

STATES OF JERSEY



WARWICK FARM: FEASIBILITY STUDY FOR INCORPORATING THE SITE INTO THE ST. HELIER COUNTRY PARK (P.75/2017) – COMMENTS

Presented to the States on 25th September 2017
by the Council of Ministers

STATES GREFFE

COMMENTS

The Council of Ministers opposes Proposition [P.75/2017](#) as it is unnecessary.

The Revised 2011 Island Plan does not commit to a St. Helier Country Park, but indicates that a public realm strategy for St. Helier will be developed and adopted (Proposal 12). This included consultation upon, and the development of, proposals to designate a St. Helier Country Park in the countryside immediately to the north of the Town.

Attached to P.75/2017 is a plan of the potential St. Helier Country Park as indicated by the Connétable of St. Helier in the Island Plan debate [[P.48/2011 Amd.\(38\), \(part 7\)](#)]. The plan also indicates the location of Warwick Farm, which is outside the proposed designated area.

The Council of Ministers supports the need for an appropriate study to be undertaken to provide information to bring back to the Assembly before any decision is taken on the future of this and other sites that could form part of a Country Park.

A study would need to consider a number of aspects, including –

- planning issues – including the removal of existing business uses
- identification of land required to create a Country Park
- process and costs to acquire the land
- cost of developing the land into a Country Park
- costs to manage and maintain the completed facility
- the foregone value of any Public or Parish land forming part of the Country Park
- consultation with those impacted.

The Council of Ministers considers that a full ‘business case’ that considers all aspects of the proposal is required. The document should include evidence to assess the benefits of creating a Country Park, weighed appropriately against the costs of its creation, management and maintenance.

The Connétable has suggested a 6-month delay to undertake the work. This is considered insufficient to undertake the work necessary. Identifying and procuring the right resources to undertake the study through an open and competitive process is likely to take 3 months alone.

The next 6 months is not the most appropriate time to undertake such a study. Assuming that resources can be identified and the study commence in, say, November 2017, that would deliver the outcome just before the next election.

Creating a Country Park is going to be a significant cost to the taxpayer, ratepayer or both.

If the taxpayer is expected to fund the proposal, in whole or part, then funds will need to be allocated. The current Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP) funding is already fully allocated and under pressure. The next MTFP (2020 – 2023) will need to address major infrastructure investments, including Fort Regent, Highlands and the Mental Health Estates. Any States funding will need to be prioritised against these and other

funding requests. To date, no funding request has been received by the Treasury in respect of the acquisition of land for, or the development of, a Country Park.

The site was marketed as a 'going concern' and a number of credible responses were received. The preferred and recommended applicant is a local consortium who would continue to use the site in connection with growing crops following a successful trial.

The terms of the proposed 9-year lease enable the Public to exercise a 'development break' after 5 years. The prospective tenants have also indicated that they would be willing to consider pedestrian access through the site to enable a 'green' walking route to be created.

Any study can be undertaken with a tenant in situ. All the land identified by the Connétable as a potential Country Park is currently in some other use, so there is no reason why this site should remain untenanted whilst the study progresses. To delay a decision on the lease serves no purpose.

Work to develop a Public Realm Strategy for St. Helier, as proposed by the Island Plan, is presently underway. This has included an audit of existing open space; an assessment of its quality and its accessibility. A consultation exercise, to establish what residents of and visitors to St. Helier think about its open spaces, is due to close in the middle of October. All of this work will contribute to the development of a draft Public Realm Strategy early in 2018, with a view to subsequent consultation and adoption later next year. The findings of any study into the potential for a Country Park for St. Helier should be incorporated into the Public Realm Strategy for the Town.

A review of the Island Plan and consideration of funding in the next MTFP are both due within the initial 5-year term of the lease. The outcome of any study will help to inform these key strategic documents.

Financial and manpower implications

The proposition states –

“If the States agree to this Proposition there will be a loss of 6 months’ rental income, as yet unquantified, from letting the site for agricultural or horticultural purposes; the Parish of St. Helier will be responsible for any costs arising from the feasibility study.”

The statement is naïve, as there is a real risk that the uncertainty generated by this proposal will deter potential tenants and make the site unlettable for a prolonged period until a decision on the Country Park and its delivery plan is concluded.

The Public would lose a material rental income from the site, would need to meet the costs of managing and maintaining the land and buildings whilst it was vacant, and would also bear the cost of re-advertising the site to future tenants. In total, this could amount to some tens of thousands of pounds.

If the site remained unlet for a 5-year period, the negative financial impact on the Public could be in excess of £500,000.