



Westmount

Impact report:

Proposed road access along Westmount Road

Société Jersiaise

February 2021



PROPOSED ROAD ACCESS AT WESTMOUNT TO THE OVERDALE HOSPITAL SITE

Société Jersiaise is not a campaigning body but among its aims are the dissemination of knowledge about the Island's history, culture and natural history, and also an active interest in the conservation of the Island's environment, both natural and man-made. We are very concerned that a decision to approve the principle of this proposed access might be made in the absence of a proper understanding of the cultural significance of Westmount as well as its scenic importance as one of the most important and prominent landmarks in the Island.

Significant damage to the form, character and appearance of Westmount could also have an adverse effect on the special interest of People's Park, as this familiar promontory forms a powerful and symbolic backdrop to the public open space which has been given statutory protection because of its intrinsic historic and cultural value.

This paper considers these matters. It is briefer than intended because of the sudden rescheduling of the States' debate on the road proposal, and the following commentary is therefore restricted to a few key issues.

“ We are very concerned that a decision to approve the principle of this proposed access might be made in the absence of a proper understanding of the cultural significance of Westmount as well as its scenic importance as one of the most significant and prominent landmarks in the Island. ”

Heritage

The historic interest of the Westmount area is significant, not least because of the fact that the gallows were located here for centuries, hence the earlier names Gallows Hill, and Mont du Patibulaire. There is some uncertainty about the exact location of the gallows, but it is likely to have been on the headland above the steep rocky faces of Westmount. The first recorded public hanging in Jersey was 1555, and the last one on Westmount was 1829. Four pillars represented the King, and these stood on the brow of the hill. These pillars were of wood, but in 1632 they were replaced by columns of solid granite at the request of the eloquent Attorney-General, who amused the Court by pleading: 'Then they will last for ever and serve for us and our children.' Wood beams were placed across these pillars, and the rope put over the beams. Sites of public executions were significant gathering places and executions were public spectacles.

Figure 1. Watercolour by Philippe Pipon, dated approximately 1770



Figure 2. Extract from the Legge report, 1680



Figure 3. 19th century image of the gallows

In 1781, on hearing of the arrival of the French, Major Peirson marched his troops from St Peter to Westmount, where he was joined by other regiments from town, and the militia from the western parishes. Bringing their cannons to the edge of the hill, they had an excellent view over the town. Major Peirson then led his troops down the sand dunes, which at that time surrounded Westmount, and into battle. A battle which sadly resulted in the loss of many lives, including his.

Community and economy

One of the better-known historic features of Westmount is the arbour, or gazebo, which stood on the granite outcrop above the winding road near the top of the ascent from People's Park. This was a popular viewing point during the 19th and early 20th century, as it provided a superb vantage point across St. Helier and St Aubin's Bay. There is a persistent belief that this is also the site of the gibbet, the place where the bodies of criminals were displayed after being taken down from the gallows, as a deterrent to potential wrongdoers.

From a military perspective, the interrelationship between Westmount, Fort Regent and Elizabeth Castle is very clear and proposals to fortify Westmount were still being considered by the English Board of Ordnance in 1852.

