

STATES OF JERSEY



NORTH ST. HELIER MASTERPLAN (P.73/2011): SECOND AMENDMENT

**Lodged au Greffe on 14th June 2011
by the Connétable of St. Helier**

STATES GREFFE

1 PAGE 2 –

After the words “an agreed development framework” insert the words –

“subject to the condition that any plans for the redevelopment of –

(a) the Ann Court site;

(b) the Jersey Gas site,

shall take into account any requirements in the new Island Plan that sufficient amenity space and parking for shoppers and residents be provided in the area of the Masterplan”.

2 PAGE 2 –

After the words “an agreed development framework” insert the words –

“subject to the condition that the plan to create environmental improvements in Bath Street and David Place by making these roads one-way will be subject to further investigation and consultation before being discounted”.

CONNÉTABLE OF ST. HELIER

REPORT

The purpose of this amendment is to ensure that the Island Plan retains its position as the overarching framework for the protection and development of the town of St. Helier. This is particularly important given the current emphasis by the States on concentrating the bulk of new residential units in St. Helier; while this policy makes sense in terms of environmental sustainability, reducing the need to travel by providing key educational, health, retail, transport and cultural facilities close to the homes of Islanders, and thereby protecting the countryside and coastline of the Island for the benefit of all, it risks ‘town-cramming’, and the failure, in particular, to provide quality of life that meets the highest standards.

The proposals contained in P.73/2011 (North St. Helier Masterplan) propose a significant loading of new residential units in an area of St. Helier which already has the highest density of accommodation in the Island (indeed, this was an argument used frequently over the past 15 years to promote the creation of the Millennium Town Park). When this proposal is combined with the various private schemes in the pipeline, including the conversion of hotels and outworn offices to residential use, there is a considerable risk that town residents will not be provided with adequate open space. There is anecdotal evidence that St. Helier residents already have less open space than the residents of major cities, and it is vital that analysis of our open-space provision is carried out, and the highest standards enshrined in the new Island Plan, before the proposals contained in the North of Town Masterplan are carried out. It is also vital that the strategic objectives of making the town more pedestrian and cycle friendly are not abandoned at the very time when the Island Plan’s proposals are set to introduce even greater numbers of residents, pedestrians and cyclists into its already congested streets.

Ann Court and Jersey Gas sites

The calculation of open space provided in the Masterplan itself is faulty, including as it does, those areas which are either not in public ownership, or which are unlikely to be released for development for many years. Despite the fact that the Masterplan has been a costly and prolonged exercise, there appears to have been no rigorous or systematic examination of the amenity space requirements of this densely populated area of St. Helier. It would be extremely short-sighted of the States to allow a key site in public ownership (the site of the former Ann Court), and one which borders the existing area set aside for the Millennium Town Park (a site currently in the ownership of Jersey Gas) to be developed with high-density accommodation until the community’s open space requirements have been established in the new Island Plan.

There is no doubt that sufficient open space is the key concern for those who are bringing up their families in town, but there is evidence that the creation of the new park will not adequately meet the needs of existing users, let alone provide sufficient open space for the new residential developments proposed in the Masterplan. The original proposal for the Millennium Town Park, as advanced by the then Deputy Stuart Syvret, was for the area of the park to be increased to the east once the Jersey Gas operations were moved elsewhere; this would potentially link up with the woodland areas on the escarpment of St. Saviour and provide an extent of open space much more likely to be ‘future-proofed’. It is worth mentioning that, at the recent Design Workshop convened to agree the layout of the Millennium Town Park, it was described by the landscape architect appointed by Transport and Technical Services as

‘very tiny.’ It is essential that the open space requirements of the growing town are properly examined and presented in the new Island Plan before steps are taken to impose more residential accommodation on the Jersey Gas site.

Achieving the highest standards of urban living will assist in maintaining St. Helier’s vibrancy as a place in which to shop, and it is, therefore, vital that the proposals for shopper parking contained in the North of Town Masterplan are verified in the Island Plan process to ensure that the town is a convenient and affordable destination for the many people who will continue to include a car journey in their shopping trips. While the Masterplan’s proposal of creating an underground car park on the Ann Court site may be one way to replace the lost spaces on the Gas Place car park due to the creation of the Millennium Town Park, it is bound to be an expensive solution to the problem; there are other sites in public ownership that would lend themselves to demountable above-ground car parks, or conventional multi-storey car parks, which could supply the parking requirements of the area of the Masterplan at a much lower cost than the proposed underground car park. There are also private sector developments in the area which are seeking to provide shopper car parking. All of the available options should be tested against each other as part of the Island Plan process before the States embarks on a costly capital project at Ann Court.

The new Island Plan is, of course, well underway, but there is still time for the Planning and Environment Department to ensure that the vision, policies and development plans contained within the document take proper account of these key quality of life issues for St. Helier.

Bath Street and David Place

One of the key selling points by the masterplanners of the previous iterations of the North of Town Masterplan has been the proposed environmental improvements of Bath Street and David Place, including tree planting and wide pavements, that require one-way traffic circulation to be adopted. The proposal has generated concern from some business owners and residents which is to be expected, but as it is one of the lynch pins of the scheme, it is surprising to see it being ruled out at this stage. The lower section of Bath Street is too narrow to accommodate the volume of two-way traffic which currently uses it, especially at peak times, and it certainly cannot be maintained that any worthwhile improvements can be made while the current traffic regime in this part of the street is maintained. The States’ strategic objectives of safer walking and cycling are not being met in lower Bath Street and more work needs to be done to find a solution to the problems that exist.

It is illogical under these circumstances for the authors of the revised Masterplan to assert that “Bath Street and David Place will remain two-way for traffic, the opportunity will be taken though to improve pavements, to introduce trees and shared-space principles adopted” (Para 49. p.11). Nor will the improvements referred to in Para 44 – “Bath Street and David Place can be improved visually with public realm improvements, although it will remain two-way in traffic flow” be more than cosmetic – there simply is not enough room in the lower sections of the street where pedestrian safety is compromised on a daily basis by the volume of two-way traffic. If the principles of the Masterplan, supported throughout the process by artist’s impressions of leafy boulevards to enhance town living, are not to be abandoned, the original proposals for one-way traffic in these roads must not be abandoned without further

investigation and consultation being undertaken by the Planning and Environment Department.

Financial and manpower implications

There are no financial or manpower implications for the States arising directly out of this amendment, apart from those arising from further investigation and consultation by the Environment Department if Part 2 of this amendment is adopted, in which case I would argue that these tasks could be absorbed within the department's existing workload.