douglas Corporation and UK hotel/leisure group Trust House Forte (THF) on 14th December 1970, allowing work on designing the interior finally to commence. Whilst positive in that respect, the signing of the tenancy agreement had the unfortunate effect of separating Summerland from the Aquadrome (run by Douglas Corporation) and compromised the unity of the Scheme. “Unravelling the architectural knitting, one senses a certain clarity that may have been fogged in the confrontational ping-pong between

architects, engineers, clients and so on”, commented Warren Chalk in his review of the Derby Castle Scheme published in *The Architects’ Journal*. With the Aquadrome and Summerland under different management systems (Douglas Corporation and Trust House Forte respectively) with separate admission charges levied, a member of the public could not walk directly from one to the other without going outside, a “most unfortunate” arrangement observed Mr Chalk.

Mr Lomas’ involvement with the design of Summerland ceased with the completion of the building’s shell, with the associate architects Gillinson, Barnett and Partners taking sole responsibility for the furnishing and fitting out of the complex. By this time, the emphasis of the architects’ brief had changed from amenity to profit (Byrom, 1971). There was therefore a discontinuity in the design of Summerland between the shell under one team and the interior by another, though related team. The former team was thus unaware about the design decisions that the latter team would subsequently take. The location of exits and staircases inside Summerland’s completed shell in December 1970 should have been related to the building’s internal usage and occupancy. However, Summerland’s shell had been designed *without* definitely establishing and confirming the building’s usage. The Commission of Inquiry into the fire was unimpressed by the architects’ attempt to use the late signing of the tenancy as an excuse for failing to consider fire precautions sufficiently during critical periods of design development:

“The Commission was told that, during the long process of designing Summerland, the details of escape in case of fire could not be considered because the kind of occupancy, usage and activities were not decided, as no tenant had been nominated. The Commission cannot accept this. As early as the brochure of 1965, the concept was sufficiently portrayed and architects described for owners and architects to agree a formula by which the design could, with confidence develop.”

(Summerland Fire Commission,  
Paragraph 216, Page 71)

Summerland opened in July 1971, more than two years behind schedule. The building materials used for Summerland and the facilities contained on each floor will be described in chapter 3.

## 2.7 Finance

The total cost of the original August 1965 proposals (section 2.5) was £1,411,000, of which £687,000 was for the Aquadrome and £724,000 was for Summerland. Given that the Manx Government had already promised a grant of £320,000, Douglas Corporation had to find nearly £1.1 million towards the scheme. Borrowing this sum over a 50-year period would result in interest charges of £73,205 per annum at 1965 interest rates. In the cost estimates presented to the Finance Committee in August 1965, the architects claimed the site’s annual running costs would be £38,000, of which £14,000 were for staff wages and £19,000 were for heating, lighting, maintenance,

rates and insurance. The total annual expenditure would therefore be £111,205 (£73,205 + £38,000). Income would come from two sources: admission charges and rent from leasing some or all of Summerland to a private company. The architects estimated that 250,000 adults would visit the building each year. Assuming trade is minimal in the winter half-year, more than 1,000 people would have to enter Summerland every day in the summer half-year (April to September) to reach this target. If the admission charge were set at 12.5p, then £31,250 would be raised if this target were achieved. Apart from admission charges, it was claimed that £7,000 of other income would be taken, bringing in more than £38,000 per year and thus covering the annual running costs. The architects claimed £48,000 in rent could be obtained from the concessionaires (the private company renting Summerland). The total annual income would therefore be £86,000 (~£38,000 + £48,000). If expenditure (£111,205) is subtracted from income (£86,000), it can be seen that there is an annual deficit of £25,205. In a private and confidential document dated 12th August 1965, Douglas Borough Treasurer's Office stated that it was the Corporation's belief that "the Income assumed [by the architects] is very much on the high side, and could be so to the extent of several thousand pounds". Summerland's rental income was thus revised downwards to £22,000 per year, making it highly probable that the deficit would exceed £30,000 per annum. If the Manx Government's contribution of £320,000 to the scheme had remained unchanged, then an extra 15p in the pound would need to have been added to the town's rates to meet this deficit. Unsurprisingly, this was of concern to Douglas Corporation, who accordingly asked the Isle of Man Government to increase its contribution to the scheme from £320,000 to £600,000. After two debates in the Isle of Man Parliament (section 2.8), Tynwald finally

approved this increase in the Government grant in May 1966. The Manx Government grant of £600,000 towards the scheme, which was to be paid in instalments “proportional to the cost of the work completed”, was conditional on the whole scheme being completed as originally planned.