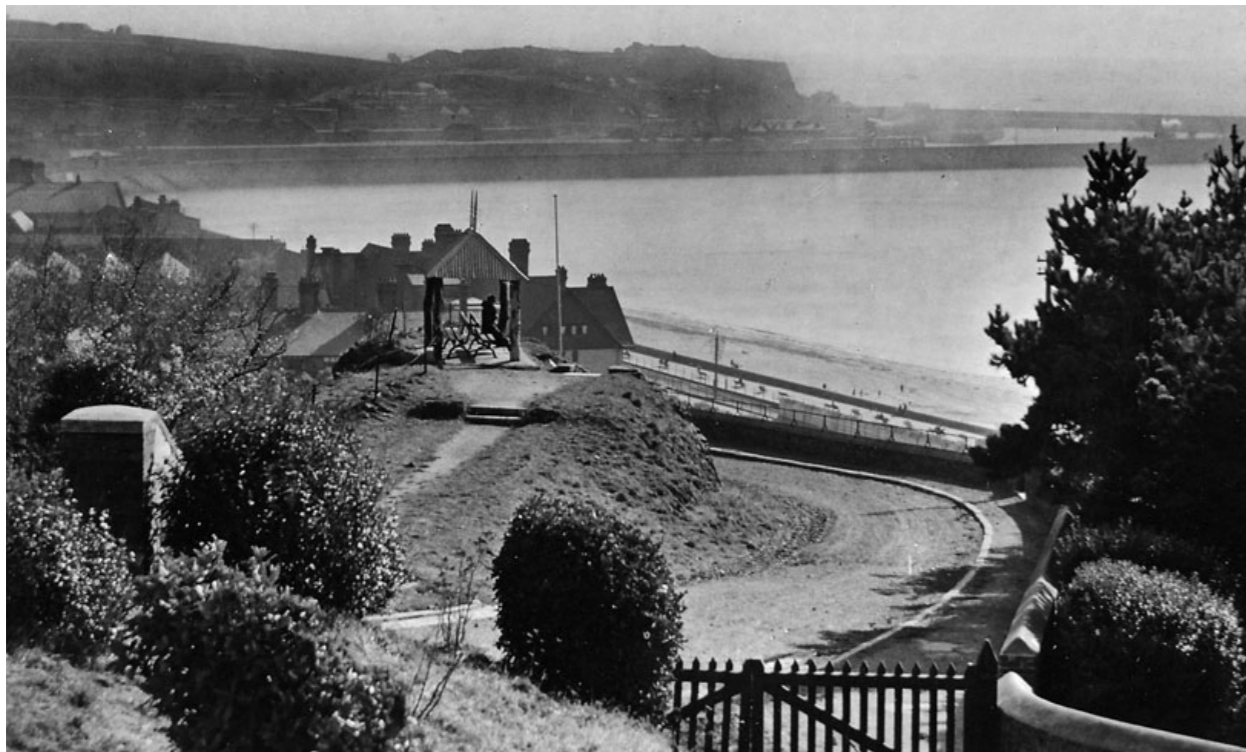


Figure 4. The arbour, or outlook, on Westmount Road



Figure 5. St Helier from Westmount, 19th century



Figure 6. St Helier from Westmount, c. 1870



Figure 7. 1909 map of St Helier

Although Westmount is now heavily planted, presenting a green backdrop to People's Park and St. Aubin's bay, it was quarried and mined well into the 20th century. The history of these activities has not been published, but this industry played an important part in the Island's economy for an extended period.

People's Park was laid out in the 1860s, and Westmount Road constructed later in the century, and the character of this part of the town gradually became more verdant. A plan of this area in 1909 shows all the key elements in place, and the landscaped faces of Westmount have reached maturity over the last century, resulting in a symbolic and iconic landmark that marks the western edge of the town.

Given the rich and complex history of this area, the significance of which has only been touched on here, and the immense scenic value of People's Park and Westmount, which are experienced together, it is quite proper to ask whether the proposed road improvements can be constructed without causing unacceptable harm to this important legacy.

Proposal

The lack of information about the details of this proposal makes an assessment of its likely impact difficult. However, the small-scale plan showing the proposed road line that forms Appendix 2 of P.129 has been carefully enlarged and superimposed on a more detailed map-base. This enables the proposed alignment of the road to be clarified and an appraisal made on how it is likely to impinge on the physical form and landscape of Westmount and People's Park. For this purpose an overall carriageway width of 12m has been assumed (two lanes, one footpath) as described in P.167. For the purpose of comparison, we note that this is slightly wider than the roadway and a single footpath in Gloucester Street (see illustration).

The coloured plan shows our interpretation of the proposed road alignment in more detail. The existing road is shown in pink colouring. The edges of the completed 12m carriageway are indicated in red lines, though it is self-evident that a much greater area of land will be affected by the construction works and the re-contouring of the land that will be needed to support the new road structure where it will rise above existing ground levels. The star symbol indicates the position of the arbour that is illustrated in image 4. This outcrop will need to be removed to enable the large-diameter curve of the new road to be put in place. It has been acknowledged that this road line will cause disruption to the northern and eastern edges of People's Park; a listed place,



Figure 8.



