

# **STATES OF JERSEY**



## **LA POUQUELAYE OLD SCHOOL SITE: PROVISION OF YOUTH AND COMMUNITY FACILITIES**

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**Lodged au Greffe on 24th December 2008  
by the Connétable of St. Helier**

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**STATES GREFFE**

## **PROPOSITION**

**THE STATES are asked to decide whether they are of opinion –**

- (a) to agree that the site and buildings of the former La Pouquelaye School (as shown on Drawing Number ASC 1) should continue to be used as a Youth and Community Centre and be administered by the Parish of St. Helier;
- (b) to request the Minister for Treasury and Resources to agree the lease or sale of the property to the Parish of St. Helier, for the restricted use as a youth and community centre, at a price to be agreed by the Minister for Treasury and Resources that reflects such restriction, together with an appropriate safeguard to protect and compensate the States should the site be sold or commercially redeveloped at a later date, with each party to be responsible for its own legal fees;
- (c) to authorise the Attorney General and the Greffier of the States to pass on behalf of the Public any contracts which might be found necessary to pass in connection with the said land and any interest therein.

**CONNÉTABLE OF ST. HELIER**

## REPORT

The Connétable of St. Helier originally approached the States in the late spring of 2005 to allow the Parish to utilise the old school site at La Pouquelaye when it became vacant after the School's move to the newly constructed D'Auvergne School premises.

This was mainly in order to trial a youth and community centre to provide much-needed facilities for this highly residential area; it would also serve to protect the property from vandalism by providing a site presence until the future use of the site had been determined.

Discussions with Property Services secured a 6 month lease on the site for the Parish on a peppercorn rent to trial the youth and community centre. This period of time proved inadequate to trial the facility and accordingly the Parish sought and were granted an extension to that period from Property Services.

At a Parish Assembly held on 27th March 2007 the Parish confirmed its wish to use this site solely for the purpose of providing a much-needed youth and community centre to this area, and authorised the Connétable to enter into negotiations with the States to purchase the site for the restricted use as a youth and community centre at a price that reflected such restriction together with a 'Le Brocq' clause to protect and compensate the States should the site be sold or commercially redeveloped at a later date. (The figure being quoted was a sum between £250,000 and £300,000.) A proposition to this effect (P.55/2007) was tabled and a debate begun, with particular reference being made to the possibility of a land swap between the States and the Parish; however, the former Deputy Jacqueline Huet successfully moved a proposition that the States move to the next item on the Order Paper.

Discussions continued between the Parish and Property Holdings with regard to a renewable 21 year lease of the site at a commensurate rental of £25,000 a year, with the Parish being responsible for all work on the site to bring the premises up to the required standards.

Meanwhile, the use of the site by numerous local charities and organisations continued to intensify, proving the need for such facilities in this area of St. Helier. Not only local youth groups, parent and toddler classes, dance and photography clubs and community meetings were taking place throughout the day, but also Island-wide organisations were able to find low-cost premises for their activities, including the Band of the Island of Jersey, One World group, the Nairobi Trust, and the like.

At this time an approach was received from Family Nursing and Home Care with regard to their sharing the site with the Parish, and an appraisal of the organisation's requirements was undertaken which suggested that the provision of family nursing services would fit in well with the Parish's vision for the site. An in-principle agreement was reached between Family Nursing and Home Care and Property Holdings that the Parish could sub-lease up to 10,500 square feet to the charity. This was incorporated into Draft Heads of Terms dated 10/01/2008.

In the summer of 2008 Property Holdings made it clear to the Parish that they were seriously considering the possibilities of accommodating Centre Point at La Pouquelaye on a shared basis with the Parish, and the Parish were asked to liaise with Centre Point to explore the possibilities of both parties sharing the facilities.

In the autumn of 2008 (16/10/2008) the Parish were informed that Centre Point were to be offered a 21 year renewable lease of the whole site for a peppercorn rent of £10 p.a. on the basis that they allow the Parish to retain some 20% of the accommodation for youth facilities and that the communal areas be shared under agreement between both parties. With this arrangement the States would bring the building and the site up to the required standard for the anticipated sum of around £250,000, with the main work being to the roof and to the drainage.

