

STATES OF JERSEY



ANNUAL BUSINESS PLAN 2007: PROPERTY PLAN (P.34/2007) – SECOND AMENDMENT (P.34/2007 AMD. (2)) – COMMENTS

**Presented to the States on 16th April 2007
by the Minister for Planning and Environment**

STATES GREFFE

COMMENTS

Comment

In seeking to comment on this report and proposition it is important to address some fundamental questions which serve to outline exactly why this building deserves to be protected and why, if it is to be retained as a property worthy of protection, sold.

Why is it important to protect historic buildings?

Historic buildings and streets provide the context in which we live, work and play. These urban structures and spaces are a record of the lives of previous generations and they are the foundations to be bequeathed to generations to come. They provide a sense of place and, as a source of memory and continuity, the built heritage plays a critical role in Jersey's cultural identity.

The cultural significance of historic buildings is recognised by the Convention for the Protection of the Architectural Heritage of Europe (Granada, October 1985) and the European Convention on the Protection of the Archaeological Heritage (revised) (Valletta, January 1992) to both of which Jersey is a signatory. These international obligations require the States, through the Minister for Planning and Environment, to identify and protect buildings and places of cultural significance (arising from their architectural, archaeological, historical or other relevant interests).

To defer from or to set aside these important obligations for ease, convenience or to maximise financial gain in an *ad hoc*, partisan and selective manner is both to evade responsibility for ensuring the protection of the Island's cultural capital and potentially damaging to Jersey's reputation.

It is important to stress that when deciding to confer protection upon a building or place, the Minister for Planning and Environment must focus solely on its architectural, archaeological or historical importance – factors such as the condition of the building; its development potential; or its ownership are not material factors in determining whether it is deserving of protection.

Which historic buildings is it important to protect?

Not all historic buildings are worthy or deserving of protection. Those that are included in the Island's Register of Buildings and Sites of Architectural, Archaeological and Historic Importance in Jersey: this is a complete list of individual sites, buildings and areas which are specifically identified as being of cultural heritage value to the Island.

The process of identifying whether a building or place is worthy of protection is a rigorous one and is one where the Minister for Planning and Environment secures expert advice about the particular merits of a building or place. He does this through receipt of independent and impartial expert advice from the Jersey Heritage Trust's Curator of Historic Buildings under the terms of a service level agreement with Trust specifically for this purpose. Buildings and places are assessed against a specific set of published criteria to determine whether they satisfy the criteria to be –

- Listed as a Site of Special Interest – defined as the most significant buildings and places of public importance; or
- Registered as Buildings of Local Interest – defined as retaining their historic form and detail so as to make a significant and positive contribution to the architectural and historical identity, character and amenity of Jersey.

The Minister for Planning and Environment is keen to secure special knowledge about Jersey's buildings and places within the context of managing the Island's Register of Buildings and Sites of Architectural, Archaeological and Historic Importance. For this reason he has, in association with the Jersey Heritage Trust,

established the Ministerial Registration and Listing Advisory Group (MRLAG) which is able to offer specific comment about the value of particular buildings and places, relative to the criteria for Listing or registration, in addition to that of the JHT's Curator of Historic Buildings.

The Group, whose membership is listed at Appendix 1, has a considerable depth and breadth of knowledge about the Island's history and architecture. The advice of MRLAG is incorporated into reports to the Minister about the protection of buildings prepared by the JHT in order that the Minister might consider it when he comes to determine whether to List or Register buildings.

What is the special significance of 1 Oxford Road?

The Le Seilleur Workshops at 1 Oxford Road date back to 1845 (with later alterations), and are a relatively rare survival of an historical industrial building on the edge of the town centre.

The workshops retain their historic form with only minor alterations, and are buildings of unusual construction with a mixture of granite and brick with timber-boarded upper floors containing extensive glazing (see photographs at Appendix 2).

The interior of the building is unusual for its large open plan areas at first floor level supported by a mixture of structural cross-walls and closely spaced piers at ground floor level. Although very utilitarian, there are internal details of interest such as heavily joisted flooring and brick piers formed with rounded corners, with the open nature of the workshops, comprising walls of glazing, contributing significantly to the distinctive character and special interest of the building.

