

# STATES OF JERSEY



## MILLENNIUM TOWN PARK: ADDITIONAL OPEN SPACE AND PUBLIC PARKING

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Lodged au Greffe on 22nd November 2016  
by the Connétable of St. Helier

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STATES GREFFE

## **PROPOSITION**

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

to request the Council of Ministers to seek to acquire the land currently in the ownership of the Jersey Gas Company in order to extend the Millennium Town Park to provide additional open space and public parking as appropriate.

CONNÉTABLE OF ST. HELIER

## REPORT

### 1. Introduction

The States of Jersey has debated the question of whether the Millennium Town Park should be extended over the adjacent Jersey Gas site on several occasions. A planning application (PP.2014/1125) to build nearly 300 units of accommodation on the site prompted a petition ([P.156/2014](#)) to prevent the determination of the application, which objectors believed was in danger of being fast-tracked by the then Minister for Planning and Environment just weeks away from the General Election; and to urge the Minister to consider alternative uses for the site, such as increasing the amount of amenity space and car-parking for town residents, shoppers and visitors. In the event, the application was deferred and then rejected in the following year by the new Minister, whose decision was upheld following an appeal by the applicant.

With a new planning application having been submitted for high-density residential development on the site (PP.2016/1414), I believe it is time to look again at the arguments in favour of extending the Millennium Town Park. The Proposition does not seek to prevent the determination of the new planning application; if the States accept the Proposition, negotiations can take place with the owners of the site to agree a fair price for it. The question of how the site purchase might be funded is addressed later in this Report.

### 2. Extending the Millennium Town Park and the Island Plan

The [Island Plan \(2011, revised 2014\)](#) recognises that St. Helier has insufficient open amenity space. Some of the relevant sections of the Plan are reproduced below –

**7.45** The audit [*by JPC Strategic Planning & Leisure Consultants: [Outdoor Open Space, Sport and Recreation Study, July 2008](#)*] of open space, sport and recreational facilities in the Island has found that there is a wide range of open space that provides varied opportunities for recreation. Provision is dominated by areas of natural greenspace and beaches, as well as the network of green lanes that provide considerable access to ‘the countryside’. The Island also has more formal provision in the form of sports grounds, play areas and parks.

**7.46** Provision varies widely across the Island, with differences in provision in the predominantly urban parishes compared to the rural parishes. However, as the Island is relatively small and easily accessible, the provision of facilities needs to be considered on both a local level and at an Island-wide level.

**7.48** Using these potential standards, an assessment of supply and demand has been made, in the [Outdoor Open Space, Sport and Recreation Study](#)<sup>1</sup>. There are some particular characteristics applicable to Jersey that need to be taken into account in any consideration of the outcome of this work, including:

- the Island has large areas of natural greenspace and beaches which provide huge opportunity for informal recreation;
- participation rates in outdoor sport are higher than the UK and people do and will travel throughout the Island to use facilities;

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<sup>1</sup> see section 6 of [Outdoor Open Space, Sport and Recreation Study](#). Assessment is based on earlier population estimate of 89,300.

- the provision of more formal facilities such as parks, play areas and amenity space have more significance in urban areas, as many of the rural areas benefit from access to natural greenspace and beaches.

**7.49** Having regard to the above, the main observations from the study are:

- there is an abundance of natural greenspace and adequate amenity greenspace provision, *however, the quantity of and accessibility to open spaces of these types is more challenging in urban areas [my italics]*;
- the current provision of outdoor sports facilities for the Island as a whole is sufficient, *with some issues of local access, particularly in urban areas [my italics]*;
- there is an under-supply of parks in the Island, however, their provision needs to be taken in context with provision of other types of open space, particularly in rural areas. *In urban areas under-supply of parks may have more significance, particularly if future development needs are to be predominantly met in the urban areas [my italics]*;
- there is an under-supply of play space across the Island.

**7.58** There is a need to ensure that along with new development in the Built-up Areas, there is adequate provision of new, good quality open space. *This is particularly relevant given the proposed intensification of development on existing built sites and in the existing Built-up Area [my italics]*. The Minister will, therefore, ensure that all new development makes adequate provision for open space in line with supplementary planning guidance to be developed and adopted by the Minister in accord with Proposal 22 ‘Open Space Strategy’.

## **Proposal 22**

### **Open Space Strategy**

To ensure the adequate provision, accessibility and quality of open spaces throughout the Island and in local neighbourhoods, the Minister for Planning and Environment will, in consultation with relevant stakeholders and through engagement with the local community, develop and adopt an Open Space Strategy which will:

- identify open space provision throughout the Island and define its quality and accessibility,
- develop Jersey standards for the provision, quality and accessibility of open space, which include considerations of safety, convenience and ease of access, with particular regard given to the mobility-impaired and the elderly when living communally;
- assess the need for the provision and/or enhancement of open space, work with stakeholders to develop proposals and policies to deliver new or enhanced provision, including the potential introduction and use of new planning policies to realise objectives;
- include a review of the ability of States-owned and privately-owned land to contribute towards the need for, and quality of, open space provision, particularly in St. Helier and other parts of the Built-up Area.

