



# MINISTRY OF HOUSING, INFRASTRUCTURE AND LAND TRANSPORT

## SEYCHELLES PLANNING AUTHORITY

### Policies and Guidelines Library

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#### (LA DIGUE SPECIAL DEVELOPMENT GUIDELINE)

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## 1.0 Background

The fragile ecosystem, sensitive nature and physical characteristics of the La Digue Island and charm of its inhabitants creates a favorable environment for special consideration to be given to activities relating to the undertaking of physical development on the island. It is paramount that the manner developments take place on the island are very sustainable.

The value of La Digue as one of the iconic tourism destinations of Seychelles has not only been understood but also actively promoted. In view of these exceptional cultural, geological, environmental and historical values, it has for many years been recognized as a potential center for eco-tourism. The island has a small population of 2761 people (Census 2010) comparable to some of the smallest districts on Mahe. Natural resources required to sustain the existing population are limited and the island's ability to absorb large amount of solid waste and waste water is felt to be approaching full capacity. La Digue has no major rivers or major source of drinking surface water; its main sources of potable water are from underground aquifers and from desalination plants.

From a cultural view point La Digue has always boasted a very distinct and rich cultural identity. For many years the people from La Digue have jealously guarded and preserved their cultural identity including their very distinct architecture. In recognition of these values, government was compelled to impose special rules and guidelines to control and restrict the number of vehicles on the island and it has limited the type of road surfacing materials that can be utilized to those that are aesthetically pleasing. Most of the businesses including tourism establishments are small and are in the main town area, owned by families who employ themselves. To date there are three hotels with the third

one catering for high end tourism and thereby relying heavily on foreign labour and natural resources.

In the SONA 2018, and subsequent cabinet meetings, the Government of Seychelles has earmarked La Digue as one of the Eco capitals of the world. An overarching vision for the island is being developed in that respect. To achieve such an ambitious target, it is extremely important to stop the alienation of the cultural, historical and environmental values of La Digue and the Diguois. On the other hand, it is obvious that the island has now reached its maximum carrying capacity (Carrying Capacity Study for La Digue 2013). The ecological services are being stretched to the limit and it is clear that environmental support systems are under stress. This will eventually lead to long term degradation of the environment of the island including contamination of ground water and the coastal areas. Once these natural support systems have lost their ability to maintain the population and the cultural uniqueness of La Digue is lost through alienation, then the value of La Digue as a prime eco-tourism destination will be greatly reduced as is the case with many islands in the Caribbean today. These potential negative effects must also be seen and addressed under the framework of the on-going social renaissance campaign as undertaken by the Government of Seychelles. There is much to learn from the Carrying Capacity Study findings and these, amongst other things, form the basis from which these guidelines emanate.

## **2.0 Purpose**

The guiding principles of the last revised development guideline for La Digue island has last been reviewed and revised since January 2015. However with revisions made to both Mahe and Praslin land use development plans recently and with La Digue being substantially smaller than both islands it became apparent that some regulations enforced were unfair to the inhabitants of La Digue. Knowing that this was affecting the rights of those inhabitants to develop their land, it was deemed appropriate to address this issue, within limitations and reason by proposing a newly revised special guideline.

With “fairness” as the force driving the conversations, the Seychelles Planning Authority was taken to task. In view that this affected all Diguois in one way or another, the revision was done alongside a public consultation in an aim to include the public in this process of change and encourage for comments on the proposals made. The outcomes were mostly positive as the majority present welcomed the proposals put forth, with a few proposed amendments and recommendations to the revised guideline.

## **3.0 Statement**

Being smaller than Mahe and Praslin, development on la Digue should consist of smaller footprints that are well integrated into the natural environment .As such, the La Digue special development guideline serves as the guiding principle providing the different

categories of development specific to La Digue Island. This proposed Guideline has been in consultation with the Ministry responsible for Tourism and The Ministry responsible for Environment is in line with the new vision- 2048 being developed for La Digue.

## **4.0 Revised guidelines:**

### **4.1 The 50 metre contour line policy**

- (i) The 50 metre Contour Line Policy and its reviews, which used to regulate all development above the 50 metre contour line has been removed and is no longer in force for La Digue. This policy has been replaced by new land classifications which consider non-development in sensitive ecosystems and controlled development in area of favorable terrain for development. No development on the skyline will be permitted on la Digue. Development guidelines to exist to control visual impacts and footprint impacts on hillside development.

### **4.2 Land Use Planning**

- (i) All new development proposals must respect the future land use classification for the island, including the restrictions to development densities.

### **4.3 Environment and nature**

- (i) Particular attention must be paid to the long-term conservation of the critically endangered Seychelles Paradise Flycatcher and its habitats. When planning new developments, these must imperatively be designed and positioned in such a way as to minimize clearance of vegetation and full-grown trees in particular.
- (ii) Mature Takamaka and Bodamier woodlands and undergrowth should be protected by ensuring that relevant permits are obtained from Department of Environment prior to clearing. Trees to be lopped or felled anywhere on the island should receive prior approval after inspection visit has been conducted.
- (iii) A 100 metre buffer shall be established around the only endemic Cave Swiftlet roost at Belle Vue.

- (iv) Ensure that introduction of invasive species is prevented through mechanisms such as ensuring that all boats carrying construction materials are free of rodents, insects and other animals and plants in line with Seychelles Bio-security Policy on movements of species between islands.
- (v) Land belonging to Government where habitat are considered favorable for The Seychelles Paradise Flycatcher should be given priority for conservation of the species rather than for physical development.

