We first learned of the Integrated Resort Development proposal called the Pearl of the Caribbean by Desert Star Holdings (Caribbean) at a presentation in January 2016. The plan was to construct a race track and ancillary facilities for thoroughbred horses, a marina, hotels and condominiums, waterfront homes, shopping malls and a casino on 699.5 acres of land in Vieux Fort, including the entire 180 acres of the Mankote Mangrove. The inclusion of the mangrove raised a red flag for the Trust and this concern was immediately raised with the developer. This matter resurfaced in July 2016 when it was announced that government has entered into a framework agreement with the developer to proceed with the development.

At the time the mangrove was still included in the project footprint. We held consultations with public sector entities, the general public, our members and residents of Vieux Fort to solicit their views on the project. Those consulted shared our concerns about the inclusion of the mangrove in the project and advocated for its exclusion from the lands to be developed. In October 2016 the Trust shared the outcome of the consultations with the Honourable Bradley Felix who gave
us the undertaking to raise the matter with the developer on our behalf. We were delighted to learn in early November that Minister Felix was true to his word and the mangrove was no longer part of the lands to be developed.

But concerns remain. An image displayed during the project sod turning ceremony in late November showed that the footprint now includes the lands south-east of the Hewanorra Airport, including Bruce Ville and Sandy Beach, and there are unconfirmed statements that the Agreement between the developer and government will exclude public access to that beach. While we find it difficult to believe that government will enter into an agreement which will deny the local population access to one of the most popular beaches in the island, we are continuing our thus far unsuccessful efforts to confirm or deny this claim. In the meantime, we are examining the limited information available to us with the view to making recommendations on the issues to be addressed in the Environmental and Social Impact Assessment to be conducted for the project.

The Saint Lucia National Trust is steadfast in its support for efforts to promote development. We are equally steadfast in our belief that development and conservation are not mutually exclusive. We will continue to advocate for development based on conservation principles that embrace the communities in which they are pursued and integrate community values and norms in their design and execution. To this end, we look forward to the Pearl of the Caribbean project, and indeed all future development projects to embrace the Honourable Prime Minister’s description of Saint Lucia’s value proposition of economic viability, sustainability and social equity in their design and operations.