



A landscape plan for Sark

This Report was presented to an informal meeting of the members of the Chief Pleas of Sark convened by La Dame on the 24th August, in the late evening. Some fifty slides accompanied the description.

**G. A. Jellicoe, CBE, PPILA, MTPI, FRIBA,
Jellicoe and Coleridge, Architect - Planners,
12 Gower Street, London, W.C.1**

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A Plan for Sark

Summary of Recommendations And Suggestions

Recommendations

- I. Development shall be as indicated on the Overall Plan in areas marked in red. Development to be restricted to (a) nine existing "clusters", (b) certain parts of the central area, and (c) certain individual buildings. (Paras. 17-21)
- II. Two consultants to be appointed as follows:
 - (a) a qualified engineer to examine and report on sanitation and fresh water supply; and make proposals. (Para 32).
 - (b) a professional consultant, honorary or otherwise, to advise the Preservation of Natural Amenities Committee on all matters concerned with their terms of reference. (Para 33)

Suggestions

- (a) New tree planting is proposed along roads and in groups as shown in green on the Overall Plan. (Paras. 34-40)
- (b) A footpath round Little Sark and a coastal system of paths round Great Sark. (Paras. 41-45)
- (c) Because the economy of the island depends upon the attraction of its scenery to visitors, an endeavour should be made to restore the traditional landscape by the gradual removal of eyesores. (Paras. 46-50)
- (d) The way from the harbours to the Pilcher monument should be regarded as of continuous landscape interest. A suggestion for reconstructing the Avenue has been deposited. (Paras. 51-52)
- (e) A new hotel of international standard adjoining Beauregard and overlooking Havre Gosselin is suggested. (Paras. 53-55)
- (f) A nine-hole golf course between the Pilcher monument and Dixcart Bay, is debated. (Paras. 56-57)

Sark lies 7 miles E. of Guernsey and 14 miles N.W. of Jersey. It measures about 3 miles from north to south, and $1\frac{1}{2}$ miles from east to west. It is divided into two unequal parts (Great and Little Sark) by an Isthmus (La Coupée). Unlike the isles of Scilly which form a cluster, the Channel Islands are more a collection of individuals. The peculiar interest of Sark is the combination of an historic and original pattern of living imposed (or incised) on an isolated and almost inaccessible granite mass that reminds us of the description of England, as it used to be, in Henry V: "This fortress built by nature for herself alone". The cliffs are over 300 ft. high and their scenery is magnificent.



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View from the north.

View from the north. In the foreground Le Grand Fort (fig. v); in the middle distance La Seigneurie (fig. vi); in the far distance Little Sark. The view illustrates the idea of the individual clusters of dwellings set in agricultural environment. Historically there was no orthodox village centre. The resident population at 500-600 has remained more or less constant throughout history, and is a figure that "fits" the agricultural landscape. Spring flowers are particularly beautiful on the banks forming the hedgerows, and on the cliffs.

A Plan for Sark

The Report

1. Terms of Reference

To study the existing landscape of the Island of Sark, and make proposals both immediate and for the future.

2. Sark is unique for three reasons: natural physical beauty; an historic pattern of agricultural groupings that basically still exists; and a government that is "a microcosm of a medieval fief . . . unique in modern society"*.
3. There is agreement common to all that the island shall maintain and perpetuate its way of life, adapting itself without loss of character to the changing conditions externally. In this there is identity of interest with the economic conditions, for it is manifest that it is the landscape that attracts the visitor, and any damage to this proportionately damages the economy as a whole.

4. The Hereditary Landscape

Following a dramatic approach to the island from the sea, the first impression of the plateau as the visitor emerges from the harbour valley, is one of disillusion. Here is no pleasant farming landscape he has been imagining, but the usual conglomeration of buildings, shanties, and wirescape that he has come to associate with tourist attractions everywhere. It is not surprising that he is unable to appreciate that the landscape is basically as it was in Queen Elizabeth's day, that this design is original and distinguished, has no counterpart anywhere, and in fact is one of the island's greatest hidden assets.

