

STATES OF JERSEY



CHARING CROSS: VACANT SITE – PETITION

**Lodged au Greffe on 4th April 2006
by the Connétable of St. Helier**

STATES GREFFE

PROPOSITION

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

to request the Minister for Planning and Environment to designate as an Area of Important Open Space the greater part of the vacant site situated at the intersection of York Street and Dumaresq Street.

CONNÉTABLE OF ST. HELIER

REPORT

This report supports the petition of some 24 business people and residents in the immediate area of the 'Hectors site', St. Helier, against the proposal to use the site for development (a copy of the petition is attached as Appendix 1).

The matter has been discussed by the Parish of St. Helier Roads Committee on several occasions and has also been the subject of a Parish meeting (29th June 2005), following which a letter was sent to the President of the Planning and Environment Committee indicating the wish of those present to maintain the site as open space. The site which is the subject of this petition is a vacant plot on the corner of York Street and Dumaresq Street in St. Helier. The whole area is shown on the attached plan (Appendix 2) marked as A and B. The petitioners would like to see both areas kept as open space, especially given the potential for developing a recycling centre where there are currently eurobins screened by planters in the back of the site. However, if it is believed that a building of some sort is required to 'finish off' in aesthetic terms the line of historic buildings leading up Dumaresq Street to the junction with Pitt Street, part B of the site could be built upon leaving the greater part of the site (shown as A) as an area of important open space.

Having been a member of the Planning and Environment Committee for more than 6 years, I have long accepted the received wisdom that this 'gap site' ought to be 'repaired' and the building lines of York Street and Dumaresq Street restored by the insertion of a building on this corner site. However, I have noticed over the last few years, and particularly since the use of the site for parking was discontinued and seating provided, how important this small piece of open space is to the users of this part of town. It provides, even in its present unimproved state, a useful resting place for people who are making their way to or from commercial and residential premises in Parade Gardens, the Hospital, Cheapside and People's Park.

Were the greater part of the site to be designated as open space improvements could be carried out both to the surface of the site and to the gable ends of the surrounding buildings – if this latter objective were not realised by the limited building which the terms of the petition envisage. It is noteworthy that the tidying up of the area carried out by the Parish last year impressed the judges during 'Britain in Bloom'. The site also provides valuable space for refuse disposal facilities – now shielded from view by planters – and it has been identified as a potential site for a number of bring-banks or recycling centre to serve premises in this part of St. Helier. More recently, the gable ends bordering the site have been used to exhibit large screen prints, firstly of a local artist's views of the Jersey cow and currently images of a Liberation 60 exhibition. Such uses indicate that replacing the lost building is not the only option to consider for the site.

At the same time, many of those who have commented on the various steps being taken to improve this part of St. Helier have called for the urgent restoration of the premises on the east side of Dumaresq Street, leading from the vacant site up to Pitt Street, and including the well-known but increasingly faded mural/advertisement on the Foot building. It is understood that the repair of these properties has been complicated by the owner's wish to assemble a plan for the entire site bounded by Broad Street, York Street, Dumaresq Street and Pitt Street.

The Planning Brief prepared by the Planning and Environment Department (Appendix 3) makes the following assumptions about the site:

1. *Building on the site is a prerequisite of the regeneration of the building group.*

This point can be challenged as there is no question that the neglected group of buildings can be left to decay whatever decision is taken by the States over the vacant site. Although the owner of the adjacent buildings has been waiting to obtain possession of the corner site in order to pursue a development for the entire building group, if it is decided not to approve buildings upon it, it will be essential that steps are taken to seek the conservation of the Foot building and its environs. It would be possible for a small building to be permitted that would finish off the gable end of the line of historic buildings while leaving the greater part of the site as open space.

2. *The Planning Brief represents the first step towards resolving the future of the area.*

It should be pointed out that in 2002 the Parish of St. Helier took the important step of solving the problem of the Co-op's unloading facilities: the decision by the Parish's Roads Committee that the vehicles servicing the store could unload in Pitt Street meant that plans to create an unloading area inside the Foot building, thereby destroying part of the fabric of this important old building, could be shelved.

3. *The only course of action for the community to take over this site is to plug 'the gaping hole and large exposed gables of the adjacent buildings left when former buildings here were demolished,' ... which will restore the street pattern and character of this area, where evidence of what the town used to look like can still be seen.*

This is the main argument in favour of the Department's plan to place the site on the market as a building site, but while it can safely be argued that replacing a building on the vacant site would restore the street pattern it is unclear whether this will recapture the character of the area, given the near-complete destruction of much of the historic quarter which used to lie to the north and east. As has been pointed out under 1. above, repair work to the gable ends, with some limited building if thought necessary, could be achieved without losing the advantages offered by the open space.

