

Andrew Smith – Garff

Political Questions (2016)

Why do you want to be a member of the House of Keys?

I have always had an interest in both the Island's and international politics and believe that the time is now right for me to stand for election to the House of Keys. My extensive business career and my time within the IOM Civil Service working with the Island's politicians I believe will give a good opportunity for me to immediately tackle the issues of the day. With the support of all constituents of Garff, together, I believe we can achieve positive results.

If you were elected, what would your priorities be on a national level?

The financial state in which the Island now finds itself is a sad reflection of inept management of the public purse, our money. A major priority would be to scrutinise in much more detail the spending of all Departments. Growing and diversifying the economy would also be a priority to enable us to properly fund health, education and the public services everyone expects and deserves. The recent decision by the UK to leave the EU has caused a barrage of comment and discussion. However, the present outcome has thrown everyone into disarray. In reality we have very little influence over any consequences that may ensue from Westminster other than

continuing to lobby those MP's who have committed to assist the Island. We do not necessarily have to wait for the UK to act on our behalf. Now is the time for us to look further both at and beyond the UK and Europe for our future growth. I would enthusiastically encourage all Island politicians, past and present, captains of industry and business leaders to come together and formulate an updated and enhanced "Vision 2020" document. In every threat there is opportunity and we must consider all possible prospects.

I believe a much better outcome could be achieved on numerous capital projects, ongoing and planned, without necessitating increased costs. A more integrated work ethic is required to encourage those involved to contribute more enthusiastically to the overall conclusion.

An exceptionally wide chasm continues to exist between the general public and their politicians. I would aim to bridge this gap by much wider consultation throughout the constituency and Island on all matters. Current political discussions amongst the constituency and wider Island electorate reveals a disturbing number of disillusioned and disenfranchised people.

Growing the economy is vital. In an exceptionally uncertain and competitive

world the Island has to be proactive in both gaining new business but also, and of equal importance, retaining existing business.

Encouraging visitors to our shores, other than around the TT Festival, continues to be a real challenge. We need to ensure that visitors have an all-round positive and pleasurable experience, from arrival at the airport or sea terminal to their departure. Just as with any business, we have to not only fight to secure our tourist industry but also fight to retain those who visit to guarantee at least a return visit and ongoing positive comment and recommendation to others.

We need to constantly promote a culture of National pride in all that we do which would then openly demonstrate that the Island is a great place to live, work, and visit.

Infrastructure is obviously of major concern not just to me but to everyone I meet. General ongoing upkeep on roads and verges is lacking and in some instances non-existent.

The Victorians were exceptional engineers, however, it is now time for us to realise that long overdue maintenance on drains and sewers is urgently required.

If you were elected, what would your priorities be on a constituency level?

First and foremost I would ensure that all constituents of Garff are well represented including the new constituents previously in Onchan. National Glens, unspoiled countryside and life in our villages are rich in history and culture. This sense of community is exceptionally rare in the present age. All constituents and these natural assets deserve our utmost care and protection. We have a newly formed Garff Commissioners Board. Although it is still in its early days we need to ensure that they have the necessary powers to properly fund and support the people of Garff.

Laxey and Baldrine require a firm commitment as to when connection to the IRIS project will be completed. We have waited far too long for this outcome and our coastline and water quality is severely suffering as a consequence.

We have just witnessed major road improvements on the A2 (top of Whitebrige to Balladromma Beg) which have been well received. However, the recent surface dressing in Baldrine appears to have excluded the lowest and most uneven part. New Road in Laxey has also received some surface dressing but major subsidence has been ignored. The Glen Road in Laxey is in an exceptionally poor state of repair.

Considering that it serves a regular bus route this really is now a priority.

A flood action plan is also urgently required. This plan needs to give detailed action as to the problems experienced by each area. The major flooding last December seriously affected many areas including Whitebridge, Groudle Road, Baldrine, Pinfold Hill, Old Laxey Hill, Rencell, Baldhoon, Glen Road, Ballaragh, Dhoon, and Hibernia to mention a few. There is currently a topographical survey underway of the Laxey river and its tributaries but plenty can be done immediately to clear existing river debris before the winter season is upon us once again. Other than work on the bridge in Laxey there has been no visible signs of any real action being taken to alleviate or avert a recurrence of the situation. The completed part of the Laxey regeneration project has certainly enhanced the centre of the Village. However, there is more that could now be done to give the Village square a real purpose.

The Glens within Garff are a great natural asset and we need to continue developing these for the benefit of both visitors and locals. There is exceptional enthusiasm amongst local groups and business project teams, so much could be easily accomplished at minimal cost. Technology is advancing at great speed

How well do you think the present administration has handled the major challenges of the past five years?

but unfortunately, both internet and mobile services are very intermittent in some parts of Garff. In an age when Government and others are encouraging and expecting everyone to be more internet proficient then something by the telecom providers certainly requires to be done in the various Garff "Black Spots."