5. The present pattern is virtually identical to that laid out by Helier de Carteret as land for himself and the 40 farmers or tenants. The original layout established the seigneurie in the centre and near the new Creux harbour, and parcelled out the land so that each tenant not only had an agricultural holding, but a portion of cliff which he was required to defend, and from which he drew bracken and gorse for fire.
6. Mainly because of shelter as many as possible of tenants' homes were grouped together, a "cluster" being located at the head of a valley. The clusters were heavily planted with trees which stretched down the valley to the sea, and were ringed round with the same earth banks that separated the fields, and that originated from Normandy and Brittany. These earth banks were generally planted on top with scrub for firewood, and the combination made a wind deflector that functioned at its best when the fields were neither too large nor too small.

*"Sark" by Michael Marshall

7. The roads were laid out on the principle of a spine, minor roads leading off to clusters, each of which was a cul-de-sac. The roads were generally heavily tree-planted for shelter. It is of interest that the road pattern is a forerunner of the modern "precinct".
8. There is therefore the conception of an original landscape where clusters contrasted with open agricultural landscape, and where trees were confined to roads or as thickets linking each cluster to the sea. No trees grow below the 100 ft. contour, and therefore in principle the cliffs remained barren at their base. In several places on high land there were windmills, and these must have been the first visible objects from the sea. There were a few mounds and forts, which were inconspicuous. Each cluster being its own hamlet, there was no village centre, and the few shops, when they came, were grouped at the top of the harbour road.

9. The character of the Administration

Sark is a dependency of the Crown responsible only to the Queen in Council. The government has not materially changed since the original Charter given by Queen Elizabeth I. It is vested in the Chief Pleas, composed of the Forty Tenants of the Seigneur and twelve deputies elected to represent those islanders who are not Tenants. The Chief Pleas is the body which enacts legislation, while the Seneschal's Court is the sole Court of Justice in the island with jurisdiction in civil and criminal cases. An appeal lies in all cases to the Royal Court of Guernsey.

10. The hereditary head of the island is the Seigneur or La Dame, who sits as such automatically in the Chief Pleas. Although the Seigneur is no longer all powerful, he may exercise a temporary veto over any ordinance which the Chief Pleas may press.
11. There is no civil service, no planning authority, nor planning law as on the mainland. There was no control at all of land development before the order-in-council of 1961 and the resulting ordinances of 1962 and 1964, which set out the scope of the Natural Amenities Committee. The Committee's decisions do not need ratification by the Chief Pleas or by anyone, but there is appeal from the Committee to an independent Appeals Tribunal set up by the Chief Pleas by ordinance under the 1961 Order in Council.

12. Visitors and Tourism

During the past half-century the society has changed by an influx of residents from the mainland attracted here by the landscape and the quiet, and, latterly, the absence of taxation; and the economy has changed from farming and fishing to one of tourism.

13. The following is a recommendation of the Natural Amenities Committee, for consideration by Chief Pleas, 18th January, 1967.

"The future policy of this Committee concerning new dwellings is clear. There should be fewer houses built in future, of better quality, and almost exclusively for Sark people."

The landscape consultant endorses this recommendation, which he has accepted as basic to his terms of reference.

14. Residents

The number of dwellings at present on Sark is 236 (including 28 summer cottages and chalets), proportioned as to 143 to residents from outside and 93 to Sarkese. Many of the former do not themselves contribute appreciably to the economy and are leaving their mark by promiscuous building, some of it good, some of it commonplace, and some of it poor. The sites chosen are usually those having a view and are therefore visible to the view itself; being exposed the buildings are unenjoyable most of the year, when they are often deserted. Sometimes they are deserted altogether.

