

STATES OF JERSEY



MILLENNIUM TOWN PARK – GOVERNMENT SUPPORT FOR EXTENSION

Lodged au Greffe on 10th March 2022
by the Connétable of St. Helier
Earliest date for debate: 25th March 2022

STATES GREFFE

PROPOSITION

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

that the Millennium Town Park should be extended over the whole of the site formerly occupied by Jersey Gas and to request the Council of Ministers to inform Andium Homes that the States and Government of Jersey endorse its vision of extending the Town Park in this way.

CONNÉTABLE OF ST. HELIER

REPORT

Executive summary

There has been a growing appreciation, especially in the years since the Millennium, of the importance of amenity space in the Island's main town, and last year it was proposed by Andium Homes that the site of the former Jersey Gas company, between the Millennium Town Park and St Saviour's Road which had long been proposed for housing, should instead be used to double the size of the park with no other buildings upon it. Andium's vision mirrors that of the early campaigners for the creation of the Millennium Town Park and it offers the Island its one and only chance to create a park of significant size in the heart of a growing capital which, if achieved, will maximise the benefit of the park for the community, especially for children, and which will in decades to come be regarded as the most important action towards urban regeneration taken by Jersey's government. As the Parishes of St Helier and St Saviour are increasingly being asked to take responsibility for the thousands of new homes required in Jersey it seems only right that the quantum of such critical infrastructure as parkland be increased, and that the unique and visionary opportunity offered to the Island by Andium Homes be supported by the States Assembly.

The Millennium Town Park: a brief history

The creation of the Millennium Town Park was the Island's chosen project to celebrate the new Millennium. First proposed by Stuart Syvret and agreed upon in 2000 following a 16,400 strong petition the project took more than a dozen years to be implemented, the delay being partly due to the high cost of re-provisioning the surface car parking underground, the inclusion of a car park being part of the original petition. Nor was funding the project a high priority of the Council of Ministers at the time, and it took a backbencher to achieve this, an amendment by Deputy Geoff Southern to the Government's business plan which was approved by 23 votes to 22 in September 2009. (In what has become known as a 'ring binder vote', Senator Alan Maclean – Treasury Minister and former District Deputy – attributed his vote '*pour*' to the papers on his desk in the States Assembly; his attempt to have his vote changed to '*contre*', in line with his fellow Council of Ministers members, was rejected by the Bailiff.)

With the funds necessary to provide the Millennium Project in the budget, the States were asked to get on with it in 2010 (Millennium Town Park: Commencement in 2010, [P.42/2010](#), debated on 13th May) but the Council of Ministers won an amendment 'subject to the outcome of the North of Town Masterplan', which had been commissioned by the then Planning Minister of the day, the late Senator Freddie Cohen, from Hopkins Architects. While the North of Town Masterplan has much to commend it such as the transformation of Midvale Road, David Place and Bath Street into a traffic calmed thoroughfare with generous pavements, cycling facilities and tree planting, its imposition of blocks of housing as 'framing elements' on the land earmarked for the town park caused consternation among supporters of the Millennium project. The Hopkins masterplan was duly presented in July that year ([P.103/2020](#)) but withdrawn, revised ([P.190/2010](#)) and withdrawn again, before being revised once more to remove the proposed housing ([P.73/2011](#)) and debated on 29th and 30th June 2011.

The Millennium Town Park was finally opened on Saturday 29th October 2011.

The Jersey Gas site

The North of Town Masterplan also signalled the States' intention to build 250 – 300 homes on the Jersey Gas site, and in the second amendment to [P.73/2011 Amd \(2\)](#) I asked the States to agree that any plans to redevelop the Jersey Gas site should it become available should 'take into account any requirements in the new Island Plan that sufficient amenity space and parking for shoppers and residents be provided in the area of the Masterplan'.

