

GRAEME HALL NATIONAL PARK

Land Use at Graeme Hall: Critical Questions and Answers

The concept behind the proposed 240-acre Graeme Hall National Park is not new.

Over 25 years ago land use planners in the Barbados Town and Country Development Planning Office collaborated with professional land use planners from the United Nations to recommend a large green space buffer between the two urban areas of Greater Bridgetown and Oistins.

This recommendation was ratified by Parliament as part of the 1988 National Physical Development Plan:

“The Graeme Hall agricultural area is proposed to be preserved as an open space break separating the urban zones of Oistins and Greater Bridgetown.”

“...The Graeme Hall area is proposed to be maintained as an agricultural area and as an urban open space in order to create an environmental break between the two urban areas. Parts of the open spaces are proposed to be used for sports and recreational purposes.”

References: Sections 10.35 (page 137) and 10.61 (page 145), 1988 National Physical Development Plan. A copy is at www.graemehall.com/reference.htm

The following pages contain questions and answers on how and why most of this land has since been re-classified to Residential and Urban Corridor use.

This material also discusses why it is appropriate to reinstate the original recommendation and intent to preserve Graeme Hall as parklands as promised in the original 1988 Barbados National Physical Development Plan.

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QUESTION: Is the proposed National Park really the last significant green space between the Airport and Bridgetown on the South Coast?

ANSWER: YES. Here, one can find the last significant mangrove ecosystem and the last open area left for a Park. Adjacent to the mangrove wetland are upland buffer lands which would be the last place on the South Coast for traffic-free recreational activities. There is no other multipurpose park on the South Coast where a child can potentially ride a bicycle in safety, where families can mingle in relative peace and quiet, or where walking and running trails can be away from traffic.

Over 6,000 people have signed a Petition saying that the Graeme Hall green space must be preserved in perpetuity, before the South Coast becomes a continuous city from Greater Bridgetown to Oistins and beyond.

QUESTION: In these tough economic times, should the Government of Barbados invest in the proposed 240-acre Graeme Hall National Park?

ANSWER: YES. More than ever, Barbados must plan for the future health and welfare of its children, and their children's children.

Many developers would say, "Let's develop every last bit of urban land to make as much money as possible." But growing an economy that also has a good quality of life means major commitments to the environment, education, culture and recreation.

Healthy economies depend on healthy people and healthy communities. Conservation of our natural heritage, recreation, investments in physical fitness – all of these must have a place in our communities if robust investment is to flourish.

Nearly 50 years ago Barbadian land planners began a process that would ensure enough land would be preserved for future generations.

Unfortunately, and despite the fact that Graeme Hall is home to the highest concentration of biodiversity on the island and is the last major urban green space on the South Coast, in the last 12 years the Government of Barbados has quietly re-classified most of land within the proposed Graeme Hall National Park for commercial and residential development.

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QUESTION: Was more recreational/open space promised for the South Coast, and if so, how much?

ANSWER: YES. The 1988 Physical Development Plan recommends that:

“...1.85 hectares of land will be required per 1000 population for playgrounds, playing fields, local parks and local recreational centres...”

Reference: Section 10.17 (page 129), 1988 National Physical Development Plan.

The population of the South Coast between the Airport and Bridgetown is well in excess of 110,000 people, meaning that a minimum of 504 acres should be set aside for recreation.

The proposed recreational land area at Graeme Hall outside of the RAMSAR Wetland site is less than 200 acres. (Note: The Graeme Hall RAMSAR Wetland is an international wetland designation under the Convention on Wetlands treaty. Barbados has signed this Treaty.)

QUESTION: Does the Government of Barbados currently plan to preserve the full 240-acre National Park at Graeme Hall?

ANSWER: NO. The 240-acre Graeme Hall area does not have National Park or fully-protected status. The only protected area is an 81-acre area of the Graeme Hall wetland. None of the remaining wetlands or upland buffers have perpetual legal protections in place.

Instead, and contrary to the 1988 National Physical Development Plan, the 2003 Physical Development Plan calls for private development of most of the Graeme Hall area. This includes the highest ridge of the proposed National Park, and private development of the western section of the endangered wetland area located just west of the Graeme Hall Nature Sanctuary and the RAMSAR Wetland.

