

# STATES OF JERSEY



## GAS PLACE: PETITION

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Lodged au Greffe on 24th September 2014  
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 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.

CONNÉTABLE OF ST. HELIER

## REPORT

This petition seeks to prevent the approval of the Jersey Gas site development application (PP.2014/1125) and to urge the Minister for Planning and Environment to consider alternative uses for the site, such as increasing the amount of amenity space and car parking for town residents, shoppers and visitors. The petition against the development was launched by Mr. Bernie Manning, Chairman of 'Friends of the Millennium Town Park' and Deputy J.A. Martin of St. Helier following a public meeting held at the Town Hall on Wednesday 20th August. The prayer of this petition requests 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'. The petition includes in its reasoning the following concern: 'the development of this site will lead to overcrowding and pressure on all amenities'.

The movers of this petition seek to protect the Parish of St. Helier from being blighted by town cramming. 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 rehearsing.

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 the amendments to the Island Plan made by the Connétable of St. Helier and adopted by the States.

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 can provide the open space needs of the residents of the proposed 300 or so apartments which are proposed for the Jersey Gas site, and recommended for approval by Planning Officers, beggars belief. The Planning Department has simply shelved the Open Space study carried out in 2008 which showed, amongst other things, that St. Helier is already deficient in open space.

The prayer of the petition, namely that the Jersey Gas site should be considered as a valuable opportunity to extend the provision of open space in one of the most densely populated parts of the Island, together with, if practicable, the provision of some underground parking for shoppers and visitors, are worthy of a full and proper

consideration by the Minister for Planning and Environment. The petition specifically raises the concerns that have yet to be resolved 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.

The charge that this application is being fast-tracked is difficult to avoid. It was only advertised 8 weeks ago and is now being proposed for determination at the Ministerial Hearing on Thursday 25th September. This is simply insufficient time to allow proper consultation, especially given the magnitude of the scheme – nearly 300 apartments – in an area of St. Helier which is already densely populated. The ‘reasons’ given in the petition highlight this: ‘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.’.

It is not considered best practice for such a controversial planning decision to be made after the Nomination Meetings have been held and less than 3 weeks before the General Election. While it is understood that Ministers must continue to make ‘housekeeping’ decisions in the run-up to their facing the electorate, the development of the Jersey Gas site does not fit this description. It is particularly disturbing to those involved in collecting signatures on the petition to find that their efforts have had to be abandoned due to the Minister’s insistence on determining the application in a hurry when several applications of equal magnitude have been held up for months, and for years in certain cases, while the Minister and/or his Officers seek further information or consultation.

The Jersey Gas site application is not merely controversial because of the large number of units which it is proposed should be crammed onto the site adjacent to the Millennium Town Park. It is controversial because the Open Space Study commissioned by the Planning and Environment Department in 2008 concluded that St. Helier is already significantly short of open space. Why then, is the Minister not at least giving consideration to the proposal contained in the prayer of the petition – and outlined as long ago as at the time of the Millennium Town Park’s inception – that the eventual relocation of Jersey Gas’ operations would allow the extension of the park towards the ring-road and the woodlands below Victoria College?

The Parish of St. Helier has made detailed comments on the application including the above concerns, but as so often happens, these have made no impact on the decision of the Minister to fast-track consideration of the application, nor on his Officers’ willingness to mark the application for approval. As the States member presenting the petition to the States, I feel particularly aggrieved that the Minister has refused my specific request for a delay in determination, as it suggests a scant regard by the Council of Ministers for the views of elected parochial representatives, not only the Parish Connétable, but also the Roads Committee, the latter being, at least in the case of St. Helier, a body whose workings are transparent and accountable, having met in public since 2002.

### **Financial and manpower implications**

There are no financial or manpower implications for the States arising from this proposition.