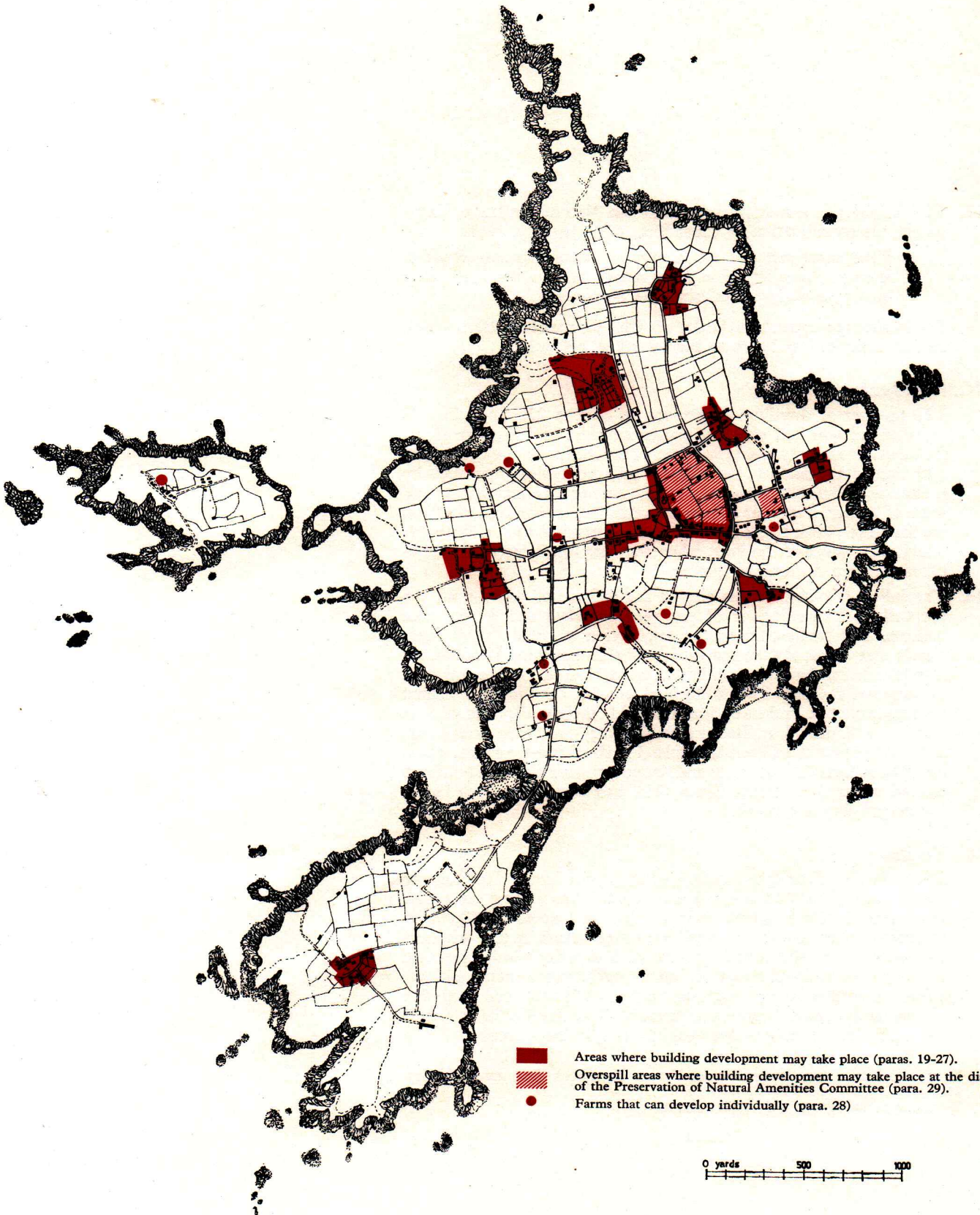
15. The influx of outsiders has altered the balance of population; the proportion of dwellings is 61 per cent outsiders and 39 per cent Sarkese. The current figures for application to build "show fairly clearly that within say ten years it is probable that some 70 additional new houses will have been built . . . more than 50 will be occupied by outsiders and only 15 to 20 by Sark people."* Although a Tenant holding cannot be broken up it can be sold outright, together with its seat in the Chief Pleas. Because the holding cannot be broken up, it has in the past often been let off land in short sub-tenancies, which has been reflected in the cheap and temporary nature of new buildings erected under these terms. Since 1964, however, very much longer leases are being negotiated.

16. Tourism

The economy of the Island is now wholly dependent on Tourism. In round figures, 40,000 non-residents paying 1/6d. landing tax visited the Island in 1966. These tourists may well spend £250,000 in accommodation charges, carriage hire, refreshments, meals, souvenirs and other holiday spending in the Island. The period visitors included in the above probably number about 4,000 per annum, and are adequately catered for by eight medium priced hotels, and a number of smaller boarding houses and cottages. The day visitor is mainly catered for by a concentration of shops, etc., in the Avenue.**

* From a Report of the Preservation of Natural Amenities Committee January, 1967.

