

# IS JERSEY'S BUILT HERITAGE SAFE IN STATES HANDS?

*'Almost by stealth, the special character of Jersey is changing', writes former chief Planning officer and former St Brelade Deputy*  
**JOHN YOUNG**

JERSEY'S unique built heritage is the backdrop of our daily lives. Our forts, harbours, roadside walls, banques, historic buildings, archaeological sites and the increasingly important Occupation structures have not survived by accident.

Willie Millar in his character Study of St Helier (2005) lamented the damage done by 1960s modernism and planning policies, unlike Guernsey which maintained the fine character of St Peter Port and St Anne in Alderney. Jersey lost many of its late mediaeval cottages, Regency Houses, Victorian villas, 18th century houses and shops, working class terraces, in town locations such as Ann St, Hue St and Dumaresq St, which now need regeneration and improvement.

Joan Stevens recorded our special buildings in the 1960s and 1970s. Many have worked tirelessly to conserve our heritage from the ravages of re-development, such as Mr C Brett in his Survey of St Helier in 1976, Maurice Boots the former States Architect, the National Trust for Jersey, La Société Jersiaise and Save Jersey's Heritage. In 1972 the States approved legal powers to protect historic buildings and special places.

The surviving mediaeval farm buildings and grand Georgian country houses were listed for protection. Grants were available; public support was strong although there were some controversies, notably the demolition of Government House was prevented, Colomberie House was lost in the 1990's to a modern office block but the Island Site was saved despite the efforts of the Waterfront Enterprise Board.

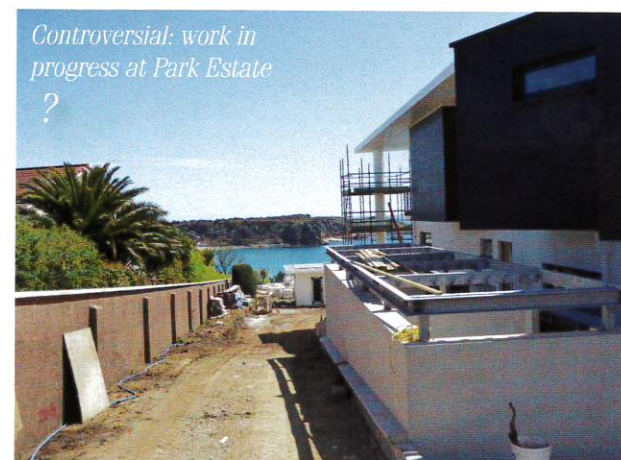
In 2010 responsibility for historic buildings in Jersey was transferred from the Planning department to the Jersey Heritage Trust. A review of 4,000 historic places was conducted three years ago; new policies sought to protect all buildings dated before 1700, the best surviving buildings to 1850, and some ordinary Victorian buildings. These have been assigned into four advisory grades; higher grades preventing internal changes; lower grades only external protection.



✓ *Old Court House  
fine historic building – worthy of  
"conservation area" of St Aubin*

The regime is vulnerable to development pressure and given low priority by government. The dated legal framework is essentially unchanged and the registration of listed buildings is only half way through. Grants have long gone.

Unlike Alderney, the States have failed to implement their 1970s commitment to designating Conservation Areas where the character warrants special care, as in St Aubin, Havre des Pas and Gorey – areas which are gradually being 'modernised'. Almost by stealth, the special character of Jersey is changing, becoming more like mainland towns every day. Nowhere is this more apparent than in St Helier, where high density developments dominate traditional streets. Cottages in Hue Street have finally fallen victim to improvement. New Social Housing developments demand the maximum density. Recent projects propose the loss of open space in Green Street and 'town cramming' in the Gas Works and Summerland sites.



*Controversial: work in  
progress at Park Estate*

Government is custodian of many fine historic buildings: over 50 are 200 years old, and several are vulnerable; in the last five years nearly 200 States properties have been sold. La Folie Inn, built in 1730, has stood empty and unloved for 12 years, Le Seilleur Building in Gas Place for much longer; La Motte St School is proposed to have historic covenants expunged. Are these safe from development? Would St James still be standing if it was not a youth centre? Would Piquet house in the Royal Square, a Regency gem of 1803, survive if I hadn't persuaded the States to save it?



*Park Estate*

*Corbiere Station – grand design or carbuncle?*



Newly built office block overshadows and dominates the Grand Jersey Hotel X



Empty offices line the back streets, the fall-out from the sterile Waterfront vanity project.

The cause is Jersey's relentless drive for economic growth and government unwillingness to control our population. This generates demand for public services, more schools and infrastructure, further increasing development pressure. If unchecked, this will change the face of Jersey, and damage the quality of Island life, nowhere more so than in St Helier.

Jersey has managed to protect its countryside from these pressures thanks to successive Island planning policies. But we can't be complacent, Guernsey's countryside is spoiled by ribbon development; this could happen in Jersey. Many modest buildings in our coastal locations have been

demolished and replaced by 'Grand Maisons', such as the Zanzibar site in St Brelade's Bay, in Park Estate, Grouville Bay, Portelet, La Coupe and many more.

Maintaining the quality of Island life is as important as economic and financial considerations. It is time for Government policies to strike a better balance. Conserving our heritage is not just for the benefit of those living in the countryside and fine country houses, but to all Islanders, urban and town residents too. If we fail in this we run the risk of ruining our very special built heritage, which is so attractive to our economy.



La Folie Inn, looking empty and unloved X