In the debate on 29th June 2011 on the Plan, as amended, I referred to “the extremely opaque description of open space” in the sections of the Plan quoted above –

[Official Report – 29th June 2011 – Hansard](#)

“ “Provision varies widely across the Island with differences in provision in the predominantly urban Parishes compared to the rural Parishes. However, as the Island is relatively small and easily accessible, the provision of facilities needs to be considered on both a local level and at an Island-wide level.” An extremely cryptic statement because the first sentence appears to be reluctant to state the obvious fact that urban dwellers have less – they call it different, I call it less – they have less access to open space than residents of rural communities. Then in 7.49, the main observations of the study include the statement that, and I quote: “There is an abundance of natural green space and adequate amenity green-space provision. However, the quality of and accessibility to open spaces of these types is more challenging in urban areas.” While provision of outdoor sports facilities is sufficient and I quote: “With some issues of local access, particularly in urban areas.” I mentioned in an earlier debate that they suggest that we need to develop Jersey’s standards because we cannot meet the international ones, which has got to be a wrong-headed idea. They do say there is an under-supply of parks in the Island but then they go on to qualify that by saying: “However, their provision needs to be taken in context with provision of other types of open space, particularly in rural areas. In urban areas, under-supply of parks may have more significance, particularly if future development needs are to be predominantly met in the urban areas.” Well, I say there is no “may” about it. There is a problem with the amount of open space in the town area and if we are not prepared to tackle that, then we are going to effectively be doing what Deputy Trevor Pitman called “dumping in St. Helier”. The open space is absolutely crucial if increased density of housing is expected to go into St. Helier.”

The Open Space Study itself is specific about the deficiency in open space in St. Helier –

“Amenity Greenspace – Provision varies from parish to parish, however, under supply in many of the rural parishes is offset by good supply to natural greenspace and/or beaches. The under provision of amenity greenspace is more of an issue in the parishes with larger urban areas, and this is the case in St. Helier (minus 11.67 vergées) and to a lesser extent St. Clement (minus 1.08 vergées)”.

The key statement in the revised Island Plan comes early on in the ‘Strategic Policy Framework’ –

“In particular, it is imperative that to create an acceptable urban living environment in the Town, adequate provision of good quality and accessible public open space must be planned for and made.” *(page 18)*

### 3. **Extending the Millennium Town Park and the North of Town Masterplan (P.73/2011)**

The North of Town Masterplan was conceived as a solution to the impasse that had led to a decade-long delay in producing the Island's preferred Millennium project, a Town Park. Unfortunately, its initial recommendation was that the area earmarked for the park should have five-storey apartments built on both sides. When the Masterplan finally came to the States for debate (it was supposed to take 3 months to complete, but it took nearly 2½ years), the Millennium Town Park had been approved, albeit by the most slender of voter margins and without sufficient funding for the creation of underground parking which had been part of the original petition to the States.

At the time of the debate on the Masterplan, I proposed the potential for the future extension of the Millennium Town Park over the Jersey Gas site in an amendment which requested the States to agree that the Masterplan would be "subject to the condition that any plans for the redevelopment of ... (b) the Jersey Gas site, shall take into account any requirements in the new Island Plan that sufficient amenity space and parking for shoppers and residents be provided in the area of the Masterplan".

The Report accompanying the amendment explained that its purpose was –

“to ensure that the Island Plan retains its position as the overarching framework for the protection and development of the town of St. Helier. This is particularly important given the current emphasis by the States on concentrating the bulk of new residential units in St. Helier; while this policy makes sense in terms of environmental sustainability, reducing the need to travel by providing key educational, health, retail, transport and cultural facilities close to the homes of Islanders, and thereby protecting the countryside and coastline of the Island for the benefit of all, it risks ‘town-cramming’, and the failure, in particular, to provide quality of life that meets the highest standards.

The proposals contained in [P.73/2011](#) (North St. Helier Masterplan) involved a significant loading of new residential units in an area of St. Helier which already has the highest density of accommodation in the Island (indeed, this was an argument used frequently over the past 15 years to promote the creation of the Millennium Town Park). When this proposal is combined with the various private schemes in the pipeline, including the conversion of hotels and outworn offices to residential use, there is a considerable risk that town residents will not be provided with adequate open space. There is evidence that St. Helier residents already have less open space than the residents of major cities, and it is vital that analysis of our open-space provision is carried out, and the highest standards enshrined in the new Island Plan, *before the proposals contained in the North of Town Masterplan are carried out [my italics]*.

... The calculation of open space provided in the Masterplan itself is faulty, including as it does, those areas which are either not in public ownership, or which are unlikely to be released for development for many years (Belmont Road and Nelson Street car parks, for example). Despite the fact that the Masterplan has been a costly and prolonged exercise, there appears to have been no rigorous or systematic examination of the amenity space requirements of this densely populated area of St. Helier. It would be extremely short-sighted of the States to allow a key site ... which borders the existing area set aside for the

Millennium Town Park (a site currently in the ownership of Jersey Gas) to be developed with high-density accommodation until the community's open space requirements have been established in the new Island Plan.