These lands are owned by the people of Barbados. From the upper ridge lands of the proposed National Park one has stunning views of the RAMSAR Wetland and much of the South Coast – no other Park on the South Coast has such a view.

And the private land just west of the RAMSAR Wetland is part of the 100-year floodplain which also defines the adjoining RAMSAR site. Unfortunately, this land did

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not receive RAMSAR protection and is privately owned.

This map shows these lands in conflict. Note the red-shaded areas:

<http://www.graemehall.com/press/papers/Land-Conflict-Map-Graeme-Hall.pdf>

QUESTION: Did the Government of Barbados quietly re-classify a part of the proposed National Park (the upper ridge land at the ABC Highway) for commercial development and homes?

ANSWER: YES. Under the newly approved National Physical Development Plan, the upper ridge at Graeme Hall along the ABC Highway has been classified as Predominantly Residential, and is identified as an Urban Corridor.

It is spectacular land, and it was formerly classified as open/recreation/agriculture land in the 1988 National Physical Development Plan.

While there are apparently no development applications publicly on file at Town and Country Planning for this land located along the ABC Highway, some believe there is a private deal in the works. This ridge land was the scene of the infamous Caribbean Water Park application in 2006.

Unfortunately, very few know that this land is already owned by the people of Barbados, and fewer still are privy to backroom discussions about it.

Here is what is publicly known: Within the last ten years the previous administration quietly promoted the change in land use, and many were shocked to learn that the current administration approved it in early 2008 despite their full knowledge of the 6,000 signature Citizen's Petition to create the 240-acre Graeme Hall National Park.

The issue: In sharp conflict with the original recommendation to preserve the Open Lands at Graeme Hall in perpetuity, the last two Administrations pushed through the 2003 National Physical Development Plan which changed a major portion of the proposed National Park lands from "open and natural" to "urban corridor." This newly re-classified urban corridor now occupies the finest and highest view lands of the proposed National Park.

Many will remember how the Government of Barbados allowed a waterpark developer

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to apply for use of this land, even though stormwater runoff and salt byproduct of the water treatment system would have harmed the Graeme Hall Wetland.

At the time, the proposed use of Graeme Hall lands for a waterpark was termed “madness” by former Prime Minister Owen Arthur.

QUESTION: Is it possible that the CLICO lands located to the west of Graeme Hall Nature Sanctuary could be developed too?

ANSWER: YES. Even though the CLICO lands inside the proposed National Park are classified as “OS2” Natural Heritage Conservation Area, the latest 2003 Physical Development Plan has plenty of “exceptions” that would allow an application for development that would not be appropriate for a RAMSAR wetland buffer.

QUESTION: What does it mean that CLICO land is classified as OS2-Natural Heritage Conservation Area, but not classified under the RAMSAR designation?

ANSWER: It means that CLICO has the right to develop this environmentally sensitive land, even though it is part of the 100-year floodplain just like the rest of the RAMSAR Wetland. But if the CLICO lands had been designated as part of the RAMSAR Wetland, then their ability to develop the land would be severely restricted.

There is no doubt: Even though CLICO lands within the 100-year Floodplain Boundary have been filled, they are still subject to 100-year flooding. Just like the adjoining Graeme Hall Nature Sanctuary and the Eastern Graeme Hall BADMC lands, CLICO's land should be designated protected wetland under RAMSAR.

QUESTION: Does the RAMSAR Wetland designation help Barbados?

ANSWER: YES. On the surface it may appear that RAMSAR designations are not favorable to conventional developers, but the fact is that it is the other way around. People want to live and work near protected environmental areas and open space. Quality of life and corresponding real estate values actually increase. International agencies know this.

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The RAMSAR Wetland designation at Graeme Hall enables Barbados to comply with the Convention on Wetlands Treaty. This Convention, just like other international treaties on the environment, human rights and economic cooperation, helps Barbados comply with world credit market requirements, and thus helps raise the national credit standing of Barbados.

Treaties such as the Convention on Biodiversity, the Law of the Sea, and Convention on Wetlands are all essential mandates for a nation to be competitive in obtaining international grants and loans for economic, social, environmental and cultural infrastructure projects.

