

# STATES OF JERSEY



## DEVELOPMENT OF TOWN MASTERPLAN

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Lodged au Greffe on 28th February 2023  
by the Connétable of St. Helier  
Earliest date for debate: 21st March 2023

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STATES GREFFE

## **PROPOSITION**

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

to request –

- (a) the Minister for Treasury and Resources to instruct the Jersey Development Company to pause work on the redevelopment of the Waterfront, until a Masterplan for the future development of Town has been approved by the States Assembly;
- (b) the Minister for Infrastructure to finalise, as soon as possible, work on the walking, cycling, bus and parking strategies that were agreed to be developed as part of the Sustainable Transport Plan in order that the strategies can inform a Town Masterplan; and
- (c) the Minister for the Environment to establish a working group of States Members and appropriate local officials, and to request such working group to collate and review the relevant plans and studies which have been commissioned by the Government in recent years, to consult further with stakeholders and the general public, only utilising off-Island expertise where absolutely necessary, and to bring forward a Town Masterplan for debate by the States Assembly before the summer recess in 2024.

CONNÉTABLE OF ST. HELIER

## REPORT

In many ways the Island is extremely fortunate not only to have weathered successive shocks to the economy in recent years but to have flourished, with multi-million-pound investments in our town centre by retail, hospitality, and financial services organisations; St. Helier has continued to outperform most if not all towns of a comparable size, offering a wide range of shopping, dining and socialising opportunities for locals and visitors. The Parish has also risen to the challenge of housing the majority of the Island's growing population, thereby protecting the Island's countryside and coastline from urban sprawl, and reducing the need for travel by placing the majority of new homes within walking distance of schools and workplaces. The financial services industries, in particular, by consolidating their operations in Grade A office space at the International Finance Centre and elsewhere, have allowed their outworn offices to be redeveloped for housing by the private sector and other housing providers; less welcome is the loss of many hotels but here, too, new housing is being provided to meet the growing demand, with a gradual, albeit slow, improvement in the design and facilities provided to the town's new residents.

On the other hand, there has been a worrying lack of commitment to urban planning and regeneration over the past two decades and, in spite of the significant resources expended on successive Island Plans, there is still no master plan for the development of the Island's capital. I believe that if a Town Masterplan had been in existence the search for both a site for the new hospital and for a future use for Fort Regent would have stood a much greater chance of success, with huge savings in abortive work and consultants' fees.

The absence of a masterplan for Town (St Helier and the coterminous parts of St. Saviour and St. Clement defined as 'Town' in the Bridging Island Plan) has already exacted a heavy toll on our capital as *ad hoc* private developments have failed to balance the need for profit with the needs of residents as well as other users of Town.

In contrast to rural parishes, Town is being subjected to prolific development and this is being done without a clear sense of direction, agreed urban policies, nor effective engagement with those most affected by the changes. By and large it is urban residents who are being forced to live with the increased pollution, traffic congestion, lack of parking, increasing road safety challenges and lack of amenities and green spaces that are essential to support a healthy and balanced quality of life, in particular for families. It is little wonder that the recent JOLS survey identified that whilst 70% of rural respondents were very satisfied with their housing, this figure dropped to 44% for those who live in St. Helier.

Incredibly, after two decades of waiting, there are still no strategies for encouraging walking or for safe, responsible cycling in St. Helier, nor strategies for parking and bus travel; there has been no progress on delivering a youth centre for the North of Town, nor have opportunities been taken to create much-needed car parking for residents and shoppers. If this proposition is adopted, the finalising of work on these strategies will be essential so that they can inform the proposed master plan.

Increasingly we are seeing outworn hotels replaced by the type of apartment developments that are being knocked down and replaced with housing on a more human scale in parts of Europe whose leaders have a better understanding of the kind of public amenities that are required if growing populations are to have real choice when it comes

to urban living, not only through the generous provision of green space and trees but also cultural facilities such as botanic gardens and art galleries which have been shown to make good sense economically and encourage tourism at the same time as enriching the local community.

The Government's perceived lack of empathy and understanding of the current pressures of town living, combined with a lack of effective engagement with urban residents, is likely to create further disparities and divisions in our community between those who live in town and those who live in the country. We are in danger of creating a community where 'townies' are expected to tolerate relentless development and its deleterious impacts on their quality of life, without an overall agreed plan, without proper and effective consideration of amenities and green spaces for town living, and without having a voice.

There is an important difference between the way in which Government approached the Esplanade Quarter development and the way in which the South West St. Helier plans have been progressed: the former was the subject of intensive and prolonged debate in the States Assembly; the latter has only been dealt with in passing, in a number of paragraphs in the Bridging Island Plan and in other documents. There has, of course, been a consultation exercise on the South West St. Helier Masterplan with various workshops being held but these should not have taken the place of subjecting the proposals to the scrutiny of the Island's parliament as happened with the previous masterplan for the Esplanade Quarter.

At the same time there has been a growing tendency for Government to delegate decision-making in the vital area of planning the Island's future to a single Minister acting on the advice of a single, off Island, planning inspector (and usually the same individual): this is what allowed the extensively debated and amended Esplanade Quarter Masterplan to undergo significant revisions without these being considered by the Island's elected members, and for planning policies with serious implications for the Island's capital, such as parking provision, to be changed at officer level through the application of Supplementary Planning Guidance notes (SPGs) rather than as a result of debate in the States Assembly. The current planning application for the redevelopment of the southwest of St. Helier, involving the potential loss of La Frégate and the addition of nearly 1,000 apartments is simply too important a matter to be left in the hands of a single Minister and his off-island adviser.

The stalemate over the future of Fort Regent is particularly relevant here, given the proximity of the Fort to the Waterfront and the key questions in respect of these two important sites that would be answered as part of a Town Master Plan: does the redevelopment of the Waterfront not offer a unique opportunity to provide the kind of facilities that the Island's capital needs, which would go a long way towards meeting the demand from all ages of our population as well as from our visitors, for a destination that enriches health and well-being for all? And what role should the emerging plans by Ports of Jersey for the redevelopment of St. Helier harbour play in the overall vision for this area?

For the past two decades, many Islanders have witnessed an uncoordinated approach to the development of St. Helier. Equally, many islanders have regretted the ad hoc decisions that led, for example, to aspects of the first Waterfront scheme being cut and pasted from any number of UK towns. The fact remains that there is no Masterplan for the very place which already accommodates one-third of the island's population, and

which is expected to absorb the bulk of the Island's new housing provision, whilst also being the island's centre for commerce, shopping, and the night-time economy, as well as being the engine room of the island's economy.

I am calling on the Council of Ministers and States Assembly to show the collective leadership to ensure a fair deal for not only the residents and businesses in the Island's capital but also for all islanders and visitors who come to town to work, shop, or socialise.

I am not asking that the scope of the current waterfront plans are reduced or abandoned, only that they are paused while a Town Masterplan develops an agreed vision for St. Helier and puts in place the policies required to support its delivery, and protect the quality of life for all urban residents.

### **Financial and manpower implications**

I do not believe that there need to be any financial or manpower consequences arising from this proposition, simply the allocation of existing resources to support a political working group which could bring forward proposals for a Town Masterplan for debate by the States Assembly by July 2024.