There is no doubt that sufficient open space is the key concern for those who are bringing up their families in town, but there is evidence that the creation of the new park will not adequately meet the needs of existing users, let alone provide sufficient open space for the new residential developments proposed in the Masterplan. The original proposal for the Millennium Town Park, as advanced by the then Deputy Stuart Syvret, was for the area of the park to be increased to the east once the Jersey Gas operations were moved elsewhere; this would potentially link up with the woodland areas on the escarpment of St. Saviour and provide an extent of open space much more likely to be 'future-proofed'. It is worth mentioning that, at the recent Design Workshop convened to agree the layout of the Millennium Town Park, it was described by the landscape architect appointed by Transport and Technical Services as 'very tiny.'

It is essential that the open space requirements of the growing town are properly examined and presented in the new Island Plan before steps are taken to impose more residential accommodation on the Jersey Gas site ... The new Island Plan is, of course, well underway, but there is still time for the Planning and Environment Department to ensure that the vision, policies and development plans contained within the document take proper account of these key quality of life issues for St. Helier."

Perhaps because a good deal of time and energy had been focused on the Island Plan with its numerous amendments and several days of debate, the debate on the North of Town Masterplan and its amendments which followed the Island Plan debate was rather rushed. It emerged during the debate on my amendment that the Minister for Planning and Environment had accepted it, believing it to mean something other than what I had set out in my report.

In proposing the amendment, part (a) of which referred to the Ann Court development and part (b) to the Jersey Gas site, I conceded –

"I suppose the wording is a bit ambiguous. What I am seeking to ensure is that before we build on either of these sites ... we should look at the requirements for amenity space and parking in the area of the Masterplan. Not just on the Ann Court site, nor indeed on Jersey Gas site, and the comments from the Minister seem to imply he is assuring me that yes they will have sufficient amenity space on Ann Court. They will have sufficient amenity space on the Jersey Gas site. What I am suggesting is that if a study of open space in St. Helier indicates that we are radically short of open space then I am suggesting that we should not be building on either of these sites and we should be having more open space ... that was what I was driving at, but maybe I did not get the wording quite right. In any case, the Minister appears to accept that before we build we must make sure that there is enough open space, and I think that is uncontentious. I think it conforms with the Strategic Plan, it conforms with the Island Plan that we have just finished, and so, on that basis, I think having made what I was trying to do fairly clear, I will propose the amendment."

The Minister for Planning and Environment's intervention was –

“... reading his amendment carefully I do not think it delivers what he has just suggested and therefore I am prepared to continue to accept on the basis that I had previously accepted.”.

Most of the brief debate that followed focused on the projected redevelopment of Ann Court.

In summing up I said –

“We need to remember that the Jersey Gas site was suggested by the, I think, one of the people who thought of the Millennium Town Park in the first place, the then Deputy Syvret, as being a good extension of the town park eastwards towards the escarpment of St. Saviour. Again, that proposal may sound absurd and bonkers to some Members but that proposal is kept open by this amendment. It is still possible to have a discussion in due course about the Jersey Gas site and whether that should be a densely packed housing site with parking or whether it should not be, indeed, an extension to the open space on the Millennium Town Park site. So this amendment is about keeping our options open and so anyone who votes against it is basically saying they want to close our options and tie our hands and tie the hands of future Councils of Ministers. Deputy Jeune from St. Brelade suggested I was hung up on open space requirements for town. Well, yes, I suppose I am and, in a way, so should she be because everybody who uses St. Helier deserves a standard of open space requirement that is at least comparable to other densely populated towns ... I do maintain the amendment and ask Members to agree that it is about keeping options open and making sure we do not short-change St. Helier in terms of open space.”.

The amendment was approved by 25 votes to 9.

#### **4. Extending the Millennium Town Park and the Gas Place petition (P.156/2014)**

A petition “to request the Minister for Planning and Environment not to approve any planning applications for development on the Gas Company site and adjacent areas, other than a possible extension to the Millennium Town Park with underground parking if appropriate” was launched by the Friends of the Millennium Town Park Group following a public meeting held at the Town Hall on Wednesday 20th August. It included in its reasoning the following concern: “There are currently many new sites in this part of Town proposed for development, the development of this site will lead to overcrowding and pressure on all amenities”. The movers of this petition were basically seeking to protect the Parish of St. Helier from being blighted by town cramming.

The area surrounding the Millennium Town Park is already densely populated; statistics in this respect were widely available throughout the long campaign by the park's support group to persuade the States to create the park in the first place. The park is already crowded in the evenings and weekends, and the idea that it could provide the open space needs of the residents of the proposed 300 or so apartments which were proposed for the Jersey Gas site, and recommended for approval by Planning Officers, beggared belief. The Planning Department, I contended in the Report accompanying the Petition,



had simply shelved the Open Space study carried out in 2008 which showed, amongst other things, that St. Helier was already deficient in open space. The Petition specifically raised the concerns about the potential deleterious impacts of the application, if approved, on the quality of life of residents in the neighbourhood, and on the infrastructure of this already crowded part of town.