Figure 9. Gloucester street

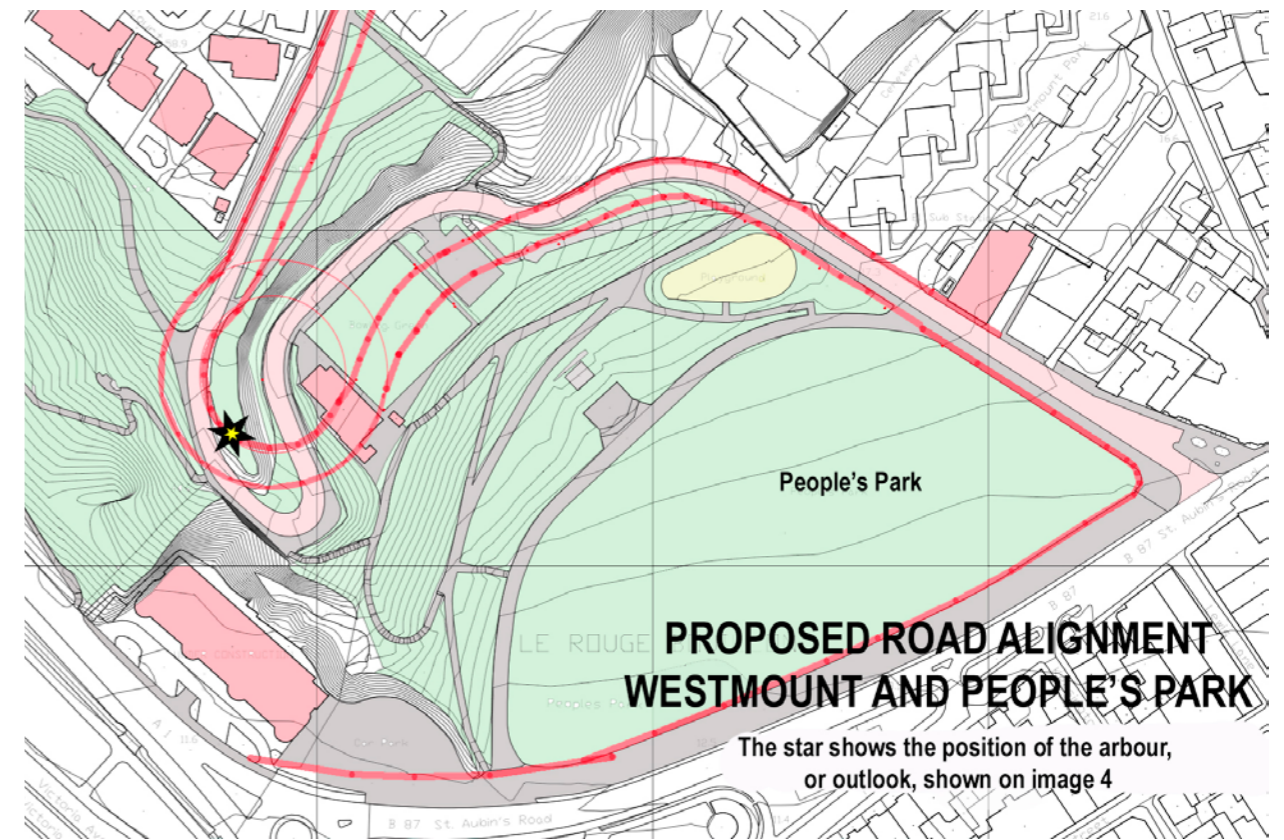


Figure 10.

but the extent to which this harm to the historic park and its boundary trees can be mitigated is unclear.