Contractors were invited to submit tenders for the construction of the Aquadrome by 30th November 1966. As already noted (section 2.6), the Finance Committee chose Manx contractors Parkinsons Ltd. The contract price was £631,893. 9 6d. This price was £49,293 above the architect’s original estimate because of anticipated increases in the cost of labour and building materials.

In March 1968, Douglas Corporation’s Derby Castle Sub-Committee studied a report from Mr Lomas on stage two of the project: the construction of Summerland. The architect submitted two schemes that were considered by Douglas Corporation’s Finance Committee on 5th April 1968. The first scheme would involve constructing Summerland according to the 1965 plans. The total cost of this scheme would be £1,617,500, an increase of £206,500 over the original August 1965 estimate of £1,411,000. More than half of this increase (£131,443) was explained by increased costs between the time of the original estimate and the building’s completion. The second scheme was a modified, less grand version of the original plans, which would see Summerland being constructed within the August 1965 cost estimate. As has already been noted (section 2.6), the Committee opted for the first scheme because it satisfied the Isle of Man Parliament’s requirement for Summerland to be constructed according to the original 1965 plans. This scheme also maximised the available letting space. The cost of the second

and third stages of the Derby Castle Development Scheme (Summerland + Car Park) was now £802,500, which would require an additional Government grant on top of the £600,000 given by Tynwald in May 1966. Parkinsons' £739,000 fixed price tender was accepted by the Finance Committee for the construction of Summerland.

By October 1968, the estimated final cost of the Aquadrome had risen to £815,000. The increased cost was due to three factors. These were the incorporation of additional facilities into the complex, such as an aerotone bath which had proved a profitable addition to a swimming baths in Blackpool; engineering problems encountered in dealing with abnormal foundations and the cliff face (chapter 3); and the rising cost of labour and materials. Some of this additional expenditure should have been foreseen because a Building Design Partnership (BDP) report commissioned in February 1966 mentioned how unusually deep foundations and work to the cliff face would increase the cost of the Derby Castle scheme. In the same month, Douglas Corporation petitioned Tynwald for a further Government grant of £45,000 towards the cost of building Summerland. This was approved, which meant work on Summerland could begin in October 1968 (section 2.6).

## 2.8 The Parliamentary Debates

### *Spring 1966*

The Derby Castle Development Scheme was first discussed in the spring of 1966, when Tynwald members were asked to approve an increase in the Government grant from £320,000 to £600,000. The debate in April

1966 was introduced by Mr McFee, the Chairman of the Local Government Board, who asserted that the Derby Castle project was “one of the largest schemes envisaged in this decade to meet the challenge of world tourism...a bold concept – far reaching in its amenity value”. Mr Simcocks MHK expressed his strong support for the scheme in the April 1966 debate:

“If we are not prepared to...encourage the visiting industry of the Isle of Man, if we lack the faith in our own Island, how can we expect others to have...faith in the Island? It is an imaginative scheme...but it is something which will help to put, not merely Douglas, but the whole Island more firmly on the tourist map.”

Mr Coupe was lavish in his support for the scheme. “This [Aquadrome and Summerland] is absolutely essential – this is the most wonderful thing that has ever come forward”, he declared. The size of the grant was of concern to some members, including Mr Nivison. He argued: “...before a scheme of this magnitude was presented to [Tynwald] we should have had a lot of detailed information [of] costs...If they take a decision to grant £600,000, [this] will be in my view taking an irresponsible line.” Mr Bell commented along similar lines that he was not “convinced of the pricing of this [Derby Castle] scheme”. With previous development schemes involving the Manx Government in mind, he continued:

“Every member of [Tynwald] knows it will cost two-and-a-quarter million pounds and it will not do a ha’porth [*sic.*] of good to say ‘but the architect said it would only cost £1,411,000.’...The cost, in most [previous development projects] has doubled.”

Some members felt building a multi-storey car park with only 163 spaces would be futile and a waste of money. “In my opinion, that £180,000 could be spent in a very much wiser way than providing a car park”, argued Mr Nivison. Mr Colebourn felt that with rising car ownership and the volume of visitors “you might as well forget any car park if you are talking of that sort of [low] numbers”.