I am fully signed up to the principles of environmental sustainability, and have always argued that the urban areas are the rightful place in which to concentrate new development, not only to safeguard the Island's green fields and natural environment, but also because focusing residential and commercial development in St. Helier, in particular, reduces the need for unnecessary commuter trips, and allows the urban areas to benefit from the vibrancy that comes from being the capital of the Island.

The *quid pro quo*, however, must be that the town is not denied the generous amounts of parking and open space that are 2 key elements that make urban living an attractive proposition. St. Helier needs more visitor and shopper parking in order to allow the retail and hospitality sectors to thrive, and to allow town residents who wish to own a car, especially for leisure and social use, to do so; while the benefits of generous amounts of open space should not need spelling out.

The Parish of St. Helier, as statutory consultee, considered the application in open session at its meeting on Wednesday 13th August and submitted a number of objections, including the failure of the scheme to include any shopper or visitor parking. The provision of such amenities as visitor parking and generous amounts of open space in large residential developments in St. Helier were part of my amendments to the Island Plan adopted by the States in 2011.

The petition (with my accompanying report) was debated on 20th January 2015, and in my opening remarks I attempted to set out the main arguments against building on the Jersey Gas site –

“...we know from Planning's own study, the open space study carried out in 2008 – and not very widely disseminated, perhaps because its findings are so stark and uncompromising – that there is a shortage of open space in St. Helier, even with the Town Park. We know that this part of St. Helier, when the Town Park was first proposed, has one of the highest densities of population in the Island; I believe the figure from the 1996 Census was 13 per cent of the Island's population live within 400 metres of the proposed town park; that is 11,300 people. It is a very, very densely populated part of St. Helier, and it has the least amount of open space, so why would you not, when given the opportunity, extend what is effectively rather a small park – it is much-loved but it is still quite small – to extend that open space if you had the chance to do it?”

You have the open space study of 2008, and you can go back much further: you can go back to the Implementation Group set up by the States, I think it was by the Council of Ministers, and in its terms of reference, it included the following: “The group would actively pursue the relocation of the gasworks to allow for the full extension of the park.” That was way back before the Town Park was even a glimmer of light on a green ring-binder, and that is a long time ago. The terms of reference also said that this was: “An intergenerational project. No actions would be taken that would compromise the potential maximisation of

the town park area even if its full realisation may take a number of years.” So the States knew about that; this idea of extending the Town Park is not some fanciful notion that has been dreamed-up at a meeting in St. Helier last August; this notion has been around for years, that the town park needed to be extended ... at the moment the backdrop is fairly benign; you can see low-level buildings, which is very much consistent with the pattern of development in residential St. Helier from the Victorian period. You can see, of course, the gasometer, what is left of it, but mainly you are struck by the backdrop; you can see the green backdrop of Victoria College grounds and the escarpment of St. Saviour. If this development were to be approved, that backdrop would simply go; you would have 5½ storeys of development right in your face. So the actual pleasure of using the Town Park would be spoilt. You would then, of course, have 300 units – we were talking about 1,000 people possibly – in addition coming into this area for recreation. If Members have not been to the Town Park in the summer when it gets very busy indeed, I would suggest they need to visit it. It is already very, very tightly-packed. That, of course, is not surprising given the figures that I have already referred to; an awful lot of people live around here and do not have private gardens.

Of course, we have other schemes coming forward: one of the things that many people referred to is this is not just a development by itself that is being proposed, we already know that the former Play.com warehouse has a significant development proposed for it. We know that the Le Bas Centre is earmarked for residential development, we know that the Ann Court Brewery site is earmarked for residential development, and the list goes on and on and on. All of these housing developments will pull people into the Town Park and if it cannot be extended where are they to go for their open space? I do urge Members to think very long and hard about open space requirements as well as parking requirements in this part of St. Helier and that these matters, these principles are important. I did refer to Plémont; I have been a passionate supporter of Plémont. I have not always seen eye to eye with some of the Deputies on this, but it seems to me – and I have made this point very simply and clearly, I hope, in my report – that if we want to keep Jersey special, then St. Helier has to accept that it will be the place where most new accommodation is built. It will be the place where most new businesses are located, and that makes sense for lots of reasons, not just because it reduces the need for travel; people can then live in the town centre or in the town area and not have to commute to work by car every day, making life a misery for people who live in St. Clement, St. Lawrence, St. Peter, St. Brelade and so on. It certainly drives down the need for commuter traffic; it drives down the need for school traffic, which of course, is a large part of that misery first thing in the morning.

Town needs development for its own sake; the more people who live in town, who raise their families in town, who run businesses in town, the better and the more vibrant a place it will be to live in.