In summing up, I said: *“We need to remember that the Jersey Gas site was suggested by, I think, one of the people who thought of the Millennium Town Park in the first place, the then Deputy Syvret, as being a good extension of the town park eastwards towards the escarpment of St. Saviour. Again, that proposal may sound absurd and bonkers to some Members but that proposal is kept open by this amendment. It is still possible to have a discussion in due course about the Jersey Gas site and whether that should be a densely packed housing site with parking or whether it should not be, indeed, an extension to the open space on the Millennium Town Park site. So, this amendment is about keeping our options open and so anyone who votes against it is basically saying they want to close our options and tie our hands and tie the hands of future Councils of Ministers. Deputy Jeune from St. Brelade suggested I was hung up on open space requirements for town. Well, yes, I suppose I am and, in a way, so should she be because everybody who uses St. Helier deserves a standard of open space requirement that is at least comparable to other densely populated towns ... I do maintain the amendment and ask Members to agree that it is about keeping options open and making sure we do not short-change St. Helier in terms of open space.”*

The amendment was approved by 25 votes to 9.

A planning application by the former owner of the Jersey Gas site (PP. 2014/1125) to build up to 300 units of accommodation next to the Millennium Town Park prompted a petition, ([P.156/2014](#), debated on 20th Jan 2015 and defeated 15/24 with 6 abstentions) to prevent the determination of the application, which objectors believed was in danger of being fast-tracked by the Minister for Planning and Environment just weeks away from the General Election; it urged the Minister to consider alternative uses of the site, such as increasing the amount of amenity space and car-parking. In the event the application was deferred before being rejected the following year by the new Minister, whose decision was upheld following an appeal by the applicant.

Later in 2015, I amended the States Strategic Plan ([P.27/2017 Amd \(7\)](#) as amended by the Council of Ministers) to add to the fifth priority of the Council of Ministers' Strategic Plan, 'Improving St. Helier', the following commitment *“seeking to acquire the land currently in the ownership of the Jersey Gas Company in order to extend the Millennium Town Park to provide additional open space and public parking as appropriate.”*

During the debate on 29th April 2015, referring to the other high-density developments already proposed in the area covered by the North of Town Masterplan, Deputy J.A. Martin asked where the children of her constituents would play – *“where are you going to find their open space? Somewhere in the other part of town? Have they got to go to People's Park, St. Andrew's Park? It is not feasible.”*

Deputy J.A. Hilton referred to the original vision of the proposers of the Millennium Town Park, “standing outside the Odeon Cinema looking down the Town Park, right through to St. Saviour’s Road, a completely large unhindered space by development for the people of St. Helier.”

Several St. Saviour Deputies also supported the idea: Deputy P.D. McLinton shared a vision “where the Town Park does indeed stretch the entire distance and is filled with happy children playing, people walking, having picnics. Inasmuch as I understand the costs of this project, I would not one day, in 25 years’ time maybe, be there with my grandchildren and stare at the buildings that have blocked this amazing park, and regret the missed opportunity that we had to put this wonderful park and make it stretch through the middle.”

Deputy L.M.C. Doublet reminded the States: “We have signed up to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child and Article 3 says that we have to think about the best interests of children when we are making policies. So I will fight any way I can to get an extension to the Town Park because the children that live around that area in St. Helier and St. Saviour are being denied their rights. Article 31 says that children have a right to relax and play.”

It took a several more years for the future of the Jersey Gas site to be settled by the States Assembly when, following the purchase of the site by Andium Homes, the Assembly was asked to approve a proposal ([P.114/2017](#)) to reduce significantly the number of homes while increasing the size of the Millennium Town Park.

Despite a Reference Back, [P.114/2017](#) was approved by a large majority, whereupon Andium Homes began a thorough consultation process leading up to a planning application for 122 mixed tenure homes, a public car park and a 50% extension to the Millennium Town Park (PP/2019/0809). This application was approved on 6th January 2020. However, as Andium began to plan and procure the project, it became clear that the parking arrangements made the scheme unviable in its approved form. Therefore, Andium took a revision of the scheme for planning approval in September 2020, (PP/2020/1001) this revised application provided a more efficient double basement at the south end of the site. This was refused, largely due to the impact on the potential Grade 1 archaeological heritage beneath the site.

Andium could have appealed the decision or revised the application further to remove the potential prejudice to any possible archeology beneath the development, but instead they rethought their approach, especially in light of numerous other housing developments in the North of Town, including the redevelopment of several hotels to residential use in the next few years. The Andium report initially produced in May last year and revised in August, ‘Town Park Masterplan’, (Appendix 1), outlines Andium’s proposals to deliver a piece of strategic placemaking, by converting the entire Jersey Gas site to an extension to the Millennium Town Park. In the report Andium identify that by looking beyond the site boundary the 122 homes planned for the Jersey Gas site can easily be delivered elsewhere. Central to this Masterplan are the new footpaths and green links that will enable the residents of existing homes in the area, those living in the projected 1,000 new homes, and students going to and from the schools and colleges on the Eastern escarpment, to make their way into the heart of town via a new pedestrian link from Bath Street to Halkett Place and Moneypenny Lane. To further enhance these safe pedestrian links, Andium is investigating the possibility of potential bridge links across St Saviours Road, subject to any necessary land acquisitions.

