

STATES OF JERSEY



PROPOSED USE OF FORMER JERSEY GAS SITE: REQUEST FOR RECONSIDERATION

Lodged au Greffe on 3rd June 2025
by the Connétable of St. Helier
Earliest date for debate: 24th June 2025

STATES GREFFE

PROPOSITION

THE STATES are asked to decide whether they are of opinion –

to request the Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning to reconsider the proposal to build a new primary school on the site immediately adjacent to the Millennium Town Park, formerly occupied by Jersey Gas ('the site') and, following consultation with the Council of Ministers, to present a report to the States Assembly by the end of 2025 providing–

- (a) an assessment of the need for a new town primary school in the light of demographic changes, including the capacity of the existing primary school estate to meet demand for new school places, and any alternative approaches to meeting this demand;
- (b) data as to the number of households located within 400 metres of the site, and estimates of the numbers of potential users by age group of an expanded Millennium Town Park, including those living outside this radius, visitors, shoppers and office workers;
- (c) an analysis of the health and other benefits provided to the whole community by the Millennium Town Park, especially the ageing population, and an assessment of the likely impact of doubling its size, compared to the current proposals to develop new 'pocket parks' on sites such as those presently occupied by Springfield School and Le Bas Centre;
- (d) an assessment of the expected traffic impacts on the St. Helier road network of a new primary school constructed on the site, including air quality levels in surrounding streets, and an assessment of the role 'active travel' could play in mitigating them; and
- (e) up to date financial projections on the cost of building and maintaining the proposed new primary school, compared with the costs of meeting the demand for new primary school places by alternative means.

CONNÉTABLE OF ST. HELIER

REPORT

I have brought forward several Propositions over the past 25 years seeking to protect and increase St Helier's open space, not only to increase the size of the Millennium Town Park but also to protect vital areas of green space such as People's Park from development, and so I make no bones about wanting the Assembly to reconsider the decision taken in the Bridging Island Plan (following amendments brought by two St. Helier deputies, and confirmed in the two subsequent Government Plans), to build a new primary school on the only site which could ever be used to extend the Millennium Town Park, for I am passionate about parks, and my belief in their environmental, social, therapeutic and economic value to the whole community has only grown since the pandemic. Increasing significantly the size of the Millennium Town Park is one of the pledges I made in my Manifesto in June 2022.

This proposition is an attempt to obtain up to date information about the relative benefits and disbenefits of doubling the size of the Millennium Town Park compared to the construction of a new primary school on the site, with other 'pocket parks' provided at some point in the future.

The investigation requested is broken down into five key areas and it is accepted that only the first and last of these falls directly within the Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning's remit; but, if this request for reconsideration is approved by the States, I am confident that the Council of Ministers will take a collegiate approach to what is being asked for in respect of the other sections of the proposition and direct their officers to provide the necessary information.

The Proposition

Part a) of the Proposition refers to the demographic changes which are occurring in the Island, which are relevant to this Proposition in at least two ways: firstly, given the falling numbers of children requiring primary education it has to be questioned whether the Government should still be proposing to build a new primary school at all. The existing provision is already generous for an island of nine by five, and there is at least anecdotal evidence that some of the private as well as rural primary schools are facing pressure to keep classes open. Would it be feasible to change the catchment areas to ensure that our existing primary schools remain viable rather than risking their closure? As far as private primary school education is concerned, how are schools like FCJ and VCP faring in terms of admissions over the next few years? What would be the benefits and disbenefits for a child living in St. Helier to undergo their primary school education in Trinity School, for example? How could the school bus network be adapted to allow this to happen?