While the Connétable and officers of the Parish considered aspects of the arrangement to be favourable, not least the avoidance of necessary investment in the buildings, no decision had been reached by the Steering Group that had been administering the centre for nearly 3 years. Subsequent discussions with the Steering Group and the administrator of the Centre indicated that the shared use proposed with Centre Point would be totally unworkable, severely restricting the potential benefits of the site for both youth and community provision in the neighbourhood. Much of the open space on the site would be given up to the parking of Centre Point vehicles, and

there would be limited availability of rooms during the working day.

It was also pointed out that while the activities of Centre Point could be transferred to any site in States ownership with good road access (which the La Pouquelaye Centre clearly lacks), such as Overdale, the need for youth and community facilities in this densely occupied part of St. Helier could only be met from the former school site.

The Minister, Senator Terry Le Sueur, made a decision to offer the site to Centre Point on 15/10/2008 (MD-PH-2008-0083), and informed the Parish the following day. Due to political pressure from the St. Helier Deputies involved in the La Pouquelaye project, and Senator James Perchard, then Assistant Minister of Health, the decision was put on hold, though officers from Property Holdings and States architects have continued to visit the site, apparently confident that the move of Centre Point will go ahead.

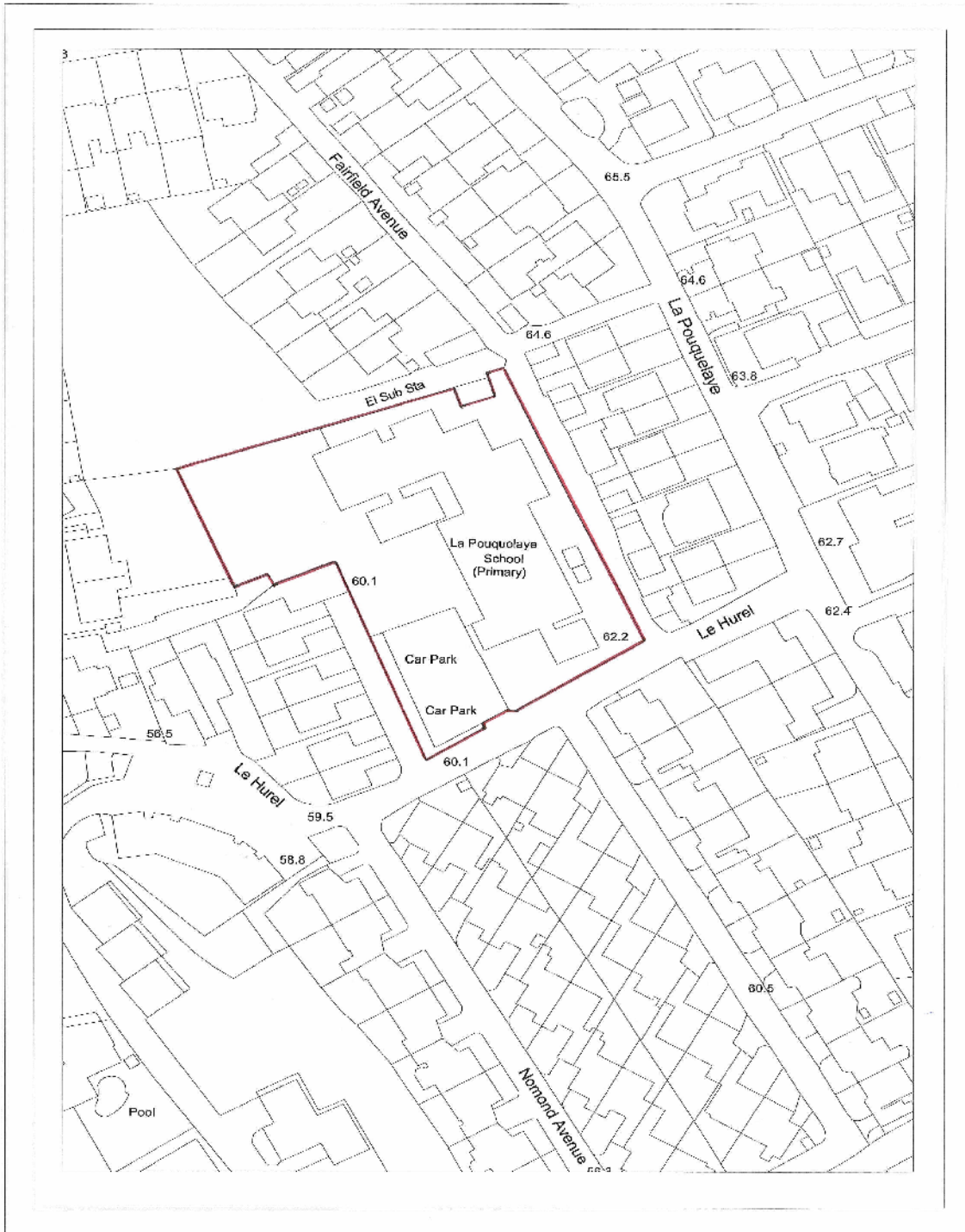
On 6th November the La Pouquelaye Youth and Community Centre Steering Group agreed that the Parish would seek the support of the States to continue its development of much-needed youth and community facilities on the site. The Parish would be willing either to buy the site from the States on the restricted use basis (with a 'Le Brocq' clause if required) as originally proposed in P.55/2007, or to continue the previous negotiations for a lease.