But there must be a *quid pro quo*, and that is that a St. Helier resident has the right to leave town in a manner that is convenient to him or her, and if that is going to be at 11.00 p.m. on a Sunday evening to catch the tide for fishing, there is not going to be a bus service that can help. They have a right, therefore, to have a car parked in a garage that they can make use of. It is that failure ... in a way I think what I am looking for from the Chief Minister and the Council of

Ministers is I supported Plémont quite passionately against the quite fierce opposition from some Deputies in St. Helier, and I did it because when it came to this proposition, I expected some support from them. I must say, without perhaps trying to tie him down too much, the Chief Minister in his comments – and they were helpful – has already hinted that once the value of this site is set to buy a planning application, then that will be the time to start talking long and hard about how we can perhaps achieve that outcome that I am confident in, which is that we will not build on the site which could extend the Town Park.”

The majority of speakers in the debate on the petition were unwilling for the States to get involved in a live planning application, which was understandable, and which was reflected in the vote at the end of the debate: 24 contre, 15 pour, with 6 abstentions. Judging from the content of some of the speeches, there was some confusion about the value of civic parks or the meaning of urban regeneration. The then Minister for Planning and Environment argued that building hundreds of units of accommodation in an already densely populated area would be –

“a significant catalyst to further continue the regeneration of this part of St. Helier ... I have to tell Members that this site is just one of 4 in the area and I said yesterday if you are good at throwing stones, you could almost throw a stone from one to the other. We have the site alongside the Co-op Grande Marché, we have the Jersey Gas site, we have the Ann Street Brewery site and we have the Ann Court site that the Constable has referred to. I would urge Members to see this as a wonderful opportunity to kick-start the rejuvenation of that part of St. Helier. We know there is a need to make sure that West Centre, the Beresford Street, Bath Street, the markets are rejuvenated and kept lively and vibrant. Here is an opportunity that we must not miss. I am humbled, almost, that the Chief Minister and the Council of Ministers have allowed myself and my department to lead off on the project, which is the Future of St. Helier Project that the Constable has referred to. I want people to want to live in St. Helier. I want people to want to work, to want to visit, to want to shop, to want to open and run businesses in St. Helier.”

In response to these comments, Deputy L.M.C. Doublet of St. Saviour argued –

“I just wanted to pick up on something that the Minister said in response to the Connétable of St. Helier. He said he wanted people to want to shop in St. Helier, to want to work in St. Helier and to want to live in St. Helier. I really believe that when we are voting on this we need to think: okay, would we want to live in a tiny cramped flat? Would we want to live somewhere where there was not enough parking to enable us to own a car, to go about our business in the Island? Would we want to live somewhere where our friends cannot visit us because there is nowhere to park? Would we want to live somewhere where there is limited outside space, only this already cramped park? When voting on this I really think we have to think about the quality of life. If we are not prepared to live like that then I do not believe that we can ask Islanders to live like that [Approbation].”

In addition, the petitioners must have derived comfort from some of interventions by Ministers, including this statement from Senator Sir P.M. Bailhache –

“In an increasingly crowded Island and more particularly in an increasingly crowded town, it is more and more important that the planning authority should be extremely sensitive, not just to the Island Plan, but also to the recommendations to bodies such as that which produce the open space study and, of course, to public opinion, distinguishing always between genuine concerns and vested interests. The quality of life of those who live in St. Helier is vitally important.”

The vast majority of elected representatives from St. Helier and St. Saviour lent their support to the petition, including Deputy S.Y. Mézec of St. Helier, who said –

“When we look at the Town Park ... I mean who could possibly think that it was a bad decision to have put that there in the first place? It really is fantastic for town. It is fantastic for my constituency. There are very, very few times where you can walk through that park and not see it being enjoyed by someone. Even first thing in the morning you often see parents take their kids there to have a bit of a play in the playground before going to school. Throughout the day, especially when the weather is good, you see people on their lunch break there enjoying it. It is an absolutely vital lifeline for that part of town. What is being proposed here, I believe, will completely undo all of the good that has been done there for those residents. Because this is an exceptional case, because it is such an extreme proposal that is being made for this development, I think the Assembly should cast some sort of verdict on it. What I am worried about, and this was expressed at the Parish Assembly last night, is that 300 flats have been proposed and so it may get to the Planning Applications Panel or whatever and they will look at it and say: “No, no, no, 300 is far too much. You must put 150 there instead.” So, we end up with 150 and all the problems that will come from that, admittedly not as great as 300, but there will still be something. Everyone can say: “See, we found a compromise. Was not that great?” When the original vision for the town park was to have it go all the way back, was to have even more space. Sometimes in summer it is pretty full and if you want to go and have a picnic down there and sit there or whatever it is difficult, because there will be people playing football or it might be busy for another purpose. So having more space there is the right way to go. Especially when you consider what is likely to happen in the other parts of town in the area.”