Council Member Mr Bolton felt there was a lack of transparency in the scheme’s costings. He argued: “Unless I can find some clarity in the figures, I am certainly not prepared to support it”. Mr Bolton feared the scheme would become a burden on the Manx Government with the original cost estimates proving to be inaccurate, resulting in “requests for further money to assist the Douglas Corporation in meeting the rate burden”. By contrast, Mr Colebourn argued [the Isle of Man] Government should take [the major financial] responsibility for this...It is a thing for the Island, and I think the whole Island should come in [i.e. contribute finance]”. In the debate, Mr Bolton alleged that the Corporation was being too philanthropic in its motives and was preoccupied with providing a public ‘amenity’ at the expense of a commercially viable scheme.

“I am very much afraid that we are losing sight of the idea that we are here to make money and that we are not here just to throw away the profits...so that the net result is nil...We are not trying to see the smiling faces of the visitors...we are after their money. If we are honest, that’s all we want...We are not going about the job in the right way...and if we go along in this way we shall bankrupt ourselves.”

Mr Bolton called for “more clarity about the [architects’] plan...in regard to the entrances and the surroundings”. Mr Creer MHK was disappointed that a conference hall was not included in the scheme. However, Summerland did contain a flexihall on the Lower Downstairs Level (chapter 3) that was normally used for children’s rides, which could have been converted into a conference venue if so needed. “That’s what we want in Douglas to encourage...conferences to the Island”, he argued. Mr Colebourn and Sir H Sugden feared the scheme could have detrimental effects on the Manx Electric Railway (MER) and the Douglas Horse Trams because of the possible need to move the railways’ sheds and termini.

At least three members of Tynwald thought that the development was in the wrong place. Mr Creer MHK said:

“Where you want the building [Summerland] in Douglas is in the centre of gravity where the visitors are. Visitors [will not] go to...Derby Castle on wet days in our open toast-racks [horse trams]...It will be a white elephant if that is built there.”

Mr Moore agreed, calling Derby Castle a ‘dead end’ site. He added: “I believe that this is entirely the wrong site...I think this is going to be so far out of the way that it will be of no interest”.

The debate was adjourned until 18th May 1966, when Tynwald reconvened to approve *in principle* the Derby Castle Development Scheme. The qualification *in principle* was used because Tynwald members were assured by Mr McFee, the Chairman of the Local Government Board, that they would be consulted later when a fixed price contract for the Aquadrome and Summerland had been finally negotiated.

During the May 1966 debate, support for the scheme was not universal, with some members expressing reservations and one outright opposition. In the debate, Mr McFee restated his strong support for Summerland, and called on members “to support this great scheme which should set the Isle of Man completely on the map as a foremost visiting resort”. He was supported by Mr Kaneen MHK:

“[Summerland] is the answer to people going to the continent for the sun...They are going [to the Mediterranean] – they can and will do when it is raining – and [Summerland] will help to counteract the mass of people...going to the continent.”

Mr Kaneen also placed his support for the Derby Castle Scheme in an international context, by quoting the opinions of the National Union of Retailers’ and Shopkeepers’ Association and the Association of Hoteliers and Caterers in the United Kingdom. These organisations had both pressed

the British Government and local councils for similar schemes in UK seaside resorts because they “were losing a certain amount of their trade by people going on the continent...they were not getting the trade in their shops”. Accordingly, Mr Kaneen expounds confidently: “...this solarium [i.e. Summerland] without any shadow of doubt, is the envy of the United Kingdom”. Mr Coupe MHK even went as far as to claim that “Douglas [would] wither and die” if the plans for Summerland did not go ahead. “Pure rubbish!” replied Mr MacLeod MHK, who was the only member of the House of Keys to vote against the resolution committing £600,000 of Government money to the scheme. Mr Callister expressed reservations about the Summerland design concept (chapter 3) and the site’s suitability:

“I fail to see what there is in this tremendously over-exaggerated idea of a solarium...I cannot think that anybody is coming to this Isle of Man to sit in a room to get sunburnt when there is this beautiful Island to roam about and get sunburnt in.”

Following on from the arguments expressed in April 1966 about Summerland’s *location*, Mr Callister argued in the May 1966 debate that the *site* itself was inappropriate for a leisure and entertainment centre:

“I fail to see how this [Summerland]...is going to put the Isle of Man on the map. An area which has a very, very restricted approach with a seashore...which is quite inappropriate for such a building...All within an area from 80ft at one end to 200ft at the other with a *congested* entrance at a cost of what?”