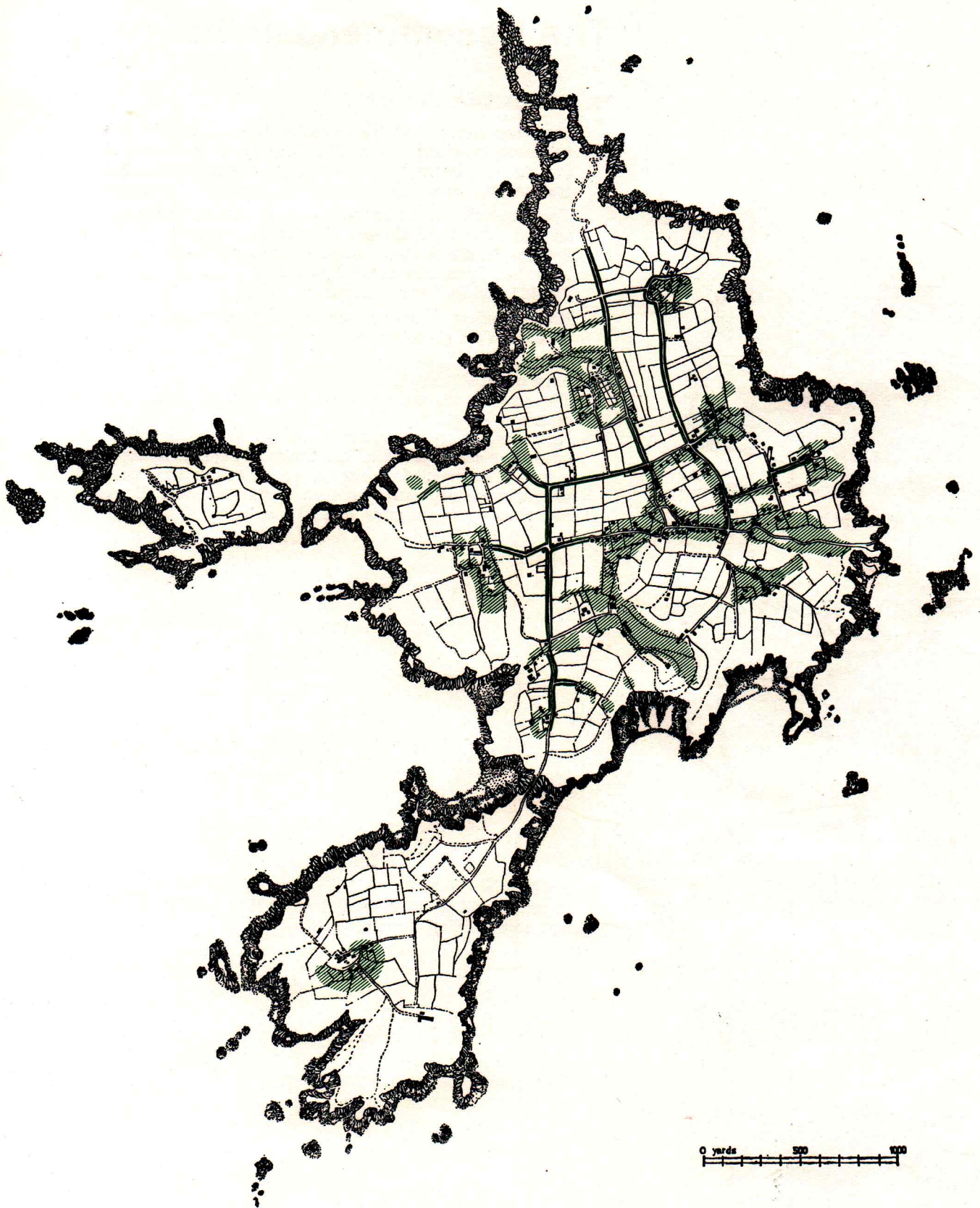
** Estimates supplied by the Hoteliers Association.



- Areas where building development may take place (paras. 19-27).
- Overspill areas where building development may take place at the discretion of the Preservation of Natural Amenities Committee (para. 29).
- Farms that can develop individually (para. 28)

0 yards 500 1000

The "Red" Plan for Building Development



The "Green" Plan for Tree Planting

The plan shows in principle the existing and proposed planting. The proposals are in three categories: along roads, around "clusters", and in the valleys paras. (34-40).

The Recommendations

17. RECOMMENDATION I

Development shall be as indicated on the Overall Plan in areas marked in red. Development to be restricted to (a) nine existing "clusters", (b) certain parts of the central area, and (c) certain individual buildings.