The special interest of the workshops was first recognised when the Historic Buildings Register was compiled in 1992 (at the highest grade). The Jersey Building Heritage Sub-Committee confirmed the building's special interest during its review of all registered buildings in St. Helier in 2002, since when the property has been registered as a proposed Site of Special Interest.

Following the request of Property Holdings, on behalf of the Minister for Health and Social Services, to review the registered status of the property the Minister for Planning and Environment has again reviewed the building's special interest and intends to now formally confirm its status as a Site of Special Interest.

In so doing, the Minister has sought an independent and impartial review of the building's significance by the Jersey Heritage Trust relative to the published criteria for assessment. This has included discussions of the building's merits with the Ministerial Registration and Listing Advisory Group following a detailed internal and external inspection of the property. The advice of the JHT was that the building was worthy of Listing as an SSI, in accord with published criteria, and its recommendation to List the property was supported by MRLAG.

This view is also supported by others who have studied and assessed the significance of buildings in the town: a recent piece of work commissioned by the Planning and Environment Department to examine and assess the character of the town^[1] identified that *'perhaps the most common building groups that might be considered to be "at risk" are interwar structures (often motorcar garages) and traditional workshops. These utilitarian structures – both the streamline Moderne buildings and the vernacular asymmetrical workshops – add immense character to St. Helier, and provide sharp contrast to the orderly details and classical refinement of so much of the town's residential properties.... These small workshop buildings, often standing in isolation amongst residential properties, are an integral part of St. Helier's historic built environment and should be preserved.'* The significance of the character and form of the Le Seilleur Workshops to the town cannot, therefore, be underestimated.

What does it mean if a building is Listed or Registered?

Inclusion of a cultural asset on the Register is intended to preserve its contribution to the cultural heritage and amenity of Jersey, and to ensure that it is a material consideration in the planning process where protection is conferred upon buildings and sites of cultural interest either by statutory Listing and/or planning policy. This is a

critical issue: the Listing of a building or place as an SSI does not impose absolute constraints upon the use, form or appearance of a structure. What it serves to do is to highlight the special importance of the building to landowners, architects, planners and politicians which must then be considered within the context of development proposals. It is the job of the Minister for Planning and Environment, or his Planning Applications Panel, to weigh the value of the special interest of the building against the value and impact of the development proposal, in order to make a decision in the determination of planning applications.

Listing a property as an SSI does not, therefore, in itself prevent change but requires the Minister to give particular weight to the special characteristics of a building or place when considering development proposals which affect that special interest. The Planning and Environment Department handles many applications which have an impact on the special interest of protected buildings and sites each year, and whilst some are rejected as inappropriate, many are approved.

A viable building is a building in use

The Minister for Planning and Environment recognises that if historic buildings are to remain viable and are to have a sustainable future, it is beneficial if they can be brought into a productive use. The States has latterly recognised this, a good example of which is the sympathetic restoration and refurbishment of a number of its coastal forts and towers, all of which are Sites of Special Interest, and which are being adapted to provide tourist accommodation. This use will hopefully raise awareness of the special characteristics and value of these buildings and places, but also sustain their future.

In the case of the Le Seilleur Workshops, the Minister has published a revised Historic Buildings Design and Development Brief to guide the potential re-use and development of the site. Senator Shenton considers the brief to be overly restrictive, yet it recognises that whilst the masonry shell of the building is capable of being repaired and upgraded, that the glazing, timber cladding and some of the roof structure may need to be replaced. The brief also suggests that a range of uses, from community use, through to office, retail or residential, might be appropriate. A recognition that parts of the buildings fabric may require renewal and a flexible approach to the use of the building is not considered to be excessively restrictive and is felt to provide a sound basis for discussion in relation to specific proposals.

The brief is published for guidance and will, in the event of proposals for the building's re-use, form the basis for discussion and negotiation. The Minister for Planning and Environment recognises that a practical approach will be required to ensure that a viable and sustainable future for the building is assured. The Minister is prepared to work with the present or future owner of the building to achieve this objective

It is only considered likely that the mutual aspiration of securing the building's benefit to the community will be assured if the building is sold, to realise the necessary investment in its repair, restoration and re-use. Part of its value to the community lies in its intrinsic value – as a building of special interest – and for this reason it should continue to enjoy protection as such.