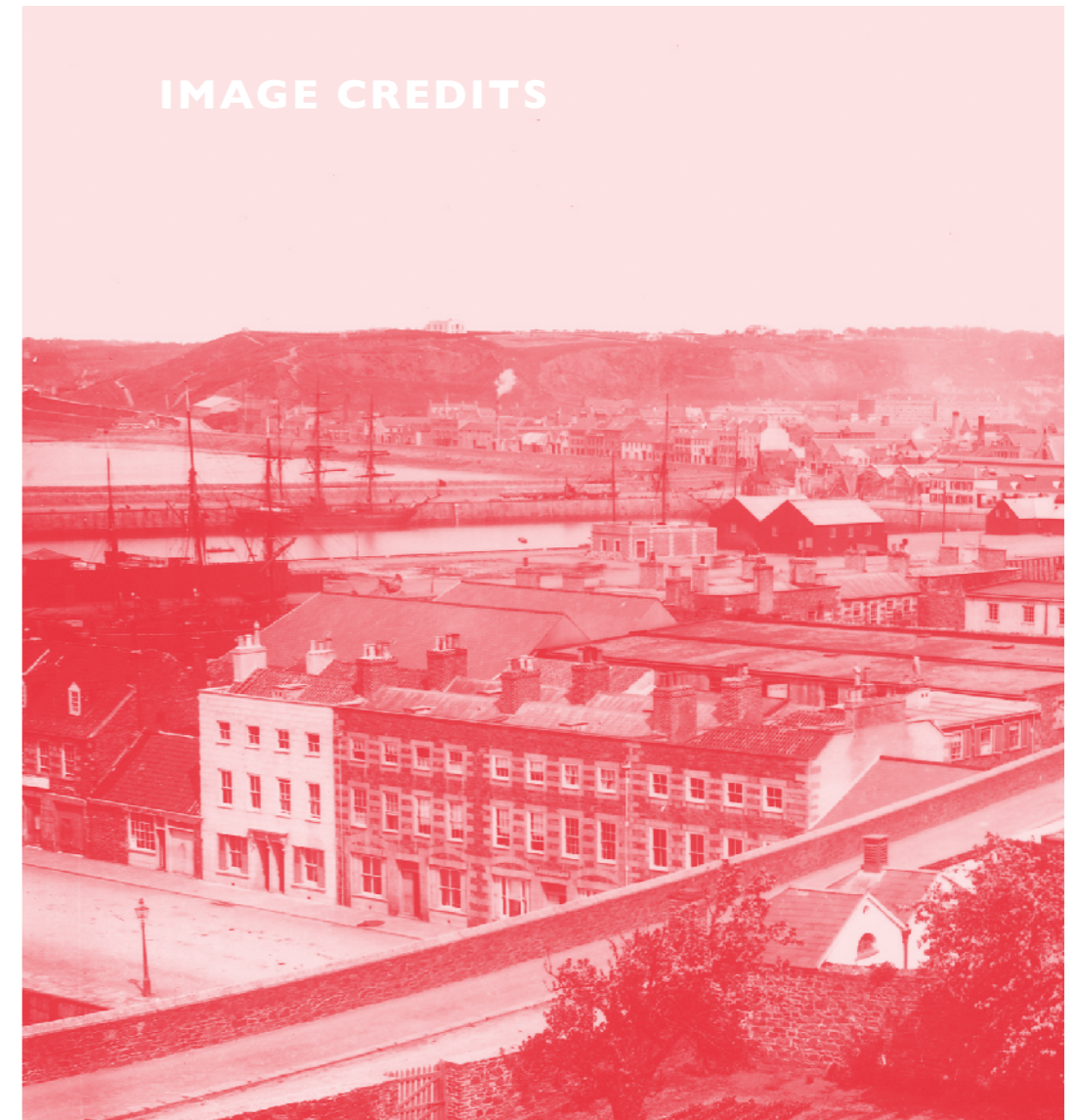
In relation to Westmount itself, the challenge presented by the topography is best explained in an aerial photograph of 1947, taken before the existing tree cover had become fully established. It seems inevitable that to create a new 12m carriageway of a regular gradient between the points A and B marked on this photograph will inevitably result in significant remodelling of the existing landforms, and a significant loss of the established tree cover.



Figure 11. Aerial view of Westmount, 1947

Our conclusion, taking account of the lack of any evidence to the contrary, is that the impact of the proposed road access on the historical, cultural and visual significance of Westmount could be considerable and that a decision to proceed with this proposal without due regard to these matters would be very regrettable.

Such a decision would also tend to nullify the established planning policies and established procedures which seek to protect the Island's character and facilitate public involvement in significant proposals.



1. Watercolour by Philippe Pipon, dated approximately 1770. *National Archive*, ADM 344/402.
2. Map from report of Lieutenant General of His Majesty's Ordnance 1680. *British Museum*
3. 19th century image of the four granite stones that supported the gallows. *Jersey Heritage*
4. Undated image of the harbour, or outlook, on Westmount Road. *Attribution unknown*
5. View of St Helier looking from Westmount, 19th century. *SJ*
6. View of St Helier looking from Westmount, c. 1870. *SJ*
7. 1909 map of St Helier, Francis Le Sueur. *SJ*
8. Listing map. *States of Jersey*
9. Gloucester street. *SF*
10. Map showing proposed road. *SF*
11. Aerial view of Westmount, 1947. *JEP*
12. 19th century view across the harbour with Westmount in the background. *SJ*

SJIR:1.1

Westmount impact report: Proposed road access along Westmount Road. February 2021.

Produced by the Société Jersiaise. With the exception of images indicated as being copyright of an organisation other than the Société Jersiaise (SJ), this document, and parts of, can be shared under Creative Commons license: Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives 4.0 International (CC BY-NC-ND 4.0)

Société Jersiaise

7 Pier Road
St Helier
Jersey, JE2 4XW

+44 (0)1534 758314
societe-jersiaise.org
info@societe-jersiaise.org