The conception of the future landscape is of one that returns to the original pattern of clusters, developing within these as infilling. Between the clusters there is agricultural land only, except that certain individual farms may expand for domestic reasons. Above all there should be no further indiscriminate building.

18. Redevelopment of out of date property may take place within the confines of the existing site.

19. The central area (La Manoir)

This grew up round the original manor and is now virtually a village centre. It should not expand west along Mill Lane as it is already tending to become ribbon development. Views to the south should be opened up where possible. The facade of the Hall facing the church is poor. Treatment of the avenue is described in para. 51. If there is unpredictable population pressure beyond the areas allowed, it may take place within the cross hatched area.

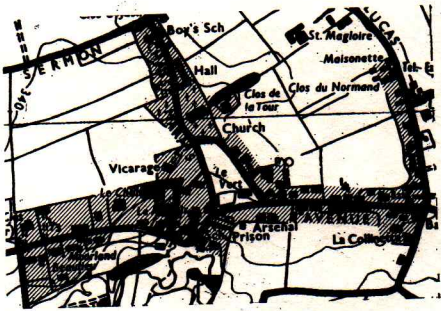


Fig. i: La Manoir

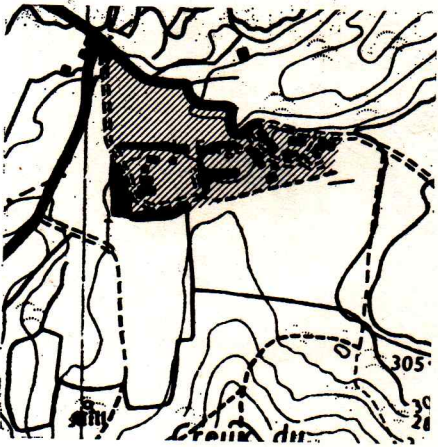


Fig. ii: La Forge

20. La Forge

A natural and beautiful cluster, with a farm building on the extreme east edge spoiling the silhouette.

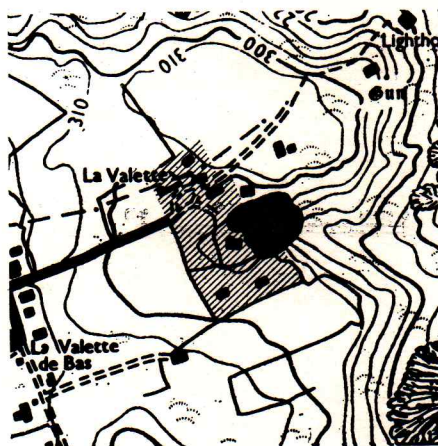


Fig. iii: La Valette

21. La Valette

A natural cluster, only requiring some extra tree planting on the north. A building immediately east of this is spoiling an attractive scene.

22. La Ville Roussel

A double cluster, of great interest and variety. Care must be taken that it does not extend to join up with the Rue Lucas and the Rue du Fort. There is some good modern infilling, and room for more. The first appearance of La Ville Roussel itself is disappointing, but the buildings and gardens behind are attractive.

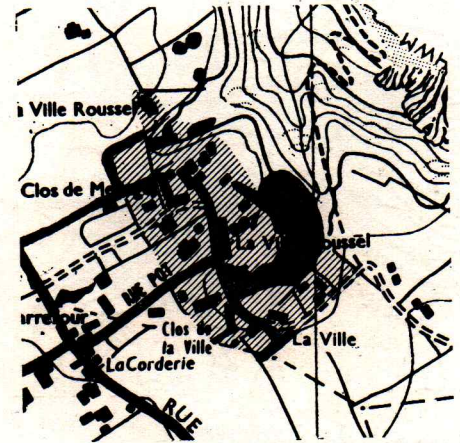


Fig. iv: La Ville Roussel

23. Le Grand Fort

This cluster is of great charm, and care should be taken to preserve some of the older thatched cottages. Some modern colour here looks well and cheerful. The earth banks are of particular interest. Some new tree planting is required.