QUESTION: Is the OS2 “Natural Heritage Conservation Area” classification strong enough to protect environmentally sensitive lands in perpetuity?

ANSWER: NO. This classification allows limited or conditional development that is often inappropriate for conservation buffers, and it relies on continuous oversight from citizen's groups who must monitor Government as they accept potentially inappropriate development applications. Of course, applications are subject to an Environmental Impact Statement from the developer, but this is a costly and subjective approach that could be avoided if the Natural Heritage Conservation Area land use definitions were not so ambiguous and aligned with strict international conservation standards.

According to Government's new 2003 National Physical Development Plan, Section 4.3.3.1 (a), in addition to the usual environmentally appropriate uses, primary uses can also include “conservation and associated development related to ... restaurants, gift shops and parking areas, existing residential, industrial and tourism development as well as minor expansions to existing buildings.”

Under the rules, OS2 Natural Heritage Conservation Areas are continually open to alternative land use applications – there is no definitive protection measure in place that would simply say that these sensitive lands will never be allowed to have development beyond simple conservation and low impact recreation. Instead, the Physical Development Plan leaves a reader wondering why there are so many allowable uses within a Natural Heritage Conservation Area.

This policy approach by the Government of Barbados is a de facto invitation for developers to continuously apply for permission to develop within these areas.

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QUESTION: To prevent inappropriate development of the CLICO lands which should be part of the RAMSAR designation, should the Government of Barbados acquire the land, declare it part of Graeme Hall National Park, and thereby protect the land in perpetuity solely for conservation and recreation?

ANSWER: YES. They should negotiate a sale or trade it for some other land elsewhere so that the CLICO lands could be included in the new National Park, and its land use should be more forcefully defined.

QUESTION: Some say that urban development of the prime upland buffer lands as an “Urban Corridor” and development of the CLICO lands will benefit all of Barbados. Is this valid?

ANSWER: NO. There are several reasons why this old and antiquated argument is not valid:

1. The land at Graeme Hall was earmarked for open space, conservation, agriculture and parkland by an act of Parliament nearly 50 years ago. They were visionary and knew that the land was a national legacy for all people of Barbados, but that one day developers would try and take it. The wisdom of our forefathers in regard to Graeme Hall and the upper lands must be reclaimed.
2. In the case of the upland land by the ABC Highway – this land is already owned by the people of Barbados. Why should Government be allowed to give the land to a small group of people who would then deny everyone else access to what is supposed to be parkland?
3. The Graeme Hall green space is the last significant parkland area on the South Coast. Further housing and commercial development would damage the urban landscape in the same manner as allowing housing development in Central Park in New York or Queens Park in Trinidad.

There is false economy in “developing” an urban community to the point where residents are unable to safely walk or ride bicycles or have a quiet picnic, or when it is the policy of Government to allow small groups of people or corporations to take prime conservation, recreation and view landscapes for their own use.

As originally promised in the 1988 Physical Development Plan, Graeme Hall is the last chance for the South Coast to have a real Park in perpetuity, for all people.

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QUESTION: Did previous Town Planners recommend that the entire Graeme Hall open lands be preserved for conservation and recreation?

ANSWER: YES. In fact, the previous Chief Town Planner, Lionel L. Nurse and his staff were distinctly visionary because they knew that the South Coast was rapidly becoming urbanised, and needed Park lands. Nurse oversaw the creation of the 1988 National Physical Development Plan with technical assistance from the United Nations Centre for Human Settlements (HABITAT). The vision and the Plan were adopted by Parliament, with the following provisions:

“The Graeme Hall agricultural area is proposed to be preserved as an open space break separating the urban zones of Oistins and Greater Bridgetown.”

“...The Graeme Hall area is proposed to be maintained as an agricultural area and as an urban open space in order to create an environmental break between the two urban areas. Parts of the open spaces are proposed to be used for sports and recreational purposes.”

In addition, scientific and other studies over the past 35 years have recommended that the environmental and habitat buffers be preserved at Graeme Hall in perpetuity.

References: Sections 10.35 (page 137) and 10.61 (page 145), 1988 National Physical Development Plan. A copy is at www.graemehall.com/reference.htm

QUESTION: By favouring development within the proposed National Park, is the South Coast in danger of becoming a crowded urban zone with not enough parkland?