Part a) of the Proposition also challenges the Minister for Education to reveal what alternatives exist to the construction of the new Town Primary on the site. To date, this challenge has been met with a bland assertion that a very large footprint is required which can only be provided by the site in question. But how can this be true? We know that for at least a decade the Education Department was considering how best to refurbish or replace Rouge Bouillon School, and it is only comparatively recently that the spotlight has switched to the 'falling down' status of smaller primary schools in the urban area, while Rouge Bouillon school appears to be good for a few more years at least. Clearly the Education Department had a 'Plan A' for redeveloping the primary school estate in Town and it did not include the Jersey Gas site because that was

earmarked for housing. It was only when (thanks to Andium Homes relinquishing their requirement for homes on the site) the Jersey Gas site became ‘available’ that people started working up plans to build a school there.

Secondly, the demographic changes point to increasing numbers of elderly people in the Island which is why part b) of the Proposition requests data on all age groups living within walking distance of the Millennium Town Park. Accurate data and forecasts about the number of senior citizens needs to be provided before we proceed to build on the only site available for an expansion of their local park. The number of non-resident park users need to be estimated, too, such as shoppers and visitors to the Island, especially now (thanks to Le Masuriers’ development in Bath Street) access to and from the park from the town centre has been facilitated by the creation of Moneypenny Lane. Part b) is particularly relevant given the large amount of building that has gone on and that continues apace in the environs of the Millennium Town Park. It is worth reminding ourselves that the ‘Northern Quarter’ which is nearing completion was permitted an increased number of units on the basis that an expanded Millennium Town Park was going to be created across the road from its entrance. In addition, Andium Homes had the foresight to realise that their current development of the Ann Street brewery site, along with the nearly complete redevelopment of the Mayfair Hotel site as residential units, would require more open space for residents, and to that end are planning to create a new pedestrian access for the residents of these hundreds of new homes to what they believed would be an extension to the Town Park.

A radius of 400m is suggested for use in gathering the data of potential users of a larger park; the reason for this is that when the creation of the Millennium Town Park was proposed in the 1990s, 11,337 persons or 13% of the Island’s population lived within 400 metres of the proposed park.

Part c) of the Proposition addresses the need for data about the health benefits of ‘a walk in the park’ both in terms of physical exercise and the mental health benefits it provides. Critical to this part of the Proposition is an objective analysis of whether expanding the existing Millennium Town Park, thereby taking advantage of the ‘marriage value’ of putting two adjacent sites together, confers more than a simple doubling of the area. Proponents of constructing a new town primary school on the site have claimed that it will still allow for an extension of the park; just how realistic this is needs to be examined objectively, as does the claim that if we make a park at Springfield School, presumably after the school has been removed at some future date, and at Le Bas Centre, presumably at some future date when Le Bas Centre has been removed, this would yield much more space than if we doubled the size of the Town Park. (Such a proposal is reminiscent of the one advanced by those who wished to build the new hospital on People’s Park who said that the park could be replaced once the site of the present hospital was cleared.) Adjacency was an important word when we were discussing the new hospital project, clinical adjacency, and adjacency is a key word in relation to the site, because of course we can put pocket parks here, there and everywhere but we can only extend the Town Park in one place, and that is the Jersey Gas site.

Part d) of the Proposition seeks information about the potential traffic impacts of constructing a large primary school on the site. Proponents of the project have opined that new active travel routes will ensure that pupils are able to walk or cycle to school rather than be ferried to and fro by car, but what evidence is there that this will happen? There is recent evidence that smaller schools, such as St. Lukes and St. Saviours, can operate such schemes, with the assistance of officers in the Infrastructure Department,

but to date there are no strategies or policies in place to facilitate walking and cycling, especially when we are dealing with children of primary school age. In terms of traffic management, it has to be questioned whether the arrangements in place for Springfield School and St. Luke's School, at present, are not more sustainable than the new arrangements that would be required were children from these catchment areas to attend a new school between the Ring Road and the Robin Hood gyratory.

Extending the Millennium Town Park, as suggested when the Island was asked to choose a project to mark the Millennium by its original proposer, the former Senator Stuart Syvret, and as subsequently recommended by Andium Homes, would mean taking the park right back to St. Saviour's Road, bridging the Ring Road and taking the green space up to the colleges and the escarpment so that students can move easily between the colleges into the Town Park with its Youth Centre, via Moneypenny Lane, and down to the bus station or wherever they need to go. The reduction in school run traffic in St. Saviour as well as in St. Helier would be significant, as would the health benefits to all school-age children; at least, this is my contention, and it needs to be evaluated.