The Parish is keen to see the repair and restoration of what is left of these important town buildings, and, if the greater part of the vacant site is preserved, would wish to provide interpretation panels illustrating how the area looked before the post-war demolition of Hue Street and its environs laid waste. The Parish would support the designation of this area of St. Helier as a Conservation Area in line with policy BE9 of the Island Plan. Of course it is practically too late to do this as so little remains, but at least the Foot building and its immediate neighbours could be returned to their original condition, with interpretative efforts made that might echo the scathing critique of past planning policy made in the Urban Character Appraisal (2005):

"Examination of historical views of St. Helier prior to the 1940s indicates that a great number of architecturally and historically significant buildings have been destroyed in the decades since the last war. Regency houses and Victorian villas, working class rows and late medieval cottages have all succumbed to redevelopment pressure. Some were replaced by blocks of modern flats, office buildings, large retailing units or simply left open for car parking.

In the early 1960s, the first Island Development Plan contained a major survey of St. Helier which documented the approximate age of all buildings, but also recorded the physical condition from good to very poor. Despite the fact that the vast majority of structures in and around the medieval core of the town were deemed to be in good or "medium" condition, within a few years planning policy was geared to comprehensively redevelop large parts of the town in order to increase the density of the sites and increase the amount and habitable quality of residential accommodation.

Many different parts of the town were affected by this redevelopment policy in the 1960s and '70s, such as Ann Street, and areas west of St. Saviour's Road. Most striking, however, was the scale of the demolition in and around Hue, Union and Dumaresq Streets. Here, despite protests from local heritage bodies, large numbers of 18th century houses and shops were summarily removed. Many sites were soon redeveloped with high- and low-rise housing, though large gap sites remain to this day.

Thankfully, a few historic houses in Hue and Dumaresq Streets were rescued at the time, and some have been subsequently reconstructed or restored. Still, the loss of such an ancient part of the town is tragic. The "architectural merit" was such, wrote an architectural historian, these houses could have been "renovated and conserved to provide a living 'Vieux Quartier' for the town." Not long after the destruction of Hue Street, the States' policy towards high-rise public housing began to change and coincidentally, a greater interest in the need to conserve the town's heritage came to the fore." (p.52)

The 2002 Island Plan provides support for the aspirations of the petitioners when it sets out the States' 'Vision for the town of St. Helier' as one which includes 'a town of civilised streets and spaces for enjoyment as well as function.' (6.31)

The Island Plan goes on to emphasize the importance of 'protect(ing) cherished views from the potential

obstruction of new development, enhance(ing) existing views and exploit(ing) the opportunities for new views and vistas. (6.32) Not using this site as a development site will preserve important glimpses of what is left of one of the town's finest streets, Dumaresq Street. Not only will it mean that the shop frontages on the western side (between 'Lettos' and 'Treadles' will remain wholly legible from York Street, but it will also allow for the facades of the 'Foot building' to be appreciated once they have been restored.

Open space is important in every busy town. This is recognised in the Island Plan –

The approach to the town centre involves ... maintaining, enhancing and providing new public open spaces and improving the links between them. (6.33)

Within the urban areas, open spaces help to soften and complement the surrounding built form and frame the setting of important buildings. Open spaces also have an important environmental role, as 'lungs' within a densely built-up area such as the town centre, as rest places in office areas, play and leisure areas in housing developments and as parks. (6.54)

The Plan emphasizes the need for the authorities to discuss the particular needs of such areas with local businesses. It is, therefore, relevant to note that the majority of businesses operating in the vicinity of the Hectors site have signed the petition to safeguard this small piece of open space which lies at the heart of their local community.

The Urban Character Appraisal recognises both the strengths and weaknesses of St. Helier. In summarising an 'Urban Design Strategy' for the town it recognises that the 'old town' will have to raise the level of the experience it offers if it is to withstand the competitive pressures resulting from the new urban quarter of the Waterfront. "This is the most important challenge facing the town in the next 10 years, the Report argues, and our strategy must be to ensure that the town centre core remains the principal centre for retail, cultural and civic functions, (and that) the town centre core continues to be a pedestrian priority environment, animated by events, activities and outdoor eating and drinking". (p.207)

There are no direct financial implications arising from this proposition. The Parish of St. Helier has already requested – and been refused – permission to make good the surface of the site where it is uneven, and would work in partnership with the businesses in the surrounding area to enhance the amenity value of the area. Clearly if the States view the site in terms of its asset value alone, that sum would not be realised unless the site were to be developed, though the sum involved would depend on how much of the site were to be designated as Important Open Space. There are no manpower implications.

