

COUNCIL FOR THE PROTECTION OF JERSEY'S HERITAGE



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

14 September 2012

Minister for Planning & Environment
Department of 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).

Further to our letter dated 21 July 2011, The Council for the Protection of Jersey's Heritage again wishes to object to the re-submitted application P/2011/0840 to redevelop the Southampton Hotel (14-16 the Weighbridge), including the demolition of two buildings, following the public hearing which you conducted and during which you deferred a decision.

You will recall that you committed at the conclusion of that meeting to advising us when this new/revised application had been submitted for examination and that there would be another public hearing.

SOUTHAMPTON HOTEL

The Southampton Hotel was originally designated as a proposed Site of Special Interest, yet this recognition of its importance clearly counts for very little, as the intention is to demolish all but one and a half of its facades. Such "facadism" was a method of "protecting" historic buildings in the 1980's. This method has long since been discredited; it leaves the protected remnants of a building stripped of all historic integrity.

NO. 15. THE WEIGHBRIDGE

This building is a simple piece of architecture, which has survived in its present form for at least a century. Its importance lies in its historic origins, as one of the early C19 hotel/boarding houses which lined the Weighbridge area. These commercial hotels and their success were part and parcel of the development of the Harbours and the vibrant import/export trade which followed. The Weighbridge area was at the heart of this booming C19 trade, which is now all but forgotten.

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Jersey has an extraordinary myopic attitude to its own history. Our famous agricultural industry is much celebrated, yet the role the Weighbridge area played in getting that agricultural produce out of the Island is entirely ignored. The few remaining warehouses along the Esplanade are themselves under threat and there is not so much as an information board to explain to the tourist why the area is even called the Weighbridge. The fact that No. 15 still survives is something that should be celebrated, not erased. We are of the view that the Harbours and the surrounding areas should be part of a single Conservation Area, so that all the various components of the C19 harbour development and growth can be protected in an overall context. May we also refer you to your own consultation document "Design guidance for St. Helier" and in particular Section Para 7.6 Area 7D – Conway Street – Weighbridge which we believe is relevant to this application and should be intrinsically, if not explicitly, recognizing the value of the historic environment (internal and external).

We do not believe that the proposals for this site understand that context. The explanation that the revised design focuses on window lines rather proves this. The current buildings are a *row of domestic* scaled buildings which were all raised in height in the C19. They were *separate* entities, and still read as such. The notion of a grand building with a classical centre-piece is an alien concept here. The most obvious piece of Regency town planning in the area is the Commercial Buildings row, which has *no* concept of a 'centre-piece' whatsoever. The buildings which followed, around the Weighbridge, continued that restrained, Regency simplicity. The Southampton Hotel is the exception to this, being an exuberant later Victorian re-modeling in the latest style, which took advantage of its corner location.

The proposed development, with its faux classical centre-piece is an entirely *alien* concept to this historic area. Such styles were far more likely to be applied to public buildings, or churches elsewhere in the town. The fact that the Southampton Hotel is described as providing one of the "bookends" for the new development unwittingly reveals this. The Southampton is to become *subsidiary* to a dominant, faux classic intrusion. The genuine article ends up as a veneer for a wedge of fake history. We do not believe that this shows any real understanding for the history of the area, or for the concept of protected buildings.

THE ISSUE OF PROTECTED BUILDINGS

Given the unfortunate outcome of the recent decision on the J1 development in Broad Street as well as the apparent view of your Planning Officers with respect to the present application, we feel duty bound, on the one hand, to raise as an important issue our serious concern that either you as the current Minister or, on your behalf, your Planning Department (as opposed to your Historic Environment Department) appear to have less interest in protecting listed buildings than accommodating commercial interests.

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However, on the other hand, given that we have experienced recent Planning Ministers expressing their own specific views in various areas of building and development, we believe that you are duty bound to implement the policies of the Island Plan. Any departure from those policies consequently makes future enforcement of those policies all the more difficult. This is particularly the case with the protection of historic buildings.

It has taken decades of foot-dragging and political indifference to get to a point where historic buildings are properly protected. Past efforts seem to have been undermined by an apparent lack of concern or interest or a real appreciation for our built heritage.

We are currently in the middle of the most thorough review of our historic buildings, one which should finally make the protection of our unique built heritage more robust and comprehensive. Decisions to permit the demolition of listed buildings would drive a horse and cart through all that hard work. It would signal that one part of the new Island Plan is already being unpicked.

We note that, in this proposed development, there is reference to the poor state of the current structures. We have been alarmed by the number of cases in St Helier where listed buildings are being deliberately left to decay, presumably on the assumption that permission to demolish will be given as a consequence. We wholly disagree with developers being 'rewarded' for such deliberate neglect of protected structures. It would make it very difficult for Planning to enforce one owner of a listed property to retain (say) wooden sashes, when another owner is given permission for total demolition. Given the current fuss about a painted sign on a listed building, it strikes us that Planning's position would effectively become untenable.

We therefore respectfully ask that you follow Planning policy on listed buildings.

Local expertise is freely being given in the ongoing review of listed buildings. Ignoring that expertise would send out an extraordinarily negative message; it would leave the Planning Department in a position where their policy is seen to be "making it up as they go along".

We trust that we will be given an opportunity to be heard at a resumed hearing.

Yours sincerely,

Maurice Dubras
Chairman