

STATES OF JERSEY



ST. HELIER WATERFRONT: DEVELOPMENT

Lodged au Greffe on 21st October 2011
by the Connétable of St. Helier

STATES GREFFE

PROPOSITION

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

to request the Minister for Treasury and Resources not to allow any commitments to be made by the States of Jersey Development Company (SoJDC) (formerly known as the Waterfront Development Board) in respect of –

- (a) the development or sale of any part of the Esplanade Quarter,
- (b) the development or sale of any part of the areas known as La Folie, Les Galots, and the sites occupied by the Jersey Rowing Club;

until the future of these sites has been determined by the new States Assembly in 2012.

CONNÉTABLE OF ST. HELIER

REPORT

The development of the St. Helier Waterfront, whichever vantage point it is viewed from, is generally considered to be disappointing, not only in how it looks, but also in its overall design – or lack of it. Islanders returning from a visit to St. Malo on the ferry cannot help but notice the contrast between that town's 'Intra Muros' – combining prime residential areas with retail quarters and hospitality in an architecturally pleasing, built-to-last way – with the hotchpotch of ubiquitous modern structures which greet their eyes as the vessel approaches St. Helier harbour.

(This is not to say that, as individual components, and for the most part, the Waterfront development does not offer our community, a number of high-quality and much-needed facilities.)

Now that the original plans for the development of the Esplanade Quarter have been changed, with the loss of the original developer's right to implement the approved scheme, we have a valuable opportunity to reconsider the approved Masterplan for this key area of the Island.

Indeed, given that the States of Jersey Development Company (SoJDC) is in the process of pursuing a different scheme from the one approved by the States – the piecemeal development of the car park site alone – it seems to me a matter of good government that the new States Assembly engages in the due processes of public consultation and political debate on the subject before SoJDC expends further sums on what may prove to be abortive designs.

There are 3 particular reasons why we should not allow the Esplanade car park to be developed at present. Firstly, we were told that the demand for large floor spaces by the financial services industry could only be satisfied by the development of the Esplanade Quarter; this is manifestly not the case, given current and forthcoming plans in the town centre. The outline planning permission for the Esplanade Quarter is for 621,700 square feet of office space, but there are currently 2 private sector schemes in the 'old town' that, combined, will achieve nearly this amount of office space if approved. The Managing Director of WEB/SoJDC, when asked about the potential impact of one of these applications on the Esplanade Quarter scheme, said, 'May the best man win' (Jersey Evening Post, 2nd July 2011), which suggests that WEB/SoJDC will be pursuing the development of 'their' site regardless of other considerations, such as the presence of under-used sites (the area bounded by Dumaresq Street and Old Street, and sites within the North of Town Masterplan, to name but two).

From a wider St. Helier perspective, rather than the narrow WEB/SoJDC perspective, placing new office development in the 'old town' is preferable to locating it to the south of the Esplanade, as it assists in the regeneration of town, and ensures that there is a supply of office workers on the doorstep, as it were, of the central markets and other retail and hospitality firms that depend on their custom. It can also be questioned why the public sector, acting through WEB/SoJDC, is determined to develop a valuable strategic site for offices when the private sector is manifestly able and willing to provide the commercial space the financial services industry requires.

Secondly, and following on from these considerations, the States' own property requirements are still unclear, in respect of the Hospital and Police Headquarters, to name but 2 departments; the Esplanade was previously earmarked for other States' purposes, and until a States' property strategy is finalised and approved, it would be better to keep the Esplanade site available. According to the Minister with

responsibility for the States' property portfolio, 'Property assets have not been run in a way that secures value for money and I am as frustrated as anyone else that this has happened.' (Jersey Evening Post, 15th July 2001). Such frustration could easily lead the Minister to approving the sale of all or part of the Esplanade Quarter to a new developer.

Thirdly, the Esplanade is hardly being wasted in its current use. It provides much-needed parking, as well as open space with trees and other vegetation. I have already made known my personal view that the area should be considered for open space, a kind of Central Park, overlooked by the impressive new buildings along the Esplanade such as the Ogier building, with car parking provided underground. The recently approved Island Plan suggests that there is a shortage of open space in St. Helier, a situation which can only be worsened by current plans to concentrate both commercial and residential developments within the central part of the parish. However, whatever eventual use is decided upon for the Esplanade car park, the decision-making process should not be hampered by commitments made by a WEB/SoJDC Board that appears determined to start selling off parts of the site.

La Folie and Les Galots

The reasons behind the closure of La Folie public house many years ago have remained a mystery to Islanders, though not a surprise given that it is not the only site that has languished in such a way. (The reason for such delays, a cynic might suggest, is in order to make it more difficult for people to raise objections to the inappropriate development of these sites when they are eventually brought forward.) More recently, the marine industries occupying the sheds on the harbour frontage of the site have been moved out, without any new marine uses being considered there. At a recent meeting of the SoJDC, it was proposed that the La Folie site be developed for luxury housing, with private moorings, if possible, to make the properties more saleable. The funds raised, it was argued, could be used to supply much-needed housing as part of an overall plan for the development of the harbours.

States Members have also been written to by the Chair of the Jersey Rowing Club, who have been advised that their clubhouse, boat park and slipway (including the area known as Les Galots) may be lost to development, while in addition, the need for a new home for the Sea Scouts has been highlighted.

The development of luxury housing beside the harbour may be in the best interests of the Jersey community, though I doubt it; however, it is surely to be expected that the States Assembly engages in the due processes of public consultation and political debate about the future of La Folie, Les Galots; the future of Jersey's marine clubs, leisure pursuits and industries; and the future of the harbour as a whole, before SoJDC expends further sums on what may prove to be abortive designs.

For these reasons, I urge the States to agree that the Minister for Treasury and Resources should not consent to the disposal of any part of the Esplanade car park site or the La Folie and Les Galots sites, until the future of these areas has been reviewed by the new States' Assembly next year.

Financial and manpower implications

There are no financial or manpower implications that impact directly on the States within the timeframe of the proposition.