Part e) of the Proposition seeks information about the costs involved in building a new Town Primary School compared to the costs of breathing new life into the smaller schools it is proposed to replace, and making do with what we already have in terms of our Primary School estate. Does not the current state of the Island's finances, existing capital project commitments and uncertainty surrounding the global financial outlook justify a long hard look at the current proposal to spend many millions of pounds constructing a school on a site which could make a financial return if used to extend the Millennium Town Park? What are the economic benefits of parks and have these been factored into the current thinking about the project?

Conclusion

I hope that the results of the investigations that I am asking for will be such as to lead a majority of States Members to think again about their support of the current proposals for the site, though I am aware of the mountain that there is to climb, given that the last significant vote on the subject on Friday 16 December 2022, ([Proposed Government Plan 2023-2026 \(P.97/2022 Amd. 21\)](#)) was approved with only one vote contre. During that debate I withdrew my amendment requesting that the school construction project be deferred pending the development of a masterplan for Town: *'I am going to bring a rescindment of this part of the Government Plan to the States because I believe the future of the Town Park is too important to give up without a fully objective, comprehensive look at the alternative options for the primary school,'* I said, which is why I have lodged this Proposition.

The comment I made at the time in the Parish of St Helier magazine, The Town Crier, "Lessons from Lyon" also bears repeating: *"At half term we went to Lyon in central France to spend some time with my eldest son and his family who are lucky enough to live next to Le Parc de la Tête d'Or, one of the biggest public parks in France - so big, in fact, that it has a zoo within it as well as a sizeable boating lake and a botanic garden. With its exceptionally wide paths, generous lawns and mature trees it is an oasis of calm in the busy city, visited by thousands every day, a vital component to the quality of life enjoyed by the Lyonnais. So, it was frankly depressing on returning to St Helier to find myself in a meeting with the Council of Ministers having to plead with our Chief Minister and senior civil servants to increase the size of the Millennium Town Park."*

With the exception of the Environment and Housing Ministers, the Government simply does not understand the importance of extending the Town Park by seizing the unique opportunity offered by Andium Homes: that organisation has the vision and foresight to realise that a thousand more homes in the north of St Helier requires more green space in a single, central location if we are to avoid the charge of town cramming' in future years."

At the time of the debate on P.97/2022 the Jersey Evening Post, in its round-up of the news, showed a picture of an extended Millennium Town Park running across up to St. Saviour 's Road, with water features and mature trees and a lot more space than we have at the moment, nothing like as large as Le Parc de la Tête d'Or, or the London parks, nor Central Park in New York, but still a park in which it would be possible for children – and those of more advanced years attempting the ‘couch to 5k’ – to get out of breath. Over the past three years, especially in the light of recent data about the Island’s demographic changes, the importance of play for the young, and exercise for older people, as well as the Island’s financial outlook, the case for a fully objective and comprehensive reconsideration of the future uses of the site has only grown stronger.

Financial and staffing implications

Financial and manpower implications: if the Proposition is successful the investigations, I have requested can be met from existing revenue budgets, especially if officers from the Cabinet Office and policy teams provide the necessary assistance.

Children’s Rights Impact Assessment

A Children’s Rights Impact Assessment (CRIA) has been prepared in relation to this proposition and is available to read on the States Assembly website.

Proponents of the new town primary school on the site have invariably asserted that it meets the States’ commitment of putting children first; however, a primary school by its definition only caters for some children for some of the time, and whether a brand new facility does that better than a number of existing smaller schools, duly refurbished, is a matter which needs to be addressed in the review I am seeking.

A larger local park offers opportunities for exercise, play and recreation to all ages of children, throughout the day and on 365 days of the year which is why I believe that more research needs to be carried out on which use of the site will most benefit the children of St. Helier.