

STATES OF JERSEY



PLÉMONT HOLIDAY VILLAGE: GRANT TO NATIONAL TRUST FOR JERSEY (P.107/2014) – COMMENTS

**Presented to the States on 30th June 2014
by the Minister for Planning and Environment**

STATES GREFFE

COMMENTS

In considering the proposition to fund a grant of £3.575 million to the National Trust for Jersey (NTJ) in order that they can purchase the Plémont Holiday Village and adjoining land, I would ask members to consider the following:

1. Existing planning permission

It is important to remind ourselves of what planning permission has been approved for the site, and what impact this will have on the site as we see it today.

Planning permission was granted in August 2013 by the Minister for Planning and Environment for the following development –

“Demolish all existing buildings and remove hard-standings. Return 67% of total site area (16.19 vergées) to public accessible natural landscape. Replace existing Manager’s bungalow/Staff cottage with 2 No. four bed houses and construct 26 No. houses comprising of 10 No. three bed houses, 11 No. four bed houses and 5 No. five bed houses all in three groups plus landscaping, footpaths and reed-bed rainwater recycling pond. Create passing place on C105 at Western edge of Field 48.”

The permission is the subject of a current appeal in the Royal Court.

Attached to the permission (and part of the consent) is a Planning Obligation Agreement, signed by the Minister and the developer. The Agreement sets out the terms of the transfer of the 16+ vergées to an appropriate body, together with nature conservation and landscape maintenance funds. In total, the Agreement achieves the gift of the land, plus £5,000 paid annually for a period 25 years, plus £6,000 for a puffin study, plus the refurbishment of the former Occupation structure (as a bird hide).

It is important to note therefore, that under the existing planning permission, the dilapidated buildings on the site today will be removed. 67% (16 vergées) of the total site will be returned to public accessible natural landscape at no cost to the States, and 33% (8 vergées) of the total site will be built upon.

2. Environmental benefits of the proposition

The proposition does offer environmental benefits above what has already been agreed with the current landowner, and these include –

- Creating landscape improvements by not replacing the existing holiday camp building with 28 new houses, but returning the whole site to a natural state.
- Increasing ecological connectivity, ensuring that the Les Landes ecological Site of Special Interest is well connected to the east.
- Providing a larger habitat and breeding area for a wide range of species,
- Contributing to the delivery of the Island’s Multi-Lateral Environmental Agreements (MEAs), such as the Bern Convention on the Conservation of

European Wildlife and Natural Habitats and the Convention on the Conservation of Biological Diversity.

- Improving public access to the countryside.

My Department is in general agreement with the NTJ's plan contained within the proposition, to develop coastal heathland habitat, comprising; dwarf shrub heath (heathers and gorse), grassland and scrub. However, the States of Jersey Natural Environment Team would propose that a more open assessment of the feasibility of restoring heathland or recreating other coastal grassland habitat is needed.

Given that the States of Jersey *Countryside Character Appraisal* is still seen as the best document in terms of assessing landscape, and still forms an integral part of the current Island Plan, it is suggested that the same categories for landscape should be used.

3. How else might £3.575 million benefit the environment?

- 3.1 We are all aware that States' funds are limited and under increasing pressure. If £3.575 million were made available to benefit the environment, how else might this money be spent?

Increasing Public access to green areas or the countryside by purchasing additional land.

Agricultural land

A recent report on agricultural land value undertaken on behalf of Property Holdings states: 'Good quality agricultural land with the benefit of links to infrastructure is currently achieving in the region of £10,000 to £20,000 per vergée.'

Taking a mid-point figure of £15,000 per vergée, £3.575 million would in theory buy approximately 238 vergées of land.

To put this in perspective, 238 vergées is the equivalent of 34 Town Parks (7 vergées), and I attach a map showing what 238 vergées around St. Helier might look like.