It is interesting to note how Mr Callister refers to *congested* entrances. This point is picked up by the report into the disaster (chapter 6), which noted, “...the main entrance was not...well designed as an escape route” (SFC Report, Paragraph 180i, Page 61) and had a “rather inaccessible position” (SFC Report, Paragraph 201, Page 67) on a high terrace. Mr Callister also feared Summerland would provide downmarket entertainment, “being full of one-armed bandits and all sorts of jiggery pokery like that”. Whilst supporting plans for the Aquadrome, Mr Callister, together with Deemster Kneale, argued that a floral hall would be a more appropriate use of the site and more likely to provide a financial return. Like the previous month’s debate, some members expressed concern about the scheme’s effects on the Manx Electric Railway (MER). However, Council Member Mr Nivison informed Tynwald that the architect of Summerland had told him the railway’s sheds would be unaffected. This was because there were plans simply to extend the building’s upper floors over the space currently occupied by the sheds. The fire, of course, abruptly aborted these plans.

### *Autumn 1968*

In October 1968, Tynwald members debated whether to increase the size of the Government grant by £45,000 (section 2.7). According to Local Government Board Chairman Mr Radcliffe, a further grant was justified because Summerland would be “an all-Island tourist attraction” that should receive the support of all Manx taxpayers. Whilst most members expressed their continued support for the scheme in the debate of 16th October 1968, three members of the House of Keys were vocal in their opposition and voted against the resolution. Among the arguments expressed by Mr Burke

in the debate was that members should continue to support the scheme because it had received favourable coverage in UK newspapers and hence reflected positively on the Isle of Man.

“We have already had a great deal of publicity in the English press, not adverse publicity as we often get from the English press, but we have had publicity from the English press that this [Summerland] is something unique.”

Given that “the standard of entertainment [in Douglas in 1968]...leaves something to be desired” with too many one-armed bandits, Mr Burke argued that Summerland would address that deficiency and provide a wider variety of entertainment for the whole family. “It will be possible for a family to go in there [Summerland] for general admission and spend the best part of the day there”, he said. Mr Anderson MHK hoped Summerland “will provide something for the younger people in the Douglas area, not only during the visiting season but also during the winter months”. Tynwald members, including Mr Irving MHK, sought an assurance that the Aquadrome would open throughout the year to provide “a social centre for young people in Douglas”. Council member Mr Nivison compared Douglas’ inferior entertainment scene to Blackpool. On a recent visit to the Lancashire town, an important competitor to Douglas for the northwest England holiday traffic, he found fourteen live entertainment venues catering for visitors even in the second week of October.

The request for a further Government grant towards the project led to a mood of cynicism among some Tynwald members. Mr Kneale, the MHK for West Douglas, who voted against the resolution, argued:

“I am just wondering whether [there was] a deliberate de-scaling of the figures...[In April 1966] we were shown a model of the finished job...I wonder whether this was all eyewash, whether this was a bit of brainwashing...I wonder whether [Douglas] Corporation have any plans at all for this scheme. As one person described [Douglas Corporation], they were like an engine going along, a motor being driven without a pilot...The [the architects’ scale] model is just so much brainwashing.”

Mr Kneale believed that the problems with the cliff face should have been foreseen and factored into the original budget. “It is quite obvious from the original figures and architects’ remarks that these difficulties [with cliff stabilisation] were anticipated”, he remarked. Mr Kneale also seized on the findings of the Building Development Partnership (BDP) report to express his reservations about Summerland’s commercial viability. The BDP report stated that “with a relatively small year round catchment area and limited holiday season there is bound to be a high risk element in the Douglas area for a project of this sort”. The BDP was of the view that there needed to be at least a 12% return on estimated costs for the Derby Castle Development Scheme to be economically viable. “In the October 1965 [Treasurer’s Report], he indicated that the return would be less than 7%, and that was on the old figures. I tremble to think what the cost of this scheme could be to the ratepayers of Douglas”, argued Mr Kneale. However, the BDP’s concerns about finding a tenant for Summerland proved unfounded, with Mr Corkish MHK informing Tynwald in October 1968 that interest in the

tenancy had been shown by three different companies, including a £54 million company.

Concerns about Summerland's location resurfaced in the debate, with Mr Kneale arguing that the Derby Castle scheme was a 'free gift' to the residents of the neighbouring village of Onchan.

“[Summerland] is put on the outskirts of Douglas...it is certainly away from the business end of the town, it is taking people away, and it is handed as a free gift to Onchan...[Summerland] is a continuation of [Onchan Pleasure] Park...provided at no extra cost to them.”