Deputy A.D. Lewis of St. Helier said –

“Up to 1,000 people could be accommodated in this particular unit. Again, I do not think we should debate the aesthetics or the niceties of a particular building. It is more about the quantum in that area. So you are talking potentially 1,000 people in that one block. We mentioned Ann Court, the Ann Street Brewery site and a number of other developments which are coming to St. Helier, which I think is great for the vibrancy of St. Helier. More people living there and working there, inputting into the community, that has got to be a good thing if it is done properly. But all these people will need open space. Various surveys that have come out about urban living in recent years clearly indicate that people that live in an urban area will not travel more than half a mile to enjoy amenity space. So one could say: “Well they can go up the road to the beach at Havre des Pas or they can go to People’s Park or they can go to Howard Davis Park.” That is all well and good but if you are a mother with 2 or 3 children and a pushchair on a narrow pavement trying to get to Howard

Davis Park from this area, are you really going to struggle all the way up there if you have not got a car because you cannot park it anywhere? Probably not. People live in a very small area. They live and work sometimes in the same area but in the case of a young family they will not necessarily travel very far if they have not got a car nearby. So having that green lung in the middle of St. Helier which, I have to say, when it was debated in the States last time, I was sceptical thinking: “No, we should be building on that. It is a brownfield site in St. Helier, why would you not?” But I was pleasantly surprised when I saw the Town Park in all its glory and how it is now used today and I do walk through there regularly myself. It is very well-used and that is in the winter. I went up there a few days ago and it was being very well-used and the weather was not particularly good. So if we have 1,000 more people at the top end of the park, another 1,000 to the east of it, another 1,000 to the west, it is going to be very well-used. Too well-used, I would suggest. So this is an opportunity for us to do something about planning for the urban environment for the future ...”.

Deputy P.D. McLinton of St. Saviour expressed similar views –

“If you want to breathe life into St. Helier you need a decent set of lungs and this park will provide a good set of lungs for St. Helier ... How many times have you been to a large town or a small city and said, ‘There is just too much attractive green space here?’ The town needs it. This is the golden opportunity to supply this.”.

## **5. Extending the Millennium Town Park and the Strategic Plan**

Paragraph (2)(b) of the seventh amendment to the Strategic Plan 2015 – 2018 ([P.27/2015 Amd.\(7\)](#)) was debated 4 months after the Jersey Gas site petition (see [Hansard 29th April 2015](#)). My amendment sought to add to the fifth priority of the Council of Ministers’ Strategic Plan, ‘Improving St. Helier’, the following commitment made in the same terms as the earlier Petition –

“seeking to acquire the land currently in the ownership of the Jersey Gas Company in order to extend the Millennium Town Park to provide additional open space and public parking as appropriate.”.

The Council’s amendment to mine was approved after debate by 37 votes to 10, with the effect that it was agreed that instead the Council would be tasked during the plan period with –

“providing additional open space and public car parking as appropriate; examining the benefits and costs of extending the Millennium Town Park”.

During the debate, some St. Helier Deputies expressed dismay that I had decided to accept the amendment: Deputy G.P. Southern said that it “emasculates what was brought forward,” and predicted a park “overshadowed and the grass growing yellow because it does not get enough sunlight” once the Jersey Gas site is developed. Referring to the other high-density developments already proposed in the area covered by the North of Town Masterplan, Deputy J.A. Martin asked where the children of her constituents would play – “where are you going to find their open space? Somewhere in the other part of town? Have they got to go to People’s Park, St. Andrew’s Park? It is not feasible.”. Deputy J.A. Hilton predicted that “we will be sold down the river,” and

referred to the original vision of the proposers of the Millennium Town Park, “standing outside the Odeon Cinema looking down the Town Park, right through to St. Saviour’s Road, a completely large unhindered space by development for the people of St. Helier.”. None of those who spoke against the Council of Ministers’ amendment was opposed to the principle of St. Helier taking the majority of the Island’s new housing units, but they shared the view of Deputy M.R. Higgins: “you have got to treat the residents of St. Helier fairly and that does mean we have got to have our fair share of grassy areas where the kids can play, but we have also got to be able to have parking for residents.”.

Several St. Saviour Deputies also opposed the amendment: Deputy P.D. McLinton shared his vision, “where the Town Park does indeed stretch the entire distance and is filled with happy children playing, people walking, having picnics. Inasmuch as I understand the costs of this project, I would not one day, in 25 years’ time maybe, be there with my grandchildren and stare at the buildings that have blocked this amazing park, and regret the missed opportunity that we had to put this wonderful park and make it stretch through the middle.”. Deputy L.M.C. Doublet reminded the States: “We have signed up to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child and Article 3 says that we have to think about the best interests of children when we are making policies. So I will fight any way I can to get an extension to the Town Park because the children that live around that area in St. Helier and St. Saviour are being denied their rights. Article 31 says that children have a right to relax and play.”.