Purchase of non-agricultural land

At a cost of between £5,000 to £10,000 per vergée and by taking a mid-point figure of £7,500 per vergée, £3.575 million would, in theory, buy approximately 476 vergées of non-agricultural land. This is nearly 60 times the proposed built-on area of the Plémont development (8 vergées) which is not already being returned to public accessible natural landscape. In contributing £3.575 million, it could be argued that the States are supporting the purchase of 8 vergées of non-agricultural land at an approximate cost of at least £446,000 per vergée. This sum excludes the contribution being made by the NTJ. This does not represent good value for money.

3.2 Investment in the Coastal National Park (CNP)

With limited resources available to manage, develop and promote the CNP, any additional funds could make a considerable difference to the CNP and benefit those that work, live or visit the CNP.

As already indicated, a far greater area of land could be purchased with far less money than is being proposed, resulting in substantial improvements to the Island's access network and the development of the CNP.

My Department is already engaging with CNP stakeholders, and I am sure that additional funding would be welcomed and could be incorporated into the management plans which are being developed. Additional funding might be used to create a CNP funding mechanism to support CNP activities that the wider community could apply to.

Currently, excluding labour costs, we spend approx. £30 per hectare towards managing environmentally important land. If we are to make significant improvements to the land, it is considered that we should be spending between £500 to £1,000 per hectare.

Other uses of additional environmental funding could include –

- Establishing and implementing an invasive species eradication project
- Implementing an extensive grazing programme (e.g. 700 km. of stock fencing)
- Improving the Island's hedgerow
- Establishing a botanic garden.

4. Adding Plémont to the Coastal National Park (CNP)

The proposition refers to adding Plémont to the Coastal National Park, if States members decide to support the NTJ in acquiring Plémont.

The definition of the Coastal National Park is and should be based on an objective assessment of the landscape characteristics of the Island's coastline and countryside. The area of land on which the former Plémont Holiday Village sits has a different landscape characteristic to that which already forms part of the Coastal National Park and which is adjacent to the holiday village site to the north and west.

The Plémont Holiday Village and adjoining land –

- (a) sits within a landscape that has the characteristics of interior agricultural land (defined as E1 in the Countryside Character Appraisal) which forms much of the Island's Green Zone; and
- (b) does not have the landscape characteristics of the adjacent North Coast Heathland (defined as A1 in the Countryside Character Appraisal), which is located within the CNP.

For these reasons alone, I do not consider it appropriate to include the site within the Coastal National Park.

The States Assembly discussed the inclusion of the Plémont Holiday Village and adjoining land in the CNP in 2011 as part of the Island Plan debate, and the Assembly voted against this proposal.

5. Regulatory matters

It should be noted that if the proposition is adopted –

- The Minister for Planning and Environment will need to agree to revoke the current planning permission for the development. A revocation under Article 27 of the Planning and Building (Jersey) Law 2002 comes with provisions for compensation, which will need to be addressed first to avoid any risk to the public purse.
- Planning permission will be required to demolish the existing buildings, remove the hard-standings and to restore the landscape. Although permission already exists for this (linked with the approved housing scheme) as noted above, this consent would need to be revoked by the Minister.

Conclusion

There is some environmental benefit in the States supporting the National Trust for Jersey in purchasing the Plémont Holiday Village and adjoining land at a cost of £7.15 million. I am sure that in a perfect world, returning built land to its natural state would be welcomed by many Islanders and by the Minister for Planning and Environment.

However, I do not believe that providing a grant of £3.575 million to return 8 vergées of land on the north coast of the Island to a natural state offers the Island good value for money. Only a small number of Islanders will benefit from the acquisition of this small and very expensive piece of land.

Members should not consider the dilapidated appearance of the site as it appears today, but what it will look like if the planning permission is implemented. The States' contribution of £3.575 million towards the purchase achieves the removal of the permission for housing, rather than the dilapidated buildings on site today – these are already removed as part of the planning permission.

For the same sum of money we are being asked to contribute, the States could purchase up to 30 times the land area, possibly around the town perimeter, and this would provide much greater benefits to a greater number of town residents, Islanders and visitors alike.

For these reasons I would ask members to reject this proposition.

APPENDIX

Area of agricultural land
238 vergées @ £15k per vergée