#### 4.4 Physical Development

- (i) New development proposals and/or extensions to existing buildings must not be higher than ground + 1 + attic or ground + 2 (where such developments would not pose adverse aesthetic impacts);
- (ii) Development on hillside should be restricted to Ground only and should not protrude above the vegetation canopy level.
- (iii) Extensions must be aesthetically pleasing and must match the existing.
- (iv) Attic designs should be in line with “Attic Guidelines” and must take into consideration the roof slope to allow installation of renewable energy devices such as PV or solar panels.
- (v) The maximum permitted development footprint for all new buildings will be controlled by land use classification of the parcel of land under consideration and associated maximum allowable development threshold density/plot coverage limit requirements (***e.g. 25% in low density, 35% in medium density***).
- (vi) In the entire low-lying (plateau) area of La Digue, all new buildings must be raised by at least one (1) metre above existing ground level.
- (vii) All proposed buildings must be well integrated in their surrounding environment and must reflect true and appealing elements of the typical Creole architectural design and style. Particular attention must be paid to color schemes, roof styles, roof color, balustrades, dormers, and windows etc. in line with the “Creole Architectural Guideline”.
- (viii) Building Regulations apply on all other aspects, such as energy efficiency, rain water harvesting requirements, etc.
- (ix) Containers and container like structures are not permitted in residential areas on La Digue.

- (x) The location of containers on La Digue must be approved by the responsible authority.
- (xi) Change of use from Residential to Tourism will not be allowed on plot size below 1000sqm in strict residential classifications.
- (xii) No constructions of any form, except for the purpose of allowing access, will be considered over rivers, drains and drainage networks, streams or other wetlands.
- (xiii) Proposed development located near and close to the beach should be in line with the La Digue Foreshore Guideline. Development should consist of smaller footprints that are well integrated to the natural environment and should be of light structure. The following type of development should be considered:
  - (a) Leisure structures such as tree houses for relaxation activities such as playing dominoes or local spa
  - (b) Kids playground or physical educational infrastructures of permanent and movable climbing frames
  - (c) Open beach restaurants and bars – airy open plan bars with sheltered tables and kiosks and on decking or soft natural sand
  - (d) Covered beach restaurants, cafes and bars – interior and exteriors that promote the Creole Architecture. Art and craft vendors’ kiosks on commercial/community plots
  - (e) Construction of structures, including residential, should use resilient materials (combination of cement and stone used as rigid protection to retain softer structures).

#### **4.5 Fences**

- (i) To demonstrate and preserve the existing good neighborliness amongst neighbors on the island, solid type fencing is discouraged.
- (ii) All fences facing accesses must be of picket fences or fences with similar design and visual effects with maximum heights of 1.5 meters.
- (iii) All fences facing on the coast line must only be of picket design of maximum height of 1.2 meters and the permitted recessed distance from the high water mark and any vegetation line shall be dependent on site conditions.
- (iv) Fences along common boundaries and those that do not face road reserves or right of ways, shall be picket or chain link fences of maximum 1.8 meters with minimum set back distance of 0.3 meters from the boundary line, unless legally registered consent between neighbors is

obtained other norms in regards to setback from road reserve may be applicable.

- (v) For chain link type fencing, for added aesthetics, it is strongly recommended for shrubs and hedges to be planted at the internal side of the fences.
- (vi) Natural hedges of foliage types are highly encouraged.
- (vii) Other types of material for fencing may be permitted upon prior approval of the Planning Authority.
- (viii) Barbed and razor wires to fences and elsewhere are not permitted.
- (ix) Electric fences are not permitted.
- (x) The responsible authority will apply its discretion as regards to color schemes for all applicable fences. Nonetheless, colors that blends within the existing environment are highly recommended.
- (xi) All color schemes must be approved by the responsible authority prior to implementation.
- (xii) Special consideration may be given to fences for institutions that require added security.

#### **4.6 Jetties, Reclamation and backfilling**

- (i) No private jetties will be allowed.
- (ii) No private reclamation or backfilling along the coastline of the island.
- (iii) Coastal protection works must be approved by the relevant Authorities.
- (iv) Sand accretion/accreted land must remain as public domain.
- (v) Mitigation measures and resilient designs for coastal protection must be provided for development on the foreshore
- (vi) Soft engineering techniques is the preferred choice for coastal protection on La Digue, except when environmental study validated by the Department responsible for costal protection recommends otherwise

- (vii) No hard structure will be allowed to be erected across the beach unless approved structures relating to access to the beach (e.g. Slipways)
- (viii) Development that will obstruct existing public beach access will not be authorized
- (vix) No reclamation or backfilling of wetlands to prevent overflow during flooding period is allowed.

#### **4.7 Earth (works) Cuttings**

- (i) Earth cuttings may only be done upon obtaining approval from Planning Authority.

#### **4.8 Waste water management**

- (i) Measures must be taken to prevent contamination of ground water through installation of appropriate and adequate treatment processing plants.
- (ii) The use of traditional waste water treatment systems such as septic tanks and soak away pits/drain field shall not be permitted in the event that same can be connected to any nearby central treatment plant(s).
- (iii) All measures must be taken to prevent contamination of ground water through installation of appropriate and adequate treatment processing plants.
- (iv) Development proposals within close proximity of existing drainage infrastructure must be connected to same.

#### **4.9 Subdivision of land**

- (i) The minimum subdivided plot size for tourism purposes should not be less than 1000sqm per resultant plot if located outside tourism designated zones.
- (ii) The Minimum subdivided plot size for residential development should not be less than 600sqm per resultant plot.
- (ii) Subdivision for other land uses is controlled in accordance to the land use classification

#### **4.10 Others**

For all other aspects of development the standard Regulations under the Physical Planning legislation will apply.

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**Contact Information**

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**Related Information**