In spite of Deputy M. Tadier of St. Brelade’s comment that I had been ‘hoodwinked’ by the Council of Ministers, I was confident that the Council would carry out the promised cost-benefit analysis of extending the Millennium Town Park. After all, several members of the Council gave concrete pledges that in accepting their amendment I was not being fobbed off. The Minister for Planning and Environment said: “There may be options for the Gas Works site, there may be options for the Town Park, but I do not know yet. We do not know. We need to examine those options further but we do know that providing additional green space and public parking is a vital constituent for any future plan. As such, the Council of Ministers’ amendment reinforces the commitment to improve the quality and quantity of open space as well as a commitment to undertake an evaluation specifically on the Gas Place site, while not predetermining the nature of the masterplan or where the increased levels of open space should be.”.

I was particularly reassured by the undertakings given by the Chief Minister in his speech –

“the cost work and the benefit work ... it will be Jersey Property Holdings who will take the lead with the support of TTS’ (sic) ... those 2 individuals I believe [*the Minister and Assistant Minister for Infrastructure*] if this amendment is accepted, will get on and deliver that work in a way which is not simply, as some have suggested, looking at the money but looking at the wider and the broader community benefit that open space can bring in all its forms to families, to individuals, and to the wider community... we all know that the development that is going to take place in this area means that it needs more open space; the challenge is how we are going to deliver it and being informed before we make that final decision of exactly how and, for example, if it is that site, which bits or whether it is all of it is going to be delivered.”.

This debate took place, as I say, a year and a half ago, and to date there has been no sign of the cost-benefit analysis into the proposal to extend the Millennium Town Park.

## **6. Extending the Millennium Town Park and the future new Hospital**

In spite of arguments made by some senior States Members during the debates of 20th January and 29th April 2015 that the Jersey Gas site needed to be developed for housing at all costs, the New Year brought a surprising change of heart: the extension of the Millennium Town Park would be feasible if the Council of Ministers' preferred site for the new Hospital, the People's Park, was given the go-ahead.

In the Report accompanying the Proposition [P.3/2016](#), 'People's Park: removal from list of sites under consideration for future new hospital', lodged on 19th January 2016, I repeated the arguments in support of extending the Millennium Town Park across the Jersey Gas site –

“Efforts to extend the Island's newest urban park have been continuing, albeit being put on hold while the outcome of an appeal against planning permission is awaited. It is rumoured that such an extension may be part of a compensation package to be offered to the Parish in return for the loss of People's Park. However, ... given the policy of the States to concentrate new housing developments in St. Helier, and the fact that the majority of the new housing sites are in the northern part of the town, the extension of the Millennium Town Park should be pursued anyway. The Jersey Gas site offers clear marriage value to the present park, whose facilities are already strained by the thousands of people who use them. It is not a case of either/or. St. Helier needs People's Park and the Jersey Gas site, if the future residents of the town are not to be short-changed when it comes to amenity space, with all of the social consequences that go with town-cramming.”.

The following statements were made in the [Comments of the Council of Ministers on P.3/2016](#), 'People's Park: removal from list of sites under consideration for future new hospital' –

“Ministers acknowledge and appreciate the current level and importance of open space provision in St. Helier and its value for all Islanders, and this has informed key proposals within the Strategic Plan for the regeneration of St. Helier.

Ministers recognise the role the Connétable of St. Helier has played in seeking new open space and protecting existing areas in the Parish, and agree that such protection and new provision is a critical part of a thriving and healthy Island.”.

The Council of Ministers appeared to be reluctant to accept that there had been any change of heart with regard to their previous comments on the idea of extending the Millennium Town Park, which at best had been lukewarm –

“● In relation to Gas Place, the Proposition implies that a public open space should happen here anyway, and not be linked with hospital development. Whilst the Proposition might hope this to be the case, the reality is that with public finances facing ever greater challenges, there is unlikely to be any

foreseeable opportunity to pay for such a development unless it were to be part of the compensatory provision for the People's Park short-listed site.”.

This is, of course, nonsense, as 8 years ago, the States identified the source of funding for urban regeneration: the proceeds from the Esplanade Quarter development.

## **7. Extending the Millennium Town Park: funding**

The Esplanade Quarter Masterplan ([P.60/2008](#)) was lodged on 16th April 2008. Aside from the benefits the proposed development offered the Island in terms of new modern office accommodation, the replacement of surface with underground public parking and the creation of significant amounts of open space, there was also the promise of at least £50 million regeneration funding to be used to offset any negative impacts of the development on the rest of St. Helier. As the then Minister for Planning and Environment said in his opening speech on 3rd June 2008 –

“The £75 million W.E.B. estimates which will come out of the Esplanade Quarter must be invested in the rest of the town and, to achieve this, we propose setting up a regeneration taskforce to ensure this money delivers our objectives. There are many areas of the town that would benefit from regeneration and the town itself must be the focus of our attention ... it is out of the Esplanade Quarter that the catalyst funds will come to generate improvements in the town that will, in turn, ensure the town once again becomes a first choice place to live.”.

