

STATES OF JERSEY



ESPLANADE QUARTER, ST. HELIER: MASTERPLAN (P.60/2008) – AMENDMENTS

Lodged au Greffe on 20th May 2008
by the Connétable of St. Helier

STATES GREFFE

PAGE 2 –

At the end of paragraph (1)(a) add the following –

“subject to the following conditions –

- (i) 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;
- (ii) that the proposed Winter Garden or other building for public use will be allocated the whole of the plot in which it is situated in the draft plan;
- (iii) that the roads bordering the Esplanade Quarter have high levels of service for pedestrians and cyclists, and the levels of service for pedestrians and cyclists in locations affected by the proposals, such as West Park and Green Street roundabout are not decreased in the interests of increased vehicular capacity;”.

CONNÉTABLE OF ST. HELIER

REPORT

Following public consultation, the Minister for Planning and Environment has made some significant changes to his proposals for the development of what is at present the Esplanade car park, the most important of which is the reduction of the amount of retail on the site and a corresponding increase in the amount of housing units. Although his addition of a 'Winter Garden' is not quite what it seems – and is the subject of one of my amendments – it is a step in the right direction, and the lowering of the central square, suggested at one of the consultation meetings by Deputy Paul Le Claire, brings with it several benefits. If many of those who have taken the trouble to examine the plans remain unconvinced that there will be no significant deterioration in traffic congestion once the development is complete – in spite of the existing car park being nearly trebled in size and all east-west traffic being routed underground – the problems arising from increased use of vehicles have to be tackled by the Island sooner or later in any case.

A more fundamental objection to the Masterplan is that its key aim, of providing a 'seamless' link between the town and the Waterfront, is unlikely to be achieved if traffic levels increase as is predicted on the roads bounding the new quarter, especially the Esplanade, and if the sections of main road untouched by the scheme, such as at West Park, Gloucester Street and Liberation Square, become more difficult to negotiate for non-car users. The needs of the most vulnerable road users must be met as part of the Masterplan, and one of my amendments attempts to provide this assurance.

The document accompanying P.60/2008 sets out in persuasive terms the benefits that will flow to St. Helier if the Masterplan is approved. There are legitimate concerns that the development will lead to the abstraction of trade from the northern part of town, but it can be argued that both the new residents and the workers who use the Esplanade Quarter are unlikely to wish to be confined within it and will flow back into the town to spend their time and money there. If the new quarter is of the high architectural merit that is promised and helps to 'put St. Helier on the map' in terms of tourism and the reputation of our financial services industry, that must be welcomed.

I remain unconvinced that similar benefits could not be obtained by increasing the square footage of development on the discrete site – and perhaps building across the road – with nothing like the disruption that will result from sinking of La Route de la Libération. However, the present projet is what the States must decide upon, and so, having taken a great deal of advice, I have produced amendments which, if adopted, will mean that I can support the Masterplan.

(i): 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

Contrary to the view expressed on page 34 of the booklet that the proposed development is 'a major enhancement of the town's rateable base', the construction of the new Quarter will not in itself represent a windfall to St. Helier in terms of rates income. Any surplus once the cost of extra parochial services has been met will have the effect of reducing the rate per quarter across the Parish; unless ratepayers wish otherwise it will simply have the effect of reducing overall Parish rates (currently fourth highest in the Island).

The proposal does offer on page 4 of the booklet a guaranteed payment by the developer to the States of £50 million and 'some other overage payments ... currently estimated to be not less than £25 million'. This is clearly where the Minister gets the figure of £75 million from which he has promised on several occasions will be used for the regeneration of St. Helier. I have no doubt that the Minister is sincere in his wish that all of the proceeds of the scheme, between £50 million and £75 million, should be used for this purpose, as it is an important part of his desire to counteract the threat posed by the 'new town' to the old. But an amendment to the projet is vital to ensure that this happens, especially when one considers some of the 'small print' in P.60/2008, such as 2.6.6 and 2.6.7:

The estimated long-term annual cost of maintaining and servicing the tunnel is £500,000 per annum. This cost consists of 2 main elements: (i) the cost of electricity to power lighting and ventilation; and (ii) the cost of maintaining the fabric of the tunnel (including maintenance and replacement of ventilation plant, lighting, signage, cleaning and maintaining the roadway). Whilst the long-term annual cost is estimated to be £500,000, the cost for the first 5 years of use of the tunnel will be significantly less and consist primarily of providing power for lighting and ventilation and cleaning services.