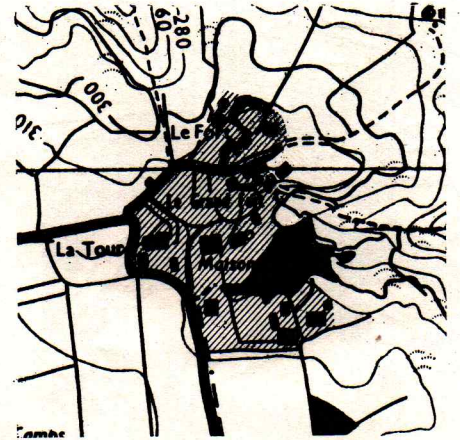


Fig. v: Le Grand Fort

24. La Seigneurie

The Seigneurie was moved here in the mid-eighteenth century and the present landscape is a complex of three periods: the original Magloire Chapel, the traditional cluster, and the Victorian buildings and park. Together they form the only area in Sark that is deep in time, and because of this have great charm and personality. Here too may be studied how plants can thrive, given the right conditions. The area zoned is larger than the usual cluster, but it is hoped that the gardens particularly can be retained indefinitely.

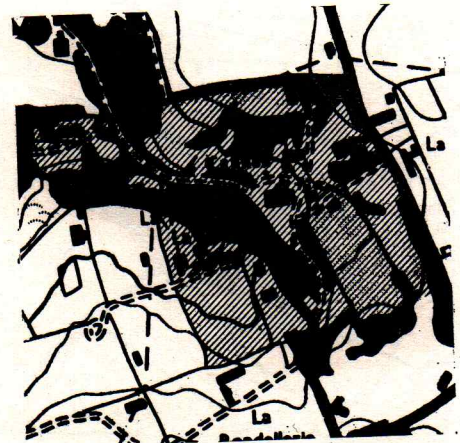


Fig. vi: La Seigneurie

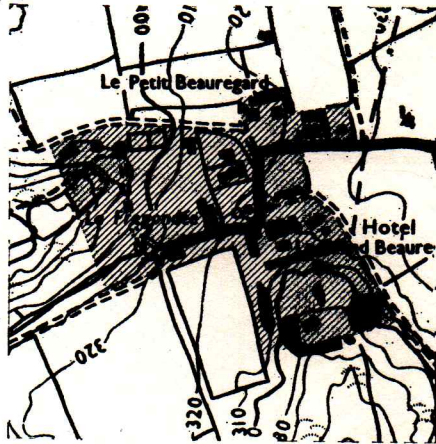


Fig. vii: Le Beauregard

25. Le Beauregard

This cluster has been selected as the site for a new hotel, and is discussed in paras. 53-55. There is an interesting historical study here, for the original tenant cottage still exists beside the more prosperous house built at a later date.

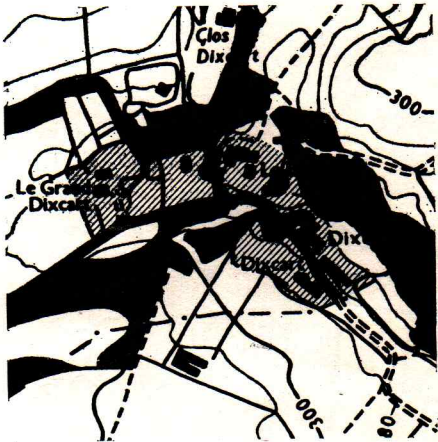


Fig. viii: Dixcart

26. Dixcart

This lies attractively in the Dixcart valley and is particularly well linked by woodlands to the sea shore. Care should be taken to ensure its physical separation from the central area. It is hoped that the wire-scape over the valley is not permanent.

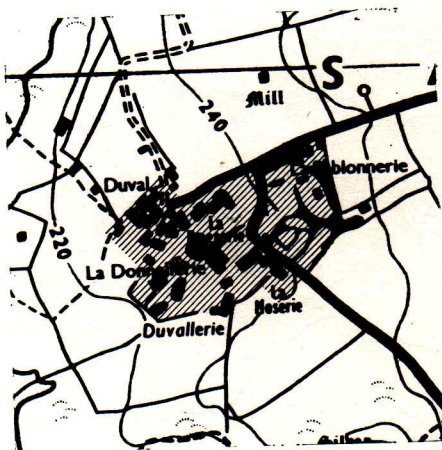


Fig. ix: La Sablonnerie

27. La Sablonnerie

This cluster and its adjoining landscape is of outstanding beauty. There are one or two scruffinesses on the outskirts, especially to the west. The roof colourings are violent but successful in their confined setting. For comment on wirescape see para. 50.

