

COUNCIL FOR THE PROTECTION OF JERSEY'S HERITAGE



19 Magnolia Gardens, La Route de St. Aubin, St. Lawrence, JERSEY Channel Islands, JE3 JW

21 July 2011

Minister for Environment
Department of Planning & Environment
South Hill
St Helier
Jersey
JE2 4US

Dear Minister Duhamel,

Planning Application P/2011/0840 – to redevelop the Southampton Hotel (14 -16 The Weighbridge).

The Council for the Protection of Jersey's Heritage wishes to object to application P/2011/0840 to redevelop the Southampton Hotel (14-16 the Weighbridge). The rigorous and expert listing of historic buildings identifies heritage assets of such importance that they should be protected and conserved for the appreciation and enjoyment of future generations. Listing should be sufficient to protect them from demolition or damaging re-development unless there is overwhelming justification that such demolition is necessary in the public interest at large. The present application betrays a fundamental lack of understanding of the importance of these historic buildings at the proposed development site and its context within this historic part of St Helier which deserves Conservation Area status. The application contains no such submission and must be rejected until the proposed extensive re-development of this listed building has been fully justified. Hence we object to this development application of listed buildings.

The Southampton Hotel was formerly designated as an SSI. The plans envisage demolition of everything apart from the main facade and half of the remaining side. It is also proposed to raise the gable end features to twice their existing height, thus spoiling the proportions of the structure.

The middle building (long known as The Weighbridge Cafe) is also listed (formerly as a BLI). The proposals require its demolition in its entirety. Again, we wholly oppose this attempt to undermine the protection of historic buildings.

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HISTORIC CONTEXT

The development of the Weighbridge area dates from the early 19th century, in conjunction with the development of the harbour. The boom in commercial trade which followed led to the creation of a series of commercial hotels in the immediate vicinity, including Nos 14-16. The Weighbridge rapidly became the hub through which Jersey's wealth and trade flowed. Its significance at that time cannot be underestimated. It would be no exaggeration to compare its importance with the proposed Financial Quarter for the Waterfront.

Nos 14-16, The Weighbridge were all built during the Regency period. Those original structures are still there. But the success of these enterprises led them to being extended upwards, to 4 storey buildings. The Southampton Hotel combined this extension with a major re-modelling, from a Regency style to a Victorian one, (although it still has Regency detailing in its internal woodwork to the lower floors). This upward extension of the buildings was an intrinsic part of their history. It should not be considered as some sort of 'ruination' of the original structures, and therefore justification for their demolition.

Over the decades, some of the original detailing was lost, particularly at ground floor level. It would be fair to state, however, that the buildings are little changed from their pre-WW2 appearance. The building currently known as 'Traders' is the plainest and is not listed, although its origins as two separate buildings are still clear and the downpipes and hoppers on the facade clearly show the original build height.

THE PROPOSALS

The proposed new building is a large Victorian-ish structure which completely upstages and overwhelms the Southampton Hotel facades (even in their elongated form). This new, oversized and bombastic building pays no attention to traditional plot widths or dimensions. In short, it destroys 200 years of genuine historic grain and inserts a great lump of imported 'heritage-style'. It would be hard to find a more dismissive or colonial attitude to Jersey's heritage. We note that in the accompanying glossy literature, a photo is included of a roof-scape in Warsaw (to justify a proposed double roof-line). It is an utter irony that the Warsaw photo shows buildings following traditional plot widths, whilst the proposals for the Weighbridge site utterly ignore them! It would seem that searching the cities of Europe is an easier option than actually attempting to understand or celebrate Jersey's culture and heritage. Lobbing a percentage for art into the mix does not rectify the inherent problem.

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CONCLUSION

We believe these proposals should be rejected on the grounds that they are entirely contrary to planning policies for the protection of listed buildings. In addition, we are fully aware of the long-standing proposal to designate Conservation Areas. We believe that the Weighbridge would be a logical part of a conservation area which embraced the harbour, the Commercial Buildings and the old abattoir site.

We would urge that establishment of such areas be speeded up and that, meanwhile, any proposed large-scale developments be required to anticipate the development restrictions of such areas.

Finally, while we might lament that developers do not show much interest or understanding of our culture and heritage, it has to be admitted that Jersey itself has failed to celebrate its own history. Whilst the former bus-parking area at the Weighbridge is now a nice paved area, there is absolutely nothing to explain to the tourists who sit there how or why the area came into being, the reason for its name, and its commercial and historic significance. Although we oppose these current plans we would, however, welcome proposals to restore all these historic buildings back to full use. They have been allowed to decay for too long. We feel that sensitive re-instatement of missing details to 200 year old buildings would be a far better option than replacing everything with a piece of brand new, fake heritage.

Yours sincerely,

Maurice Dubras
Chairman