APPENDIX 1

To: His Excellency Air Chief Marshal Sir John Cheshire K.B.E., C.B.

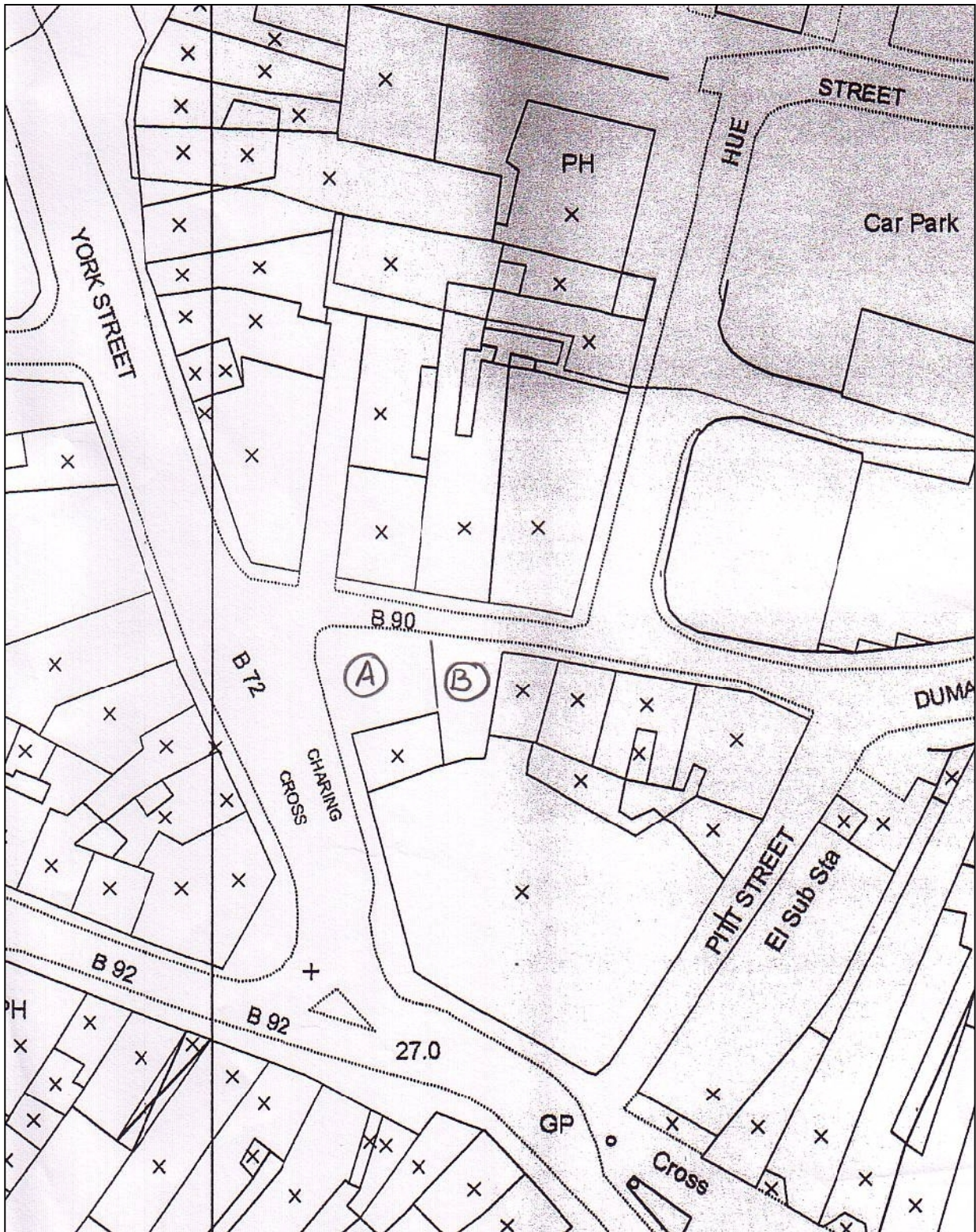
To: Sir Philip Bailhache, Bailiff of Jersey

To: Members of the States of Jersey

The humble petition of certain of the residents and traders from the area of Charing Cross, York Street and Dumaresq Street, St. Helier shews that the vacant site situated at the intersection of these streets offers a valuable amenity space for shoppers, visitors, traders, workers and residents in St. Helier, and that the greater part of it should not be built upon, and accordingly your petitioners pray that the States request the Environment and Public Services Committee to take steps to have the greater part of the site designated and maintained as an Area of Important Open Space in the town, and your petitioners as in duty bound will ever pray.