I lodged an amendment to the Masterplan in relation to the promised regeneration funding, as it was not specifically mentioned in the Council of Ministers' proposition to ensure “that the guaranteed payment to the States by the developer of £50 million and up to £25 million overage payments will be ring-fenced for the regeneration of St. Helier;” (see [P.60/2008 Amd.](#) – ‘Esplanade Quarter, St. Helier – Masterplan (P.60/2008) – amendments’, condition (i)). This was successfully amended by the Council of Ministers, who wished to extend the scope of the regeneration funding to “adjacent urban areas”.

As the then Chief Minister, Senator F.H. Walker, explained in the debate on 3rd June 2008 –

“I do not believe there is any need for lengthy debate on this amendment to the amendment or, indeed, the amendment itself, because there is full agreement that the funding from the Waterfront should be used for the regeneration of the existing urban area. The only difference between the Constable's amendment and that of the Council of Ministers is to extend that regeneration or the capability of spending the money on regenerating urban areas adjacent to St. Helier in the Parishes of St. Clement and St. Saviour in particular, and I am delighted that the Constable has accepted that amendment. It was always the intention that the money from the Waterfront should be used for this proposal and never any question that the Waterfront would pose a threat to the existing town, rather create an opportunity, which is exactly what the amendment secures and what, indeed, the Council of Ministers' amendment to that amendment secures.”.



With hindsight, the Council of Ministers' amendment to mine can be seen to be particularly relevant to this proposition, given that about half of the Jersey Gas site is located in the Parish of St. Saviour –

“... the wording as it currently stands is subject to a narrow interpretation in that funds generated from the Esplanade scheme could only be used for the regeneration of St. Helier. Thus, any schemes outside the physical boundary of St. Helier could be excluded from regeneration funding.

The Council of Ministers believes that ring-fencing of funding for regeneration schemes should be extended to include urban areas adjacent to St. Helier in addition to the parish of St. Helier itself”.

(report to [P.60/2008 Amd.Amd.](#))

One speech from the short debate which followed on this amendment is worth quoting, that of former Deputy J.B. Fox of St. Helier, who warned the Assembly –

“Society has a responsibility for designing-out crime which is an area that I am very familiar with, which you know, but it is also to ensure that there is proper amenity space and facilities for the community and £75 million is in no way going to be able to provide all that is required. I just wanted to put it on record at this particular moment in time that we must not look on this in isolation for providing all the wishes and the wants for our future community. The bit that concerns me is that as money gets tighter, things get left off: “Oh, we will do that at a later stage.” It does not happen and what happens at a later stage is that you end up by having a community that does not have quality of life that should be there and you get a deterioration in law and order. You get a deterioration in health. You get a deterioration in the willingness to live in such an area and you get the jealousies that come into that, that I live in an area that is run down and why can I not go and live in a nice 3-bedroom house in green field sites, *et cetera*. What I would like to see is that this money be used very wisely to ensure that the regeneration does what it says that it does and that it regenerates. Everybody should be proud of the area in which they live and work and that is really why I felt it was important to speak on this particular occasion.”.

The Esplanade Quarter Masterplan debate itself stretched over 3 days and involved 3 reference backs. Summarising the Council of Ministers' position on 5th June 2008, the Chief Minister said –

“The level of investment in what I would call the wider St. Helier is a fantastic one-off opportunity that I firmly believe we must grasp with both hands. There is no other realistic prospect of the funding being made available to improve and regenerate the urban area on this scale in the foreseeable future. If we turn this down and we kiss goodbye to our ability to regenerate St. Helier, parts of St. Saviour, St. Clement and so on for the foreseeable future ... It was the States who have decided that the funding should go to the regeneration of the wider urban area. I repeat again this is a one-off opportunity. Where on earth would the money otherwise come from to enable us to do great things to the town as we know it? Where on earth would it come from? Can anyone imagine just finding £75 million, plucking it out of the air, to invest in the rest of St. Helier?”.

## **8. Conclusion**

The [Council of Ministers' Comments on P.3/2016](#) gave ample evidence that an extension of the Millennium Town Park is possible; the current Island Plan and Strategic Plan both pledge to improve the quality of life offered by the Island's main town, making it a place in which Islanders choose to live, and one which provides for the thousands of students, workers, shoppers and visitors who swell its population during the working day; the benefits of increased green amenity space in St. Helier hardly need rehearsing further, though the health benefits, both physical and psychological, are especially relevant as we contemplate the rising costs of healthcare in Jersey. The Esplanade Quarter Masterplan has guaranteed that proceeds from the development of Jersey's International Finance Centre can legitimately be applied to a regeneration project such as the extension of the Millennium Town Park. Accordingly, I am asking the States to agree that the Council of Ministers should seek to acquire the site for the creation of much-needed open amenity space with parking as appropriate.

### **Financial and manpower implications**

It is reasonable to assume that some work has already been done by the Property Holdings Department on the feasibility of acquiring the Jersey Gas site as part of [P.3/2016](#), and that any further negotiations with the site owners, following the determination of the current planning application, could be met from within the existing resources of the Department.