

**THE INN ON THE PARK, ST. HELIER:  
PURCHASE**

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**Lodged au Greffe on 3rd November 1998  
by Deputy T.J. Le Main of St. Helier**

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**STATES OF JERSEY**

**STATES GREFFE**

## **PROPOSITION**

**THE STATES are asked to decide whether they are of opinion -**

- (a) to approve the purchase on behalf of the public from the owners of the property known as The Inn on the Park, St. Helier, for use for entertainment and leisure purposes for the benefit of the people of Jersey;
- (b) to authorise the Planning and Environment Committee to negotiate with the owners the purchase of the property at a fair and proper price to be agreed with the Finance and Economics Committee and, in the event of it not being possible to agree a fair and proper price with the owners, to authorise the Planning and Environment Committee, in exercise of the powers conferred by Article 4 of the Island Planning (Jersey) Law 1964, as amended, to acquire the said property and any interests therein on behalf of the public by compulsory purchase in accordance with the provisions of the Compulsory Purchase of Land (Procedure) (Jersey) Law 1961, as amended;
- (c) to authorise the Attorney General and the Greffier of the States to pass on behalf of the public any contract as it might be found necessary to pass in connection with the said acquisition;
- (d) to request the Finance and Economics Committee to make available the necessary funds to acquire the property out of general revenues.

**DEPUTY T.J. LE MAIN OF ST. HELIER.**

**NOTES:** The Finance and Economics Committee comments are to follow.

## **REPORT**

### **Aim of proposition**

The aim of this proposition is straightforward. It reflects the wish of many Islanders to preserve the Inn on the Park and seeks to do this by asking members to ask the appropriate arms of the States to purchase it outright. The Inn on the Park could then be leased back to a management company or trust, and so its presence as a building in which residents and visitors can enjoy leisure pursuits could be maintained.

### **Introduction and essential appeal**

The building known by many as the Inn on the Park - and by those with longer memories as the West Park Pavilion - has seen many changes both in style of architecture, changes of ownership and type of entertainment provided. Throughout these changes, however, it has always remained true to its original purpose as a place of leisure and entertainment. As such it has been a place of enjoyment for generations of Islanders and visitors.

The West Park Pavilion started life as no more than a covered space, and the essence of the building we know today was built in the 1930s. Of course it has been changed since then, but its current facade evokes memories of the older building, even if the covered balconies and windows seem out of scale, if not actually out of place. But this is not to say that, providing the will is there, the building can be neither preserved nor restored to its original state in order that it can once more fulfil its original role.

If pressure can be successfully applied to retain, at inconvenience and cost, the original 1930s Airport building, if the interior ruins of the original abattoirs can be deemed to be worthy of preservation, then I would find it difficult to explain to a stranger why a land-mark building - as is, without doubt, the West Park Pavilion - so much a feature of Jersey whether seen through the eyes of a resident or those of a visitor, could not and should not be retained. Whether or not members agree to purchase this building, we should seek assurance from the

Planning and Environment Committee that its existence can be assured by classifying it as a site of special interest.

As I hope to make clear in the debate, retention of this, or indeed any, building is more than preserving bricks and mortar, it is the preservation of its spirit that is equally valid, and this can be achieved by meeting the feelings of the people to whom that building has been the scene of many important stages in their lives.

It would not be too much of an exaggeration to say the Pavilion is a symbol to many of us of a rite of passage and, as such, it is a treasure house of memories. It can be retained and its use as a centre of leisure activities also be retained. This is what we should strive to do and this is what we can do.

### **Proposed use of building**

There has been a strong outburst of local feeling to preserve the building currently known as the Inn on the Park. I believe this is the role of the States, and I am not alone in hoping that this Chamber can preserve buildings of significant importance, not only to our architectural heritage but also to the leisure industries. That this point is accepted by others has been shown by experience, from what other motive, I would ask, have the Planning, Tourism and other Committees agreed to enforce change of use procedures in such a way as to prevent unnecessary erosion of hotel bed stock in key sites?

There can be no argument that, in visitor terms, the Inn on the Park represents a key site. It is the principal building on the entrance to St. Helier from the west and its position in relation to the rest of St. Helier makes it ideally situated for concerts, dances, seasonal shows, special indoor sporting events or any other leisure functions.

I would remind members that the mechanism by which I would hope this building can be saved is hardly revolutionary. The idea of an official body taking over a key property and letting it to a *bona fide* operator in order to preserve the character and attraction of a town is already well-established. Even a small seaside town such as Le Val André in Brittany does precisely that with a well-situated hotel.

**Last of its kind**

I believe the States can and should purchase this building and let it out to a management company - perhaps even the Arts Trust - in order to keep this building in public use.

