

## **Education Minister's submission to Public Inquiry 24 January 2017**

### **New Les Quennevais School -Planning Application P/2016/0870**

Sir,

As Jersey's Education Minister, I believe that this new secondary school is an absolute necessity for the Island. And I am not alone. Many parents, past pupils, teachers, parishioners and current students have said exactly that to me.

The question for this Inquiry is a simple one - where should a new school be built? Is this the land at Rue Carree the best site? Does it balance the needs of our students with the best interests of the wider community? We believe it does.

In selecting the right location, we have followed a logical process. We looked carefully at refurbishment options and concluded that rebuilding Les Quennevais School on a larger plot, in a different location, would deliver the best educational environment at the best value for the people of Jersey.

There is only one secondary school in the west of Jersey and it needs to be a focal point for the aspirations of our young people, but it will also be an important new community building, a significant addition to the St Brelade landscape and a clear signal that our island places a high value on education.

I will explain the reasoning. I hope my submission provides you with complete clarity about why we need it and how - through a thorough, transparent selection process – why we have chosen this site.

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Over the past 52 years more than 7,500 islanders have been educated in the current building. It has served an important purpose but is now out of date. Education has changed considerably over the past half a century in a way that the existing Les Quennevais school site and structures cannot accommodate.

Our young people need a building that is fit for purpose and able to deliver today's curriculum, not the education of the 1960s. They need an environment where they can physically and mentally thrive. Students living in the west should have the same facilities that their friends enjoy in other States schools.

However, the current Les Quennevais School buildings fall short of current recognised standards in every significant respect, and that means they fall short of what our students need now, let alone what they may require in future.

In selecting a site for a new building, we had to consider the unique requirements of a modern secondary school, which is a large and unusual building.

Every day about 800 young people, teachers, support staff and visitors use the building, most of them moving between lessons every hour. They take part in a diverse range of activities a lot of which require specialised rooms or equipment - from science labs to art studios and sports halls. It needs to be a safe environment built to ensure child protection and, in the case of Les Quennevais, one that gives disabled students the same opportunities as all other pupils. Vibrant social areas and outdoor spaces that appeal to young people are integral elements of a successful school environment.

Naturally we questioned whether a new school was necessary. We already know from the number of births in Jersey that we will need more secondary school places in the west. An unexpected spike in births in 2010 and 2011 meant we had to plan ahead and build extra places at primary school. Those babies are now in Reception or Year 1 but they will move up through the system into our secondary schools. So we need to plan ahead once more to ensure our buildings are big enough and of the right standard for their education.

A brief history of Les Quennevais School, helps to explain the context and why we have reached this point:

- It was built in 1964 for 450 to 500 pupils and opened in January 1965. Today it has 678 students and the numbers have, at times, exceeded 800.
- Like many 1960s buildings, Les Quennevais School followed an architectural style that was functional, with typically small entrances, narrow corridors, flat roofs and basic rooms. There was little consideration for disabled access and even less for energy efficiency. Materials were chosen for quick construction and include some asbestos, which would not be used in a new building.
- The building was renovated in 1996 but this focussed on recladding in an attempt to weatherproof and reduce heat loss. The size of the school was not greatly increased so temporary buildings have been in use in the already-undersized playground for many years to provide the necessary classrooms.
- Nearly 16 years ago the Education Department of the time recognised that the Les Quennevais school buildings needed significant improvement. A report was prepared in 2001-2002 and plans were drawn up for a refurbishment costing £7.5 million. Work was due to start in 2005 once funding became available but other States building projects took priority and the Les Quennevais refurbishment did not go ahead.
- Since then regular maintenance has taken place to ensure the school is the best possible environment for the current students but, while the buildings look superficially presentable, the underlying structures and systems such as heating and drainage have continued to deteriorate with age and use. Lack of space remains a major problem and the head teacher Sarah Hague will be able to provide more detail about the practical shortcomings of the building.
- Internally and externally, it falls short of expectations. In fact, an independent report by SERCO in 2010 stated: "The school is significantly disadvantaged compared to all other Jersey secondary schools by its poorly designed and inadequate accommodation... the accommodation is not fit for purpose."

Les Quennevais student numbers are predicted to rise to at least 727 in 2024, and this is based on pupils we know are already in the education system. Forecasts beyond that show a rise to 762 but they are, of course, predictions at this stage. What we do know is that the secondary numbers will be increasing in all schools across the island as the so-called 'demographic bulge' moves through, so it will not be possible to manage school places simply by altering catchments and sending children to other schools – because they will already be full.