Mr Kelly, MHK for Ramsey, joined Mr Kneale in voting against the resolution. Mr Kelly had supported the Derby Castle scheme in 1966. Despite hoping that Summerland would “be a great success”, he felt the building's revenue projections were inconsistent with the proposed additional facilities such as artificial sunbathing (chapter 3).

“A figure of £12,500 for receipts for a modern swimming pool...is quite ridiculous [too low]. They have never altered that figure from the very start...I don't think it is being fair to [Tynwald] to place [these] new features without escalating...the revenue which we are going to get from these new things.”

Mr Kelly was also incensed by the fact that architects' and consultants' fees for the Derby Castle Scheme had amounted to more than £148,000. "I boggled at these figures...I think that Douglas Corporation has not been fair [in informing Tynwald about] what was going on behind the scenes", he said. Mr McDonald MHK felt that the centralisation of tourist resources in Douglas was undesirable for the Isle of Man as a whole. He derided the idea that Summerland was "an all-Island" amenity. "It is no good anyone stressing to me that this is for the good of the whole island – it is not necessarily. If the people all stay in Douglas it certainly is not", he argued. After the fire, Mr McDonald told the *London Evening Standard* (6th August, 1973):

"I and a group of other MPs feel that [Summerland] was bulldozed through in an attempt to lure more tourists who were taking more and more package holidays to the Mediterranean. It was a futile attempt to compete with the sun spots...[Summerland was proposed merely] to satisfy those with heavy investment in the tourist trade."

In terms of population and taxation, Mr McDonald claimed the £2 million pound cost of the Derby Castle Scheme was the equivalent of spending £2,000 million in the UK.

Mr MacLeod MHK remained forthright in his opposition to Summerland. He said. "...it is far too big a thing for...Douglas to take on, and I am certain that it will never pay...it is going to be nothing but a money-loser". He then drew a comparison with Blackpool swimming baths: "If Blackpool, with [around] 7 million visitors against half a million in the

Isle of Man cannot make their [Blackpool] baths pay, how is the Isle of Man going to possibly do that?" Mr MacLeod then went on to argue that the Government should be spending money instead on providing new accommodation and cleaning up beaches. He continued: "I am sure and certain that visitors do not want to come to the Isle of Man to sit about in solariums [i.e. Summerland]. People who come from densely populated cities want to be out in the open." Mr Nivison disagreed:

"Let us give...Douglas Corporation every encouragement to provide additional capacity for indoor entertainment...[Having new buildings gives] the impression to the tourists that the place is alive...We shall hear less and less of people who come to our Isle of Man and say the only things they have built since the [Second World] War are the pier terminal and the casino."

Mr Radcliffe closed the debate by reassuring members that Douglas Corporation would not ask members for an even larger Government grant at a later date. The resolution to approve the grant was carried by 20 votes to three in the House of Keys and nine votes to nil in the Council.

## 2.9 Summary

The origin of Summerland can be traced to the decline in visitor numbers to the Isle of Man from the early 1950s, which was hastened by the growth of cheap package holidays to the Mediterranean. Summerland occupied the Derby Castle site, so called because of the castellated structure built there around 1790 for the Seventh Duke of Atholl. Mr Alfred Laughton, a Douglas lawyer, bought the site in 1877 and had the foresight to use it as an entertainment centre (e.g. theatre, ballroom) to cater for the growing number of visitors from mainland Britain during late Victorian times. Douglas Corporation acquired the site in 1964, with the intention of demolishing the outdated facilities and replacing them with a futuristic family-orientated entertainment centre (Summerland) and swimming baths (Aquadrome) that would counter the attractions of the Mediterranean. After earlier plans fell through, local architect Mr James Philipps Lomas was asked to draw up new plans in 1965. However, much of the detailed design work for Summerland was carried out by Leeds-based firm Gillinson, Barnett and Partners. Summerland and the Aquadrome were financed by Douglas ratepayers and Isle of Man taxpayers (Estimated cost in 1968 = £1,617,500). Whilst largely supportive of the plans, members of the Island's parliament (Tynwald) expressed concerns about the cost of the scheme, the transparency of the plans and its commercial viability. Critics of the scheme argued it was in the wrong place, a waste of money and would promote the further centralisation of tourist resources in Douglas. Some thought the money would be better spent on promoting the Island's natural beauty as opposed to building an artificial sunshine centre. A conference centre and new visitor accommodation were also seen as being more deserving projects.