

STATES OF JERSEY



PEOPLE'S PARK: REMOVAL FROM LIST OF SITES UNDER CONSIDERATION FOR FUTURE NEW HOSPITAL

Lodged au Greffe on 19th January 2016
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 Health and Social Services to remove People's Park from the list of sites under consideration for a future new hospital.

CONNÉTABLE OF ST. HELIER

REPORT

1. Introduction

The current speculation about the possibility that People's Park will be brought forward as the preferred site for Jersey's new hospital is causing a great deal of concern to Islanders, not only in St. Helier, but across the Island as a whole. At the last States Sitting of 2015, I was unable to get a firm date from the Minister for Health and Social Services for the announcement of his preferred site, while an e-mail to him and the Chief Minister on 13th January –

“As you know there's lots of speculation about the new hospital site and I was just wondering when you will be announcing your preferred option, what the Parish will be offered by way of compensation and what the next step will be, i.e. will you be lodging a report and proposition, if so when?”

– went unanswered. I do not believe that a majority of States members will accept the loss of People's Park, and accordingly I am seeking to nip any such proposal in the bud. If adopted, this proposition will allow the Minister to concentrate his resources on exploring further the alternative sites which exist for the new hospital.

2. Background

The search for a site for a new hospital has largely been conducted behind closed doors. This is in stark contrast to the Les Quennevais School replacement project which has been opened to the Public, with many meetings and stakeholder workshops being undertaken. As Connétable of St. Helier, I was invited to a short meeting on the subject of the new hospital site, but there has been no attempt by the Minister for Health and Social Services to involve the Parish deputies or parishioners themselves. At that meeting I was asked whether the new hospital project team could do feasibility work on People's Park and Parade Gardens as potential sites. I agreed that any potential site in the Parish for the new hospital could be looked at, but made it clear that I believed that parishioners would require, by way of compensation, at least the same quantity and quality of open space before it would accept the loss of any of its parks. I published my views on the matter in the monthly magazine of the Parish in November and again this month, and have received a great deal of feedback from parishioners, as well as from other Islanders adamantly opposed to the proposal, regardless of what areas of open space might be offered to the Parish in exchange for People's Park.

3. Open space in St. Helier

The shortage of amenity space in St. Helier was highlighted in the Open Space Study carried out for the Planning Department in 2008, which states –

“Amenity Greenspace – Provision varies from parish to parish, however, under supply in many of the rural parishes is offset by good supply to natural greenspace and/or beaches. The under provision of amenity greenspace is more of an issue in the parishes with larger urban areas, and this is the case in St. Helier (minus 11.67 vergées) and to a lesser extent St. Clement (minus 1.08 vergées)”.

I have sought to remedy the situation in recent years by resisting the loss of amenity space in Springfield Park ([P.125/2014](#) – not debated as the proposition was accepted by the then Minister for Education, Sport and Culture, Deputy P.J.D. Ryan of St. John, and the plans changed); attempting to have the Millennium Town Park extended ([P.156/2014](#) – debated 20th January 2015); and a similar objective in my proposed amendment to P.27/2015: *Draft Strategic Plan 2015 – 2018 (P.27/2015): seventh amendment (P.27/2015 Amd.(7))* – debated 29th April 2015), and the arguments made in those documents and in the transcripts of the debate on Hansard are equally relevant here. People’s Park should also enjoy the protection of the Island Plan (Policy SC04).

4. The value of People’s Park

People’s Park is the jewel in the crown of the Island’s urban parks. (A rival case might be made for Howard Davis Park, but it is on the other side of town and is also a closed formal park; it hosts some large events, but does not have the versatility and accessibility of People’s Park.) People’s Park is used for an extraordinary number and variety of events each year with some, like the Portuguese Food Festival, attracting tens of thousands of visitors during the course of an event; it is a vital component in the Island’s major annual festivals, including the Battle of Flowers, the International Motor Festival, the Real Ale Festival and the Jersey International Air Display; it is also ideal for sporting events, playing a key role in last year’s NatWest Island Games, and hosting a cycle-cross event in December last year. It is used by local schools and sporting clubs for football practice, sports days and so on. The park is also a much-used and valued area of grass for thousands of residents and visitors, who use it for walking, jogging, picnicking and recreation. Together with Lower Park and the wooded backdrop of Westmount Gardens, it is of important aesthetic value in an increasingly built-up environment. This explains, perhaps, why the Council of Ministers has been so slow in coming forward with a compensatory offer of open space, because there is no prospect of a replacement to People’s Park being found.

5. Rumoured compensation

Due to the lack of meaningful consultation as to what alternative open space(s) might be offered to replace People’s Park, I have had to rely on rumours of a package including open space on the Waterfront, the present hospital site when cleared, and an extension to the Millennium Town Park. To address each of these in turn:

The Waterfront:

When land was reclaimed ‘West of Albert’, there was talk of using much of it as open space for recreation; it was going to be a largely traffic-free area with some leisure uses and hospitality. Regardless of what one thinks of the present developments on the Waterfront, there is no doubt that the residents, businesses and visitors to the Waterfront expect at least some of the remaining undeveloped space to be used as open space anyway.

The present hospital site:

The site occupied by the hospital today is bordered on one side by a busy road, and on the other by the backs of relatively tall buildings, some of which will be protected; there is a large amount of residential development on its perimeter. It would not, therefore, offer a home for the kind of events which take place on People’s Park, nor would it be available until the new hospital is built and the present site cleared.

An extension to the Millennium Town Park

Efforts to extend the Island's newest urban park have been continuing, albeit being put on hold while the outcome of an appeal against planning permission is awaited. It is rumoured that such an extension may be part of a compensation package to be offered to the Parish in return for the loss of People's Park. However, the arguments made in the propositions and the debates referred to in paragraph 3 above are still relevant: given the policy of the States to concentrate new housing developments in St. Helier, and the fact that the majority of the new housing sites are in the northern part of the town, the extension of the Millennium Town Park should be pursued anyway. The Jersey Gas site offers clear marriage value to the present park, whose facilities are already strained by the thousands of people who use them. It is not a case of either/or. St. Helier needs People's Park and the Jersey Gas site, if the future residents of the town are not to be short-changed when it comes to amenity space, with all of the social consequences that go with town-cramming.

Conclusion

If the Council of Ministers is indeed working behind the scenes to find a combination of separate areas of open space whose sum will equal or even surpass the size of People's Park, it seems inconceivable that such a package would be acceptable to the majority of Islanders, let alone to St. Helier parishioners. The importance of People's Park lies in its being a single area of open space with an attractive wooded backdrop and views down to the sea and Elizabeth Castle, a park which is accessible, versatile and robust. There is nowhere else like it. There are, however, several good alternatives sites for the new hospital. The new States Strategic Plan makes the improvement of St. Helier one of its 4 Strategic Priorities, with particular emphasis now placed on St. Helier's environmental quality as a place in which to live, work and visit. People's Park is a vital part of what St. Helier offers the people of Jersey, and the States are accordingly asked to send a clear message to the Minister for Health and Social Services that it is not to be built upon.

Financial and manpower implications

There are no quantifiable financial or manpower implications for the States at the time of lodging this proposition.