During the last five years we have witnessed an exceptionally disruptive political situation. Ministers have been sacked or resigned over opposing policy or acting outside of their powers. Similarly a number of Members have been sacked or resigned over policy issues. Mixed and confusing messages abound regarding state and public pensions and the general public remain understandably confused. Consultative documents appear to be the order of the day. There is an exceptional wealth of local talent with extensive knowledge of the Island so why we need to continually engage off Island consultants at great cost to often tell us what we already know confounds me. A very challenging last five years with difficult decisions but from information available we have managed to keep low unemployment and growth in the economy.

What are the main political and social issues facing the Isle of Man in the next five years?

An ageing population that deserves the best possible care.

An increasing requirement for health and social care. Suggested figures quote a 10% rise in the Island's population by early 2017 bringing the total to almost 90,000.

The UK's withdrawal from Europe.
Possible further threats towards the Customs Agreement and Reciprocal Health Agreement.

Continuing demise of the banking/finance industry.

Outside regulatory pressures.

A change in the silo mentality of the previous administration.

How would you deal with the challenges referred to in the previous answer?

Proactive and constant review of ways to grow and diversify the economy.

Review all Government activities to ensure no waste of resources, financial or human.

Ensure Health Services are adequately funded keeping a close eye on any change in demographics that could cause an unexpected setback to any planned programme.

As previously mentioned exact details surrounding Brexit are very vague and sometimes misleading. It is going to be an exceptionally long and arduous

How would you deal with the issue of public sector pension reform and the public sector pension deficit?

process. We need to act on our own initiative as well as working with the UK. We have had a substantial reduction in our VAT revenues and there are no guarantees against this happening again.

Banking worldwide is in decline, as well as mergers, acquisitions etc. It will be a major challenge for us to overcome this issue but we could reverse the trend if we carefully consider our proposition.

This issue has arisen over a number of years and it will consequently take a number of years to address. It is exceptionally difficult to expect anyone to pay more for less with no guarantee that anything will be forthcoming at retirement.

Threats to reduce benefits to existing pensioners has only exacerbated the issue.

A well-managed ring fenced fund with nominated key workers being a crucial part of the decision making process. Despite the current situation, progress towards redressing the balance should be undertaken with the incentive of encouraging all participants to actively engage in the process. We all need to accept that the expectations we have previously anticipated cannot be sustained under the present

What has changed in the past five years for Isle of Man residents for the better? (Please give examples)

arrangements.

New Bemahague (St Ninian's Lower School) secondary school.

Isle of Man College rebranded University College Isle of Man (UCM).

Ramsey Park Hotel opened.

Island's first dedicated breast cancer unit.

The various regeneration schemes.

Completion of the Mannin Hotel.

Continued investment in Heritage railways.

Manx Credit Union working party formed.

What has changed in the past five years for Isle of Man residents for the worse? (Please give examples)

Household financial situation.

Increased charges – Sewerage Rate, Vehicle Licences.

Increased and unexplained flight cancellations.

Is the Isle of Man too reliant on any one sector of its economy?

E-Gaming which can be so easily relocated.

If you feel it is, how would you further diversify the Manx economy?

Biotech.

Ethical Pharmaceuticals.

Develop better facilities for cruise liners.

More cycle events, on and off road.

Develop sea and sand activities. Diving, shark/seal watch, sand racing, power

Are you in favour of increased independence from the United Kingdom?

boats, wind surfing etc.

Not at the moment. We have enough to contend with. The current political chaos within the UK and Europe would not assist our case either. We currently have a very good relationship and I would not wish to see this affected at this point.

If you are, in which areas?

Are you in favour of parliamentary reform in the Isle of Man?

Yes.

If you are, which aspects of the parliamentary system would you change?

I am not in favour of popular elections for LegCo.

There has been a long and arduous debate over LegCo and its processes. I believe that anyone seeking election either to the House of Keys or the Legislative Council should at least have some all-round life experience. All candidates should have an independent body of support giving substantiation, including track record/testimonials. There should not be an automatic vote by MHK's from within their ranks where cronyism is possible.

Future debate as to reform should only take place once the key issues of our

Who should have the responsibility of electing the Chief Minister?

current dilemma are under due process.

Tynwald.

Are you in favour of the nationalisation of air and/or sea services to and from the Isle of Man?

No. The open skies policy on the whole works well. There are sometimes issues with delays and cancelled flights but that also happens with national airlines. Sea services are generally good but having only one operator does bring its own challenges.

We are currently not in any position to contemplate nationalisation of either air or sea services.

Are you in favour of renewable energy projects in Manx territorial waters?

Yes.

Tidal power is an environmentally friendly energy source. It is a renewable energy, does not emit any climate gases and requires very little space. More reliable than wind power, guaranteed two tides each day, ocean currents generate relatively more energy than air currents as ocean water is much denser than air which consequently applies greater force on the turbines. Also much less visual impact than wind turbines.

Are you in favour of an increase in

Yes.

**means testing for financial support
and/or services provided by
Government?**

In a democratic and diverse society it is imperative that everyone takes equal responsibility for the best use of financial resources. It is inevitable that there will be those who require additional support. However, to be fair and equitable to all who pay taxes and duties into Government it is likewise vital that those who require assistance from Government undergo a process to truly confirm the need of that support.

As part of the procedure an ongoing assessment should also be undertaken. Social Housing.

If you are, in which areas?