

The Chairman,

Corporate Service Scrutiny Panel.

Dear Deputy Le Fondré,

I submitted comments on the future of the Finance Sector on 27th February but some points have arisen since then and I hope that, as the Panel has not yet reported, this further submission can be accepted.

In the course of one interview on the subject of the plans for the Finance Sector, the Treasury Minister listed benefits that he felt the general public were ignoring, referring in particular to three areas of open public space. Taken together with other points that he made, it appears that he was referring to the 2008 Masterplan that had been accepted by the States.

It is surprising that he appeared not to realise that the current proposals are radically different from the 2008 plan, especially as this was essentially based on the lowering of the western end of the Underpass. The extra area that would have become available for development allowed for about 16 elements that satisfied the principal of a mixed development that would contain housing, a hotel and a Winter Garden. The latest plans provide 6 buildings for the use of businesses associated with the finance industry only – as the latest name, Finance Sector – makes clear.

The three public open spaces featured in the 2008 Masterplan are reduced to two areas of landscaping between buildings and a triangular patch at the western end of the area that is too awkward to allow a building – an area known amongst planners as ‘SLOAP’ – Space Left Over After Planning.

Recent discussion in the media has been almost wholly devoted to the economics of the possible future development. While it is understandable that States Members and the JDC are paying close attention to the economics, it is to be hoped that the Scrutiny Panel will feel able to take into account other factors on which Islanders have strong feelings.

Last Sunday’s demonstrators may not only be unconvinced by the economic argument – for which only generalizations and unsubstantiated opinions are offered, with little hard information. Many simply did not like what was being proposed. The 2008 Masterplan was itself criticized for falling short in meeting the requirement that any development should reflect the character of St Helier but the development now proposed along the Esplanade is even worse. The building that has been granted planning permission could be anywhere in the world and the illustrations of the whole complex make that even more obvious.

It may already be too late to stop the first building without incurring considerable compensation costs. However, there is no reason why a halt should not be called on any further commitment until an inquiry is held into the socio-economic value that the Scrutiny Panel is tasked to consider. This would provide a forum for a transparent expression of the arguments for and against various possible futures for the immediate future and possible eventual further development.

There has been almost no public consultation since the Hopkins scheme collapsed and the JDC’s decisions have gone unchallenged. It is to be hoped that the Scrutiny Panel will recommend a

radical reappraisal of policy for the most important site that is likely to become available in the Island for the foreseeable future.

R. Anthony

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