

COUNCIL FOR THE PROTECTION OF JERSEY'S HERITAGE



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

22 August 2012

The Minister for Planning and Environment
South Hill
St. Helier
Jersey
JE2 4US

Dear Minister Duhamel

Planning Application P/2012/0833- St. Martin's School & Playing Field (field 327A), La Rue de la Croix au Maitre – Construct new school with playing fields, new vehicular access & electricity sub station.

The Council objects to this application on the grounds that the statements contained in Jersey Island Plan 2011 providing a measure of justification for building a new school on an existing community recreational playing field (Field 327A) are open to question.

As a matter of Council policy any application that will result of a green field being used for building development will be challenged until such time as it can be proved conclusively that the proposed development is required to meet an essential Island community need and that it cannot be located elsewhere. In this case, the need for a school built to modern standards is accepted, but evidence presented at the public meeting held in St. Martin's Public Hall on 1 August 2012 showed that there are alternatives to building a completely new, single-story school building on Field 327A. In addition, and in fact, the application is in direct contravention of a number of policies clearly stated in Jersey Island Plan 2011.

Island Plan Statements Open to Question

It is not understood why, following the public consultation, and after the IP Inspectors had given their recommendations Field 327A had its designation as Protected Open Space changed to Safeguarded for Educational Use and Field 327 which had been designated as Safeguarded for Educational Use had this designation removed completely.

Furthermore it will be seen that in the present Jersey Island Plan (IP) it is stated at Paragraph 7.13:

Unfortunately the existing school and nursery is well below the minimum space standards with no further capacity on the site to extend the facilities

At the public meeting it was revealed that it is possible to design a building, based on the existing structure and within a slightly extended footprint.

It is interesting to note that in The (Draft) Island Plan, September 2009 Paragraph 7.13 states:

Within existing primary school provision in Jersey, there is a known deficiency in the extent of playing field provision available to St Martin's Primary School. To address this deficiency, it is proposed that Field 327, immediately to the north of the school and to the east of the existing playing field, is safeguarded for this purpose.

In the draft plan amendments schedule under Policies SCO 1 and SCO 4 there is no mention of amendments. In their report on the (Draft) Island Plan the Inspectors stated:

Policy SCO 1 Educational Facilities

9.9 Field 327 is safeguarded, as noted above. It relates better to the BUA than does adjacent Field 327A and is accordingly the more appropriate one to safeguard for educational purposes. Field 327A is in any event designated as Protected Open Space, so on the face of it St Martin's School could make some use of it consistent with the IP. Its protected status safeguards against alternative proposals that might be inconsistent with its proximity to the school. We endorse the Minister's intentions at each of these locations.

Having read proposed amendments and the Inspectors' report the Council assumed that there would be no further change to the IP. Unless these changes were notified to the members of the States before the debate which led to the approval of the present IP these changes were clearly accepted by default. In these circumstances we would welcome the Minister's explanation for these important, retrospective changes.

It is reasonable to ask who authorised these significant changes to the original text contained in the 2009 draft Island Plan and the proposals map and in particular Map 7.1 which now shows the altered designations of Field 327A and Field 327?

Important Inconsistencies with IP Policies

It should also be obvious that to approve financial provision for a new school on a potential site in the States does not negate relevant Jersey Island Plan 2011 policies. These include:

1. "Policy SCO1. Educational Facilities:

The redevelopment of public or private educational sites and facilities for alternative uses will not be permitted except in exceptional circumstances *and only where it can be demonstrated that the premises are surplus to public and private educational requirements and the wider community need.*

It is self-evident that the present school building is not surplus to requirement. It is still in use and will remain so for the foreseeable future. The parishioners of St. Martin have not been consulted on the proposed acceptance of financial responsibility for the present school building. It would have to be adapted and renovated for alternative uses if a new school is built in Field 327A.

2. Policy SCO 4 Protected Open Space. The loss of Field 327A, previously designated as such, will in any case seriously harm the character and appearance of the locality which is much prized for its attractiveness as rural landscape by local residents and visitors alike.

3. "Policy GD 2. Demolition and replacement of buildings.

The replacement of a building or part of a building will not be permitted unless the proposed development:

6. replaces a building that is not appropriate to repair or refurbish;

Estimated costs of repair, refurbishment and extension of the present building have been obtained which clearly show that in order to minimise the expenditure of public funds, upgrading the present school building provides the best solution from an economic point of view.

Furthermore, it was revealed at the Public Meeting on 1 August 2012 that alternatives to building a new, single story building on Field 327A have not been properly considered.

4. Policy ERE 1. Safeguarding agricultural land.

The Council is seriously concerned at the present rate of loss of undeveloped land to building and other development. The Council agrees with the observation made in the Main Inspectors' Report on (Draft) Island Plan 2009 about the importance of:

Safeguarding agricultural land to increase the security of food supplies (Para. 2.8).

Though not at present used for agriculture, Field 327A is still clearly suitable for reversion to either arable or livestock farming. At present it is a valuable recreational resource which will need to be replaced if the plans to build a new school building on it go ahead.

A junior size football pitch is not suitable for adult league football matches which have taken place on Field 327A over nearly 40 years, thereby providing a well-used and important, local, recreational facility.

Conclusion

It is not understood who authorised removing the Protected Open Space designation from Field 327A and changed it to Safeguarded for Educational Use, at the same time removing this latter designation from Field 327.

The apparent justification to use Field 327A in Jersey Island Plan 2011, Para 7.13 for a new school building ignores the requirements of Island Plan Policies SCO 1, GD 2 and ERE1. The source of this statement is unknown as it is in neither draft Island Plan 2009 nor is it recorded in the formal record of Island Plan 2011 amendments.

On the evidence available to the public, building a new school building on Field 327A, in addition to being in direct contravention of these Island Plan policies would result in unnecessary, additional public expenditure.

In these circumstances the Council respectfully recommends that this application should be refused in its present form.

Yours sincerely,

John Mesch
For Chairman