28. The red circle farms

These include Brechou, and may expand for domestic reasons *provided* the new buildings group with, and are not manifestly separated from, the existing. Any farm that contemplates such expansion should undertake tree planting well in advance.

29. Two overspill areas are suggested

This Plan is for many years ahead, and it would be unwise to assume that the areas for development prescribed under Primary Recommendations would be sufficient in perpetuity. For this reason two extra or overspill areas, hatched red and white on the plan, have been included as being able to absorb an unforeseeable expansion, either immediately or in the future. The Committee must be satisfied before giving planning approval that in its opinion there is no land in the red areas either available or suitable.

30. (a) Area north of the Avenue, and east of the Church: this is logical infilling in a central position.

31. (b) Area called *LA PIECE A GENET*: the existing area has been indiscriminately developed and has no part in the traditional landscape. Infilling could take the form of low houses facing west to the open field with long gardens and trees, the silhouette of the houses to integrate with the existing.

32. RECOMMENDATION II

(a) A qualified engineer to examine and report on sanitation and fresh water supply; and make proposals.

The island is dependent on the individual dwelling for sanitation and fresh water supply. Now there is real danger of contamination during the late summer months. A preliminary appraisal suggests that a proper drainage system might be adopted for the environment of the central area, but that individual clusters could remain independent provided the required standards of soil disposal could be reached.

33. (b) A professional consultant, honorary or otherwise, to advise the Preservation of Natural Amenities Committee on all matters concerned with their terms of reference.

The Committee should retain the overall advice of a professional appreciative of landscape as well as architectural design. The appointment could be honorary, and would be from the Channel Islands. He or she would act within the terms of the "general guidance", deposited with the Committee.

The suggestions

34. (a) New tree planting is proposed along roads and in groups.

Not only do the records indicate that there were many more trees a hundred years ago than exist today, but it is clear that the tree planting was functional, mainly for windbreaks. Today shelter trees are required as much as anything to consume silhouettes and skylines that are the ugly characteristic of exposed buildings. It is not possible on the plans to do more than indicate broadly where new planting should take place. These fall into three main categories.

35. Along roads: it is characteristic to plant closely along the main roads. These trees provide shade and shelter, and do not occupy valuable agricultural land. Although the avenues which have been recently planted may be a little tight, the planting should be completed as indicated.

36. Because the ride in the carriage is a tourist peculiarity, and too many enclosed avenues are dull as landscape, it is suggested that occasional gaps in the trees be left as windows on one side whenever there is a good passing view.

37. It is desirable that there is no artificially planted landscape either side of La Coupée, to emphasize the romance and dangerous nature of this phenomenon.

