

# STATES OF JERSEY



## **PROPOSED GOVERNMENT PLAN 2023- 2026 (P.97/2022): TWENTY-FIRST AMENDMENT (P.97/2022 AMD.(21)) – COMMENTS**

### **PLAY.COM SCHOOL SITE**

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**Presented to the States on 8th December 2022  
by the Council of Ministers**

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**STATES GREFFE**

## COMMENTS

The Council of Ministers is committed to meeting the long-term needs of children and their families whilst ensuring the town population has access to green community spaces.

Ministers oppose this amendment on the grounds that the alternative site identified will not meet the changing ways in which we deliver education, nor the need for community space in St Helier. The current proposals would see the creation of two parks with a total area of 12,000 square metres, as opposed to 9,000 square metres under this amendment.

Changing direction now would also stop construction that is currently underway to build homes at the Play.com site. This would impact not only the workforce on the site but the industry as a whole – and just before Christmas. Not only could this have a destabilising effect on the construction industry, but developers could lose confidence in working alongside a government that continually changes its mind.

### **Gas Place site**

Gas Place is immediately adjacent to open space, which can be used to the benefit of both the school and the public by giving extra space for the school and by extending the park and access for the public.

Current plans for the former Gas Place site comprise a two-form entry primary school, including a 30-place nursery, and a SEMH/ARC facility for up to 24 pupils, as well as extending Millennium Park up to the school building, providing safe outdoor space for children and their families. Further open space will be created in the areas surrounding the school, improving public realm and travel access routes and providing outdoor play space for the benefit of the community. There are also plans for a community hub.

The review has shown that Gas Place is the most appropriate site in the town area, being largely vacant, unlike the Play.com site, and being adjacent to Millennium Park, giving opportunity to maximise space on this site.

Furthermore, under these plans, much-needed housing will be built, providing 169 new affordable homes for St Helier.

### **Reviewing additional sites**

The proposition calls for a review of additional sites. This work has already been undertaken. Some 17 sites in the town area were identified as part of a review of locations for the construction of one or more town primary schools.

Ministers wrote to Reform deputies in October to outline why they could not consider the former Play.com warehouse as a prospective site for a new town primary school. Ministers have not changed their position on this matter.

Indeed, there is now much more merit in the plans for Gas Place to be a new school, given the extra green spaces that will be made available, not only immediately adjacent to the proposed school but around the vicinity, too.

### **A ‘better’ site for a school**

The Council of Ministers strongly disagree with the claim that the former Play.com warehouse would be better suited for a school.

The Play.com site is in split ownership – owned jointly between Andium Homes and a local development company – so the site is not publicly owned.

The Future Places ministerial group reviewed the possibility of a school on the Play.com site. But this was universally ruled out because of the split ownership, the better opportunities presented at Gas Place – a site that is immediately adjacent to open space for the public and school – and further plans to unlock extra amenities in the area.

### **Green access corridors, improvements to public realm and travel routes**

Ministers agreed that a school on Gas Place was appropriate as long as other ‘green’ sites could be identified. Turning the existing Springfield School and the Le Bas Centre into green areas will generate more community space than the footprint of the proposed school.

### **Halting the Northern Quarter development at former Play.com site**

Contractors are already on site. Stopping the development will interrupt an existing commercial contract, with impact on the construction industry in Jersey. Conversely, there is no project in train for the Gas Place site.

Stopping a second major development scheme (after Kensington Place) would remove substantial spending from the economy and have a significant destabilising effect on both the construction sector in Jersey and the reputation of government as a development partner. Although the financial and reputational implications cannot be quantified at this point, they would be substantial.

### **A rapid review**

A rapid review would be commissioned by Jersey Property Holdings, and officers for that department have been unable to confirm, within the time available to prepare these comments, whether it would be possible to undertake that review from existing resources or whether additional funding would be required.

### **Acquiring the Play.com site**

The site is owned by both Andium Homes and a local construction company. Although government could consider directing Andium to sell their interest in the site, it may not be possible to acquire the share of the local company without either paying significantly above market value or, potentially, the use of compulsory purchase powers.

Given that work at the site is already underway, financial compensation for materials and contractual commitments would be required – and at an unknown value.

### **Acquiring the Gas Place site**

The site was previously acquired by Andium Homes, and is fully owned by that entity.

Following a successful amendment by Deputy Rob Ward, to the Island Plan, the site is now safeguarded for education, which impacts the market value.

It is not disputed that there is clear evidence of the need for new public open space in town. The Minister for the Environment’s St Helier Open Space Audit and the adoption of benchmark space standards in the bridging Island Plan highlight this, and the Council of Ministers amendment directly responds to it.

The type and extent of any costs to government from acquiring the site would be determined as part of a strategic discussion with Andium about place-making and delivery of government policy objectives in the North of Town area.

**Conclusion**

The Assembly is urged to reject this amendment in favour of current plans, which generate not only a new town primary school but extra green space and much-needed affordable housing.

**Comment under Standing Order 37A**

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This comment was submitted after the noon deadline in order that final checks and due diligence could be undertaken, given the extensive number of Amendments to which due consideration was needed. We apologise to Members for this delay.

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