FULL NAME	ADDRESS	SIGNATURE

24 signatures



APPENDIX 2

Corner site, Dumaresq Street and York Street: Planning Brief

There is great interest in the future of the vacant site at the corner of Dumaresq Street and York Street. The Department is aware that for the future of the area as a whole, this site is important and its use and appearance should complement and enhance the work that is being proposed in the streets around as part of the St. Helier Street Life Programme.

It is felt that this site could act as a catalyst for the regeneration and refurbishment of the group of buildings between Dumaresq Street, Pitt Street and York Street, including the Channel Island Co-operative Society Charing Cross food store and the historic Foot buildings. The Planning and Environment Department believes that the public interest is best served by securing the release of this site to the Co-op which has long had an interest in its acquisition, at the full and open market value which will generate a capital receipt to the States, and which would enable other significant public benefits associated with the regeneration of their landholdings here to go ahead.

Much work remains to be done and the approval of the States Assembly secured for the sale of the land, but the department believes that it has taken the first step in unravelling a complex issue that has clouded the future of land and buildings in this area for some considerable time. A planning brief for the site has been approved which will ensure that the site is redeveloped with a building which repairs the gaping hole and large exposed gables of the adjacent buildings left when former buildings here were demolished, and which will restore the street pattern and character of this area, where evidence of what the town used to look like can still be seen.

Dumaresq Street Planning Brief

Site forming the corner of Charing Cross and Dumaresq Street, St. Helier

Introduction

The site to which this planning brief relates lies on the western edge of the town centre, and forms the corner of Charing Cross and Dumaresq Street. Pitt Street forms the other side of this urban block, which features on the Le Gros map of 1834 in similar plan form.

The site is currently empty, but the exposed gable ends of the adjacent buildings, and the line of eurobins, creates a significant eyesore to an otherwise pleasant part of town. Accordingly the Planning and Environment Department are keen to promote a suitable development to restore the site and complement the other improvements proposed for the area.

The purpose of the brief is to ensure that any development is designed in accordance with the Island Plan, is well-related to its context, and as such maximises the opportunities offered by this prominent site, while controlling the architecture as little as possible. In this respect, the brief sets out general parameters within which the use and design of development on the site should be developed.

It serves to guide the development of the site as an independent building or as part of a more comprehensive redevelopment of the site and the remodelling and refurbishment of adjacent buildings.

Context

A number of significant changes have already taken place within the vicinity of the site, and more are likely to happen over the next 5 years or so. These include public space and highways improvements proposed to be carried out as part of the Planning and Environment Department's St. Helier Street Life Programme. Other potential projects include –

- redevelopment of vacant land in Hue Street;
- pedestrian improvements in Broad Street;

- mixed development in the block adjacent to The Parade and Gloucester Street.

Any reuse and redevelopment of this vacant corner site should complement and contribute to the overall revitalisation of this area of the town centre.

Analysis

The area forms an extension to the main pedestrianized retail areas of King Street and Queen Street. It is of mixed architectural and townscape quality. Notable examples of local townscape quality include the restoration of mainly 18th century buildings in Hue Street and extending into Dumaresq Street, and the line of mainly 2 and 3-storey buildings to the east of the site, which are the subject of future restoration plans.

As a corner site it is important visually, and prominent from both the Town Hall to the north and Charing Cross to the south.

The predominant architectural character is considered to be set by the 18th and 19th century terraces with rendered masonry walls to the north and east of the site. The buildings to the south of the site are of poor quality in their design and detail and contribute little to the area. They are wholly out of character and in the long term may provide an opportunity for remodelling/redevelopment. The roofs of the better buildings are mainly pitched within the range of approximately 40 – 50 degrees and finished in either red clay pantiles or slate, terminating in either an exposed eaves gutter or capped parapet. They have a mainly vertical rhythm with varying heights and regular patterns of fenestration. Various designs of traditional dormer windows can be seen. Other visual characteristics are as follows –

- narrow plot width varying from 5m to 12 m;
- frontage treatment varies from plot to plot;
- building heights vary plot by plot from 2 to 4 storeys, often incorporating a dormer level;
- projecting render mouldings and quoins;
- timber sliding sash windows;
- limited palette of materials.