The Inn on the Park is the last venue, seating up to a maximum of 500 people, left for dancing and concerts. It meets all the requirements for such large social events and it can also be used for sports clubs and associations, which rely on a large space to set up their activities. I believe the building can be seen as complementary to Fort Regent, for its more limited numbers would be ideal for certain visiting acts who would find the Fort's Gloucester Hall too expensive and too restrictive.

**Heritage**

I am informed by Planning and Environment that the building cannot be classified as a Site of Special Interest. But I would argue that States members have a duty to take a wider view than one limited by strict architectural criteria.

States members will remember that there was a suggestion that Springfield should be saved, not because of its architectural merit, but because of the memories it contained. With the Island Games looming and new facilities so desperately needed, members thought otherwise, but those worried by the concept of losing that building were consoled by the thought that another building, with similar uses, would arise from the ruins of the old one. That does not seem to be the case at West Park.

I am not qualified to argue on a strict definition of architectural value, but I am comforted that, in the case of Springfield referred to above, one of those who do regard themselves as spokespersons for those values argued that a building with memories could be made a special case. There is a definite argument that heritage - the past which we would wish to preserve - comes in a variety of guises. It comes in bricks and mortar and in memories of shared and similar experiences. We must all recognise the validity of that argument and it is on that basis that I would maintain the Inn on the Park to be a heritage site worthy of preservation.

## **Leisure value**

But it is not only emotion and memories that can be preserved at the Inn on the Park. Its value as a venue for residents and tourists as the last remaining public venue cannot be overstated.

Consider for a moment the list of venues lost for dancing. It would include such names as The Rainbow Room, West's, The Continental and Springfield. And what about venues for summer shows and visiting artists? The list of lost venues makes equally dismal reading and it would include the Hawaiian, Caesar's Palace, Château Plaisir and Swanson's. Members can search their memories and add their own names.

Members must surely be aware that there are well-established organisations in the Island seeking a new "home" for themselves. Where can the summer show be held? Would not a saved and refurbished Inn on the Park be an ideal venue? Where can the Eisteddfod present its main display? Where can the Jersey Boxing Association stage its evening events?

The Inn on the Park could provide a home for these and other organisations seeking a secure future. Its continued presence would also come as a relief to those members of the Tourism Department and the tourism industry whose brief it is to field complaints about the lack of evening facilities and activities in Jersey. The building is readily adaptable to provide a varied range of activities throughout the year and these attractions could be augmented by the existence of bars, cafés and restaurants within the complex.

## **Casino**

The public perception is that the current owner of the building has given up waiting for this House to bring itself into line with other resorts and allow a casino to operate in Jersey. Were the States to buy this building - and in the event of this House agreeing to bring our gambling laws in line with a really modern resort such as Guernsey - then I would suggest that a profitable sub-lease could be made on a part of the Inn to operate as a casino.

## **Return on investment**

I accept there would be a substantial capital cost in acquiring this building. This could be determined by negotiations or, if necessary, by compulsory purchase.

In conversation with other members while preparing this report, I have been told that the purchase of the Inn on the Park would be ruled out of court because ‘‘there would be no return on capital’’. This is an intriguing argument in that it can be applied at will and without apparent consistency.

One could well ask what, in strict financial terms, has been the return on capital in all the investments in Fort Regent? what has been the return on the capital written off in various States investments such as the Elizabeth Harbour, the Airport, the new Marina and the Cavern?

The answer of course is that no Government looks at return on capital in purely financial terms. No-one could accuse the Jersey States of being guilty of such blinkered vision in the past two or three decades.

There will be a financial return secured by the management company or trust, but it will not be great (with the possible exception of a casino) for it will be there to encourage and foster as wide a range of activities as possible. There is a difference, however, between return on capital and making a profit on running costs. I am firmly convinced that a substantial profit can be made on running costs through profit-sharing partnership, while still keeping the charges for use of the building within bounds.

## **Social investment**

But there is one other type of return on investment which members should not forget. That is the social return - a return gathered from strategic investment into the lives, health and welfare of the population. Investment in housing and the hospital is geared to the betterment of the people, not to producing a return on capital. The purchase of the Inn on the Park, I would argue, is such an investment.

## **Conclusion**

I would ask members to support this proposition, for the results of preserving the Inn on the Park as a leisure-oriented building will be appreciated by everyone. It will maintain the existence of a land-mark building at the entrance to St. Helier; it will provide much-needed facilities for dancing, concerts and sport, and it will send a necessary message out to the tourism industry that we are aware of the permanent need to improve facilities.

The purchase of the Inn on the Park, and therefore its preservation as a building to house leisure activities, will bring a return to this Island for its residents and its visitors which will dwarf considerations of returns based on purely bookkeeping criteria.