List of Appendices

Appendix 1: Membership of the Ministerial Registration and Listing Advisory Group

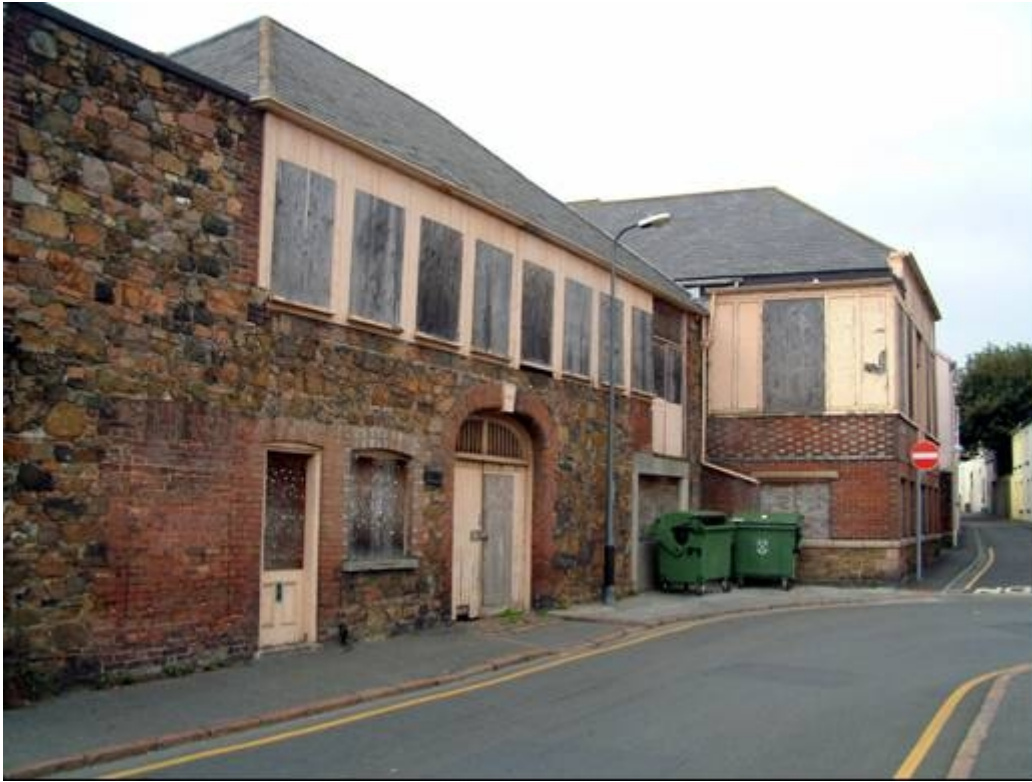
Appendix 2: Schedule of photographs

Ministerial Registration and Listing Advisory Group

Membership: 2007

Francis Corbet	President (President, Société Jersiaise)
Jon Carter	Chairman (Director of Jersey Heritage Trust)
Chick Anthony	Chairman, Environment Section, Société Jersiaise
Jean Arthur	Vernacular Building Group, Société Jersiaise
John Clarke	Chairman, Archaeology Section, Société Jersiaise
Chris Aubin	Archaeology Section, Société Jersiaise
Marcus Binney	Save Jersey's Heritage
Jon Dyson	Association of Jersey Architects
Andre Ferrari	Council for the Protection of Jersey's Heritage
Olga Finch	Curator of Archaeology, Jersey Heritage Trust
Antony Gibb	Building conservation expert
George Gilbertson	Allied Trades Federation
Michael Ginns	Channel Island Occupation Society
Paul Harding	Association of Jersey Architects
Bob Le Mottée	National Trust for Jersey
Richard Le Sueur	Association of Jersey Architects
Christopher Scholefield	Save Jersey's Heritage
Mike Waddington	President, Association of Jersey Architects
John Williams	Architect
Advisor	
Roger Hills	Curator of Historic Buildings, Jersey Heritage Trust

1 Oxford Road, St Helier
Schedule of photographs







[1] *Willie Miller Urban Design (2005) 'St. Helier Urban Character Appraisal' pp. 191-193.*