Controls and Guidelines

The Island Plan sets out a vision for St. Helier, which describes a town of strong historic identity and visual interest in its buildings and public spaces. The Department is therefore seeking development proposals which contribute positively to the character and quality of town. It is likely that the proposed public realm improvements as part of the St. Helier *Street Life* Programme in York Street will further establish the area as a vibrant extension to the core retail area of King Street and Queen Street. The following broad intentions for the site are drawn from the analysis above.

Land Use

The Le Gros map of 1834 illustrates the urban block of which the site forms part in similar plan form. On this map the site contains a building. The Island Plan stresses the importance of maintaining and restoring the historic character of the town centre, and of avoiding changes that damage the historic grain of the town. Implicit in this is the need to develop an appropriate building which restores this original grain.

As the site falls within an area of predominantly retail use and the defined town centre on the Island Plan Town Proposals Map a retail use should be provided at least at ground level, in order to further enhance the vitality of the area. In this respect, the ground floor building frontage would be expected to make a positive and vital contribution to activity at street level. The use of upper floors will be considered flexibly.

Scale and Massing

The intention is to prevent further destruction of the character of the area. The building to the south of the site

fails not through being the wrong size, but rather by its failure to break up and model the building mass into similar proportions to the surrounding buildings.

The general principle applicable to the redevelopment of the site is therefore to bring the proposed development in line with the scale and proportion of the surrounding buildings and the spaces they front on to. The part of the site fronting onto Charing Cross for example may justify greater mass and scale than the much narrower Dumaresq Street.

Special consideration should be given to the building's corner location, and its potential to articulate the sequences of movement through the area. Traditionally corner buildings in Jersey are often handled discreetly and care should be taken not to overstate the point.

Building Height and Roof

To the east of the site the building should not exceed 2 storeys. The surviving gable end of the demolished building gives an indication of an acceptable height. A further storey with dormers within a pitched roof is acceptable subject to the detailed design of roof and dormers. The latter should collectively occupy no more than 40% of any roof elevation, should not rise above the existing ridge line, and should employ traditional proportions.

At the southern end of the site facing onto Charing Cross, an increase in height to 3 storeys is deemed acceptable. Although pitched roofs predominate, some limited deviation from this on the corner may be acceptable.

Windows

The fenestration should be vertical in proportion. Traditional painted sash windows with a minimum of 150mm external reveal are considered appropriate.

Details, Colours and Materials

Elevation modelling and choice of materials should follow the established patterns. Although the site's corner location may justify in part a deviation from a traditional pitched roof, this is the characteristic roof form of the area. The colours and materials selected should be limited. Although there are a number of white or nearly white buildings in the location the adoption of warmer hues is encouraged as these will blend more effectively with the surroundings.

Generally the development should reflect its setting and relate well to the new proposals for adjacent street improvements. In order to be of lasting quality, the construction details should be carefully designed and should enrich the development.

Shopfronts

The design of these will greatly influence the character and quality of the area, in addition to the impact it will have on the display of the goods and services, and consequently their appeal in a competitive market. The demise of many traditional shopfronts in the area has contributed to the erosion of character, and has resulted in some bland and uninteresting examples. The neighbouring shoe shop is a case in point.

It is important in shopfront design to emphasize the relationship between the shop and the building above. There are a number of notable wasted opportunities in the area where this does not happen. Ideally within the street scene there should be a variety of fronts with stall risers at different heights, window designs and fascia boards. These should relate to the proportions of the buildings of which they form part.

Large expanses of glass should usually be avoided in favour of smaller proportions more in keeping with a traditional streetscape. Similarly fascia boards if used should be an integral part of the shopfront. Reflective materials, fluorescent or other bright colours, and illuminated signs should normally be avoided and if these are considered to be important should be employed with great sensitivity. Use of spot lit projecting signs in some

cases may be appropriate.

Care should be taken in articulating points of entry, to ensure that they avoid long horizontal runs of shopfront, in particular on the Dumaresq Street elevation.

Servicing and Car Parking

The proposed St. Helier *Street Life* Programme proposals for York Street include a loading bay adjacent to the site which offers the potential to provide it with a shared servicing facility. If the site is incorporated into a wider redevelopment of adjacent buildings and uses there is potential to benefit from existing facilities, although these are not without issue presently.

In view of the physical limitations of the site, the constrained town centre location and the desire to for the development of the site to make a positive contribution to the streetscene, the potential parking requirements generated by the use of the upper storeys will be viewed flexibly relative to the merits of any development proposal.