ANSWER: YES. In 1988, Barbadian planners recognized this, and recommended that all the lands at Graeme Hall be preserved as a green buffer area between Greater Bridgetown and Oistins.

One can see this on the *Settlement and Land Use Policy Map - 1988 National Physical Development Plan, Map 20:*

<http://graemehall.com/press/papers/1988-Land-Use.pdf>

In addition to the specific recommendation to preserve Graeme Hall lands as an open

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space and recreational/conservation area, here is what the original 1988 Physical Development Plan says in Chapter 7, Environmental Conservation:

“Conservation policies seek to protect and enhance landscapes as natural assets for recreational, aesthetic, economic and ecological reasons. The facets of landscape which are of main conservation interest are national and other park areas, ridges, special landscape features, sites of scenic value, and trees.”

Reference: Section 7.8 (page 94)

“Although the edges of the ridges are excellent building grounds, on which house construction has been allowed in accordance with the first Physical Development Plan, there is a need to reassess the policy for aesthetic reasons. Buildings sited on the edge of the ridges are visually obstructive, decrease the aesthetic value of the ridge, and contribute to a blurring of a truly urban or truly rural landscape.”

Section 7.12 (page 95)

“There are numerous sites of special value such as caves and viewpoints which need to be designated as conservation areas and protected from any adverse developments for reasons of recreational or tourism interest.”

1988 National Physical Development Plan - Section 7.13 (page 95)

In the Executive Summary of the 1988 Physical Development Plan (Section 5, page viii), Provision for Recreation and Conservation:

“...it is recommended to develop additional playgrounds for children, upgrade and build new playing fields for youths, implement a development programme of sports facilities for national events, provide for additional parks and open spaces within and outside the urban corridor, develop out-door recreation centres, improve beach access in several specified locations and create pedestrian and bicycle routes for recreational purposes.”

“Given the projected tourism development requirements and priorities, it is proposed that a detailed study be undertaken for the upgrading and further development of the tourism area from

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Hastings to Maxwell Coast.

- i) *To identify possibilities to upgrade the standard of tourist accommodation facilities and the replace lower standard facilities in accordance with the tourism development strategy;*
- ii) *To develop additional recreational areas for general use;
and*
- iii) *To improve pedestrian ways and the traffic circulation in order to facilitate accessibility to tourist and recreation services and attractions.*

Reference: Section 10.60 (page 145), 1988 National Physical Development Plan

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Reference Maps

Settlement and Land Use Policy Map - 1988 National Physical Development Plan, Map 20. Shows the original Graeme Hall green area classified as "Major Recreational," "Open Space" and "Special Environmental Control" between Greater Bridgetown and Oistins.

<http://graemehall.com/press/papers/1988-Land-Use.pdf>

Land Use Map - 2003 (Amended) National Physical Development Plan, Map 4.

In conflict with the Settlement and Land Use Policy Map and the 1988 National Physical Development Plan, this map shows Government conversion of most of the Graeme Hall green area north of the Natural Heritage Conservation Area to a classification of "Predominantly Residential."

<http://graemehall.com/press/papers/Map4-2003LandUseHI.pdf>

Barbados System of Parks and Open Space Map - 2003 (Amended) National Physical Development Plan, Map 6.

In conflict with the Settlement and Land Use Policy Map and the 1988 National Physical Development Plan, this map omits the original "Major Recreational" and "Open Space" land classification north of the Graeme Hall Natural Heritage Conservation Area. In 2008 the Government of Barbados officially abandoned the 1988 "Major Recreational" and "Open Space" designation for this land, and converted the classification to "Predominantly Residential" as seen on 2003 Land Use Map.

<http://graemehall.com/press/papers/Map6-2003SystemofParksHI.pdf>

Land Use Conflicts Map (2009) - Proposed Graeme Hall National Park lands (approximately 240-acres)

This map summarizes the differences between the 1988 and 2003 National Physical Development Plans, and land status within the proposed 240-acre Graeme Hall National Park. The map also shows how the 100-year floodplain has been designation an international RAMSAR Wetland Site, except for private lands in the western area of the floodplain owned by a subsidiary of Clico.

<http://graemehall.com/press/papers/Land-Conflict-Map-Graeme-Hall.pdf>