The Parish requires some long-term security with regard to its administration of the site to allow the many local clubs which have expressed an interest in being based at the Centre to move forward. It is unacceptable that the Parish and other groups expend significant time researching the best use of the site only to find that the States department responsible for property is working on its own schemes (in the case of Centre Point, simply to allow Property Holdings to dispose of the former JCG site, part of which is currently occupied by Centre Point).

The Parish has a proven track record of running the site as a youth and community centre and seeks the support of the States in allowing its work to continue. Significant sums have already been spent on staffing and equipping the centre, which is also attracting sponsorship from private companies that recognise the good work being achieved on the site. If the States allow the Minister for Treasury and Resources to pursue the plans to relocate Centre Point on the site, the ability of the Parish to provide much-needed youth and community facilities in this area will effectively cease.

### **Financial and manpower implications**

There should be no negative financial or manpower implications for the States if this projet is adopted. The States stands to receive the proceeds of a negotiated sale or lease of the property concerned, and to avoid the projected expenditure of £250,000 on converting the premises for use by Centre Point. It is interesting to note the terms of the Minister's opposition to the previous proposal by the Parish to purchase the site for up to a third of a million pounds (see Appendix). The Minister was prepared to offer the site to Centre Point for £10 per annum and to invest £250,000 in repairs and conversion costs, whereas the Parish has been negotiating to date on the basis of either a lease for £25,000 per annum or an outright purchase for around £300,000. It would appear that the Minister's concerns had a lot to do with money, i.e. the future of the former JCG site, and little to do with how the community's needs were being met, either by the La Pouquelaye Centre or by Centre Point.



**DRAWING No. ASC**

**COMMENTS on P.55/2007 by the Minister for Treasury and Resources**

The Minister for Treasury and Resources is not opposed in principle to the sale of this site to the Parish of St. Helier for community facilities. This has already been tested on an experimental basis, with the co-operation of Property Holdings, and the Parish has been able to satisfy itself of the need. The Education, Sport and Culture Department has advised Property Holdings that a youth facility would be of benefit to the surrounding community but that the Youth Service would not be able to offer any major financial support other than possibly some sessional youth workers.

However, this proposition also needs to be looked at in the broader context of the States Strategic Plan and the need to put the resources of the States to the best use. As Treasury Minister one key objective must be to realise a fair value for the site, but this does not necessarily imply that the highest possible yield has to be extracted, if alternative social or other benefits to the Island can be shown. As agreed by the States, future capital expenditure is based partly on the realisation of funds from the disposal of properties surplus to the States requirements and so it should be borne in mind that if this property is sold below market value, some further disposal(s) will be necessary, or else necessary capital expenditure will have to be deferred. It would be unrealistic (and against the principles of the Strategic Plan) to sell the site for such a low value as the proposition envisages.

An alternative approach to the sale of the site would be to enter into a 'land swap' agreement, perhaps with a balancing cash adjustment if appropriate. The Parish owns land which is not in full use and which could support a better use by the States.

Provided that asset values were broadly similar, the problem of 'writing off' the greater part of the value of the old school site could be avoided. Discussions over a potential land swap did take place with the Parish representatives toward the end of 2006 and revisiting this approach may offer an opportunity for both parties to benefit.

Whilst I can support the sale of the former La Pouquelaye School for the purposes indicated, I cannot at this stage support it on the terms proposed by the Connétable of St. Helier. I would, however, strongly favour entering into further constructive discussions with the Connétable with a view to reaching agreement on a land swap.