(For figures please see paragraphs 7.9 to 7.12 in Chapter 7 of the Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) that accompanies the planning application.)

- We need a school building that can comfortably accommodate 750 students – with a maximum of 850 if necessary and expansion room in the grounds if needed in the more distant future.
- We need a site that is large enough for a school building of around 11,500 square metres with a total site area of around 60,000 square metres to provide a playing field, parking and servicing areas.
- And we need it in the right place - and that means St Brelade. More than 40% of students live in this parish and the majority of these in the Les Quennevais area. Retaining a school in this vicinity rather than other western parishes will keep car journeys and commuter traffic to a minimum. Locating the school in any other parish would increase the volume of traffic on the roads, a negative environmental impact.

However, before we decided to look for a new site, refurbishment options were fully explored.

In 2012 the decade-old refurbishment plan was revisited and Jersey Property Holdings prepared a Concept Brief with ten options that would address the limitations and deterioration of the school building.

The concept brief identified that a refurbishment and extension to address just basic shortfalls at the school would cost around £27 million. This did not include the expense of relocating the entire school or large sections of it during what would be an extended construction period. For me as Education Minister, the disruption to the school would be too high a price to pay; a generation of pupils would have to be educated in temporary buildings. We would also need a site for the temporary school – the same issue we face now.

In the end there would be little or no financial saving and the resulting building would be a compromise with higher running costs, less adequate facilities and less space than a new building on a different site. The refurbishment would also have a sustained impact on people living in the surrounding residential areas, being the main route of access for construction traffic. And at the end of a disruptive construction period, the problems they experience because of their proximity to the school would be the exactly same, possibly worse.

It became clear that while a refurbishment of some kind was theoretically possible, a new purpose-built school would ultimately result in better value for money for the Island, a higher quality educational solution and a more desirable outcome for the community.

In light of these conclusions, the previous Minister proposed that the possibility of a new secondary school in the green zone should be included when the 2011 Island Plan was revised in 2013/14. The Inspector's report from the Examination In Public supported this, subject to certain considerations, and providing other options were seriously considered, which I can confirm they have.

(See paragraph 6.17 to 6.21 Chapter 6 of the Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) that accompanied the planning application.)

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Finding a site for a large building is a challenge in the UK. It is even more difficult in Jersey. In conjunction with Planning, a long list of potential sites was drawn up and considered.

(This process is explained in Chapter 6 of the EIS and will be presented by Richard Glover in his evidence.)

We started with land already in States or public ownership, and the Les Quennevais sports field complex was the most promising option. However, after discussions with the Planning Minister of the time, we also started to look at the Rue Carrée site, which met many of the requirements for a new school so was included on a shortlist of three options.

At this point the Education Department carried out an extensive and much-praised public consultation on the three options for the site of a new Les Quennevais School.

(This exercise is detailed in 6.108 to 6.115 of Chapter 6 of the EIS.)

It had one of the highest response rates for any States consultation to that date, and results were conclusively in favour of the Rue Carrée site. It also showed:

- Strong public support for a new secondary school building in the west to match the standard of our other secondary schools.
- Strong and clear views that the public sports fields and facilities at Les Quennevais should be preserved. The volume of comments against building on the playing fields was significant but so was the strength of feeling; islanders clearly cherish this facility because it brings significant value to the whole island in terms of health and community cohesion and would be difficult to replace. This was the clearest message from the consultation.

Many comments reflected our view that use of green zone land could only be considered in exceptional circumstances. However, this is only secondary school in the west of Jersey and replacing it for the first time in 50 years must surely qualify as 'exceptional'. It is a rare project of the type built only once in a lifetime.

And while it means the loss of fields, it has been carefully designed so that the building sits to the south of the site alongside the existing urban development. The playing fields will maintain a green open space that the public would have access to and, overall, the impact on the community would be less if the new school were here than on other sites.

A new Les Quennevais School is long overdue and we are long past the point where refurbishment is a realistic option. In Education, the new era focussed on raising standards and improving opportunities for our students has added extra urgency to the need for a new school. Education is a priority in the Island's Strategic Plan because we recognise how vital it is to underpin a successful economy. This new school is needed, wanted and, in this proposal, on the best site for the island. Teachers at Les Quennevais have waited long enough. Students in the west have waited long enough.

I hope what I have articulated provides substance to the idea that this school is desperately needed, it is an exceptional circumstance and that the site chosen is the right one.

**Deputy Rod Bryans**  
**Education Minister**  
**11 January 2017**