The cost of maintaining the fabric of the tunnel and providing power will be met (as usual) by the Department for Transport and Technical Services. It should be noted that at present the Department has not been allocated a

budget from which to fund this ongoing obligation. It is proposed that the appropriate allocation will be included in the Department's annual budget from 2012 onwards, when the tunnel first comes into use. This allocation will be funded from States general revenues.

Were the States to object to meeting the running costs of the tunnel, they might argue that the revenue to the States from the proposals should be used to meet these costs instead.

The booklet suggests a possible mechanism for the delivery of urban improvements, the Jersey Enterprise Board, but it is up to the States to decide upon the most appropriate body to undertake the regeneration of St. Helier.

(ii): the proposed Winter Garden or other building for public use will be allocated the whole of the plot in which it is situated in the draft plan

Pages 16 and 17 of the booklet accompanying P.60/2008 are quite simply misleading. Taken together, the two site plans, the photographs of 'similar' facilities and the large 'View of the winter garden, Le Jardin d'Hiver, looking out to St. Aubin's Bay' suggest that there will be a large, glazed building at the western edge of the new quarter. However, look carefully at the artist's impression and it becomes clear that the view of the bay only exists at ground level, and on the eastern and southern sides; the upper floor plan of the development on page 25 shows that from first floor up, the winter garden is actually another block of office/residential development. In other words, the winter garden is actually an atrium, albeit '1.5 times the size of the Royal Square'. Will this work as a winter garden? I doubt it: the sun path studies on page 29 suggest that the greater part of the garden will be in shadow at 1 p.m. from September to March.

I fully support the provision of an important public building at this place in the scheme, and it may well be that a winter garden is the best use of the site. Why should the Jersey public and visitor not enjoy the experience of a large glazed structure designed by a leading architect, and saving the prospect of the Waterfront from being completely bland? But the public must not be conned: their building needs to be occupy the whole plot, not be squeezed inside an office development. The winter garden proposal is the result of a short period of consultation, and has no supporting detail. If this amendment is adopted I would expect the Minister to consider the full range of potential uses for the site.

(iii): the roads bordering the Esplanade Quarter have high levels of service for pedestrians and cyclists, and the levels of service for pedestrians and cyclists in locations affected by the proposals, such as West Park and Green Street roundabout are not decreased in the interests of increased vehicular capacity

For more than a decade the States have committed in successive Strategic Plans to improve pedestrian and cycling facilities, though transport planning continues to focus on the needs of car users. The work done by the various consultants charged with making the Masterplan work in traffic terms is no exception. In order to 'increase capacity' it is proposed on page 39 to remove the zebra crossings at the Green Street roundabout, replacing them with pelican crossings which will be controlled by the newfangled computer system whose objective will be maximising traffic flow.

At a recent presentation by the Transport and Technical Services traffic department the St. Helier Roads Committee was informed that traffic levels on the Esplanade will increase as a result of the Masterplan, up to 1,100 vehicles per hour, and that traffic entering the port and Waterfront area from the west will travel above ground to do so. This will hardly provide the 'seamless' joining of the Waterfront with the rest of St. Helier which is one of the rationales of the entire scheme. This can only be provided if people can move easily from the new quarter across the Esplanade into town, and across the new 'boulevard' into the rest of the Waterfront. Pedestrian crossings will need to be of the (inexpensive) Jersey type, which allow pedestrians to cross on demand, and will need to cater for the needs of cyclists wishing to enter or leave the new quarter. Similarly, pedestrian and cyclist levels of service must not be reduced at junctions affected by the Masterplan, even if the traffic engineers would like them to be in the interests of increasing traffic flow.

Financial and manpower implications

There need not be any financial implications arising from the second amendment as the Masterplan can be adjusted to provide compensatory square footage of development elsewhere in the scheme. There are no significant financial or manpower implications arising from either of the other amendments.