The main sites providing new homes in the vicinity of the park are shown in the table below.

Site	Number of New Homes
Merchants Square	149 homes + 122 bedroom Hotel
Ann Court	165 homes
Brewery Site	262 homes
Mayfair Hotel	201 homes
BOA Warehouse	195 homes
TOTAL	972 homes + 122 hotel bedrooms

Whilst the creation of such a significant number of new homes in the North of Town does not in itself increase the number of residents in the island or indeed, increase the number of children, it does redistribute them, concentrating more residents into this part of town. Adequate amenity provision is, therefore, absolutely crucial.

Additionally, and to add context, Andium’s vision report shows that it is also proposing to develop a brand new Youth Facility as part of its Brewery development. The planning application for this project will be submitted by the end of March 2022.

Alternative uses for the Jersey Gas site

Since Andium Homes published their vision for an extension to the Millennium Town Park less than a year ago, some States Members have expressed the wish to see the site used for the construction of a new Primary School, especially given the condition of Rouge Bouillon School. While it is understandable to seek to solve the long-standing issues surrounding the town’s school estate in this way, States Members’ frustration with the failure of successive Councils of Ministers to tackle the problem should not lead the States Assembly to overlook the unique opportunity being presented by Andium Homes to provide a substantially larger Town Park which will help to meet the need for green amenity space of a rapidly growing urban population for decades to come.

Conclusion

The case for doubling the size of the Millennium Town Park is compelling. Not only do the arguments that have been made during the past two decades for creating the existing park hold true – that former levels of housing provision in the North of Town made such amenity space essential for exercise, recreation and socialising, and that the provision of adequate open space is the quid pro quo for the urban areas reducing housing pressure on the Island’s coast and countryside; but events in recent years have added weight to the case for a larger park: the public’s reliance on the park during the pandemic, in particular, but also the growing awareness of the value of exercise in improving mental health, the increased commitment of the States Assembly to putting children first, and, most of all, the dramatic increase in the number of new homes being approved in the area of the park.

The Jersey Gas site offers the only opportunity to increase the size of the Millennium Town Park: if it is built on, the marriage value of combining the two adjacent open spaces will be lost for ever. Andium Homes, with its proven track record of improving

the Island's social housing stock and bringing forward new homes, has a vision of a larger Millennium Town Park which will not only provide better amenity space for thousands of existing and new town residents but will also open up safe corridors between the town centre and the colleges. I urge the States Assembly to support this vision so that work can begin and a larger park can be established ahead of the delivery of the thousand or so new homes destined to be built within walking distance of it. Andium Homes have indicated that if it receives approval for its proposal from the Council of Ministers work on creating the park extension could commence within 6 months, subject to planning.

Financial and manpower implications

Andium Homes has stated that, replacing the homes intended for the Jersey Gas site will not be difficult given the number of sites already in its ownership, as well as the number of existing Government owned sites which are surplus to requirements. Several such sites have been identified by the Minister for Housing & Communities as being suitable for social housing development, in his report '[Publicly Owned Sites for Housing](#)'. Specific sites will need to be identified and transferred to Andium Homes for development in order to offset the cost of the Park extension.

Andium will meet the development costs of the proposed extension to the park, while the question of who administers and maintains it can be resolved in due course.

Children's Rights Impact Assessment

While the use of part of the Jersey Gas site for the purposes of constructing a new primary school could be said to be 'putting children first', I believe that the creation of a much larger area of green space in the centre of town, especially given the ability to provide safe access routes between the schools the proposed new youth and community facilities and the town centre, reducing the need for children to be chauffeured to and from school, increasing the amount of recreation and play space available to children of all ages, represents a much bigger contribution to the welfare of our children than would be the case if a significant part of the Jersey Gas site were to be effectively sealed off for the purposes of school construction.