38. Around "clusters": these need to be enriched or renewed as indicated.

39. *The valleys*: each cluster appears to be at the head of its own valley leading to the sea. This original, delightful, and eminently sensible form of landscape should be encouraged, for unlike the exposed plateau the trees flourish and form a contrasting diversion to the visitor in his search for the cliffs and seashore.
40. Where the trees are exposed, the species should in principle remain those that are now indigenous; perhaps the conifer could be introduced more generously as a windbreak. Exotic and other plants are to be encouraged in protected gardens.
41. **(b) A footpath round Little Sark and a coastal system of paths round Great Sark**
 Apart from those that are purely utilitarian and are for inhabitants only, footpaths serve two separate customers: the day visitor and the resident visitor. There is no complete footpath system at the present time. Part of the way the visitors walk uninterestingly and uncomfortably on the roads.
42. Such footpaths and cliff walks that exist are primitive and to the eye of the visitor quite remarkably beautiful, and it is tempting to link these into an organised system of a path round the cliffs. There is one such round Herm, S. Mary's in the Scillies, and elsewhere.
43. The landscape of Great Sark, however, is quite different to these islands since it consists of valleys that run down to the sea like the spokes of a wheel: the visitor can physically explore only one such valley at a time, and therefore this very small parcel of landscape is in fact exceptionally rich in investigation and discovery. It takes many days to explore the whole, in contrast to Herm, which is revealed in a few hours. This characteristic should be retained.
44. Even so, there is no doubt that a walk round Little Sark could be created immediately, would be spectacular, and would damage no sense of mystery: and it is here recommended.
45. On Great Sark a continuous cliff path might be undesirable even if feasible, but a complex system such as that which now threads its way uncertainly from Creux harbour to La Coupée is precisely one that might thread its way mysteriously to link with the cross valley paths and merge in the existing systems around Eperquerie, La Seigneurie, and Beauregard.
46. **(c) The restoration of the hereditary landscape**
Buildings: These can be an irritation when they are wrongly placed, and commonplace as to structure. On Sark, with two exceptions, they can be absorbed into the landscape by tree planting. The two exceptions are the dwelling overlooking Saignie Bay, north of the Seigneurie, and that overlooking Vermandaye Bay on Little Sark. Both these damage the island image, and in due time should vanish.
47. In future, the greatest care should be taken in the placing of such amenities as public lavatories, that automatically follow in the wake particularly of day visitors. They can quickly suburbanise a primitive landscape. If necessary, the terms of reference of the Committee should be widened to include *all* development.
48. *Wirescape*: It is perhaps safe to say that the overhead wire has brought more material benefit to mankind than any other single object, and simultaneously has done more damage to that image of landscape which we hold to be so dear in the present age. Prodigious sums are now spent in England and elsewhere on undergrounding when there is conflict with scenery. This conflict is primarily one of association of ideas, for pylons can in themselves be beautiful and elegant. We visitors come to Sark as to any other natural landscape solely because we want to escape from the technological world in which we normally live and which is beginning to dominate our lives: and we do not want to be reminded of it. The proper place for services (as it is the most efficient and as it is for drainage and water supply), is underground, out of sight and mind. The issue is one solely of capital cost.

49. The difference in cost must clearly fall upon the community and not upon the producer, whose first duty to the public is to supply electricity (or telephones) at the lowest economic charge. When good landscape becomes good business, and the island is to be in competition with other resorts, then the adoption of a policy of gradual undergrounding over the next twenty years is in fact good business. A start might be made on the pylons between La Coupée and Aval du Creux.
50. Little Sark has no wirescape (except a pole in its cluster which it is hoped may be removed in the first stage), and is one of the few complete landscapes remaining in the British Isles where hereditary values are undamaged.
51. **(d) A treatment for the "Avenue" and environment**
Elsewhere, as we have seen, good landscape is demonstratively good business. But this does not apply to the Avenue, where business is flourishing and there is not only no incentive to change, but the position of the freeholders is impregnable. The commercial development of the Avenue is a severe anti-climax, and under mainland planning law would be subject compulsorily if need be to total redevelopment. A suggestion for an improvement has been deposited.
52. *The road from Maseline harbour to the Pilcher monument:* This east-west spine road, which passes through the Avenue, is much used by pedestrians and can be conceived as a continuous landscape. Harbour road would be improved by some extra tree planting as indicated, but is otherwise most distinguished. The area round the Mill could be improved at small cost, possibly with a seat round the base for weary walkers, for the view from here on all sides is magnificent: the Mill itself is a feature of great interest and should be made good and preserved with care.
53. **(e) A new hotel of international standard adjoining "Beauregard".**
The hotel would be sited immediately to the west of Beauregard, at the head of the valley, low in the landscape and facing west over an impressive view of Havre Gosselin. The approach would be from the east, at the end of the spine road from the harbour. Apart from the forecourt for carriages, the space between hotel and cluster would be compact and reserved for staff quarters.
54. The hotel would be planned with sun or shade terrace gardens and a swimming pool. Each bedroom would have what is now accepted as a standard plan: bathroom, glass wall and balcony, and the room itself usable as a modest sitting room.
55. The economy of the island would be greatly strengthened, and there would be no competition with the existing hotels, which attract a different clientele. Apart from direct expenditure, such visitors would spend considerably on carriages, in the shops, and elsewhere.
56. **(f) A nine-hole golf course between the Pilcher Monument and Dixcart Bay**
There is no doubt that a golf course is an added attraction to any holiday resort. A nine-hole course could be incorporated in the land despite hazards of agriculture, and difficult terrain, and its effect upon the natural landscape would be negligible. It would adjoin the new hotel, and might be essential for its economy.
57. The idea of a golf course, which carries with it a certain degree of sophistication, is not part of the Sark tradition. If it were not actually to damage the image of the island, it might cause some deflection from it. For this reason the advantages and disadvantages need to be weighed most carefully.