

Phil Gawne – Arbory, Castletown and Malew

Political Questions (2016)

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

I care passionately for our Island nation and its people and continue to have a strong desire to help improve our lives and promote all that is good about the Isle of Man. We still have much to do in ensuring fairness for all our people, there is a lot more we can do about strengthening the role which communities play in society and there is a massive cultural change required across government to speed up decision making and reduce cost. As the most experienced Minister seeking election in 2016, I want to play a part in delivering these important changes.

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

We need to do more to deliver a 'can do' approach to helping business grow our economy, we still have a big task internationally in defending the constitutional position of the Isle of Man, there is a significant cultural change required across government to speed up decision making and reduce cost, we have more to do in giving more say to communities and individuals in how our Island is run and we need to introduce greater fairness across society so that everyone has an equal chance in life.

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

The biggest issue the constituency faces is finding a way in which we can put the heart back into Castletown so that it can once more become the vibrant centre of the south. Close behind that would be improving the shabby and uncared for look of the centre of Ballasalla, pressing on with the new technology park at Ronaldsway, improving the decaying roads particularly in the rural areas and estates, more appropriate traffic calming measures for our town and villages and a skipper bus service linking up communities not served by current bus services.

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

The current administration has cut the £200m a year VAT deficit to £75m while maintaining reserves at over £1.4 billion, fought off constitutional attacks from the EU, OECD, USA and UK and positioned itself as a global leader in the financial transparency agenda, reduced the size of Government's work force by over 10% and streamlined its employment structures, made big steps in ensuring the long term sustainability of state pensions and further progress in ensuring public sector pensions are affordable and delivered a vast range of other improvements. The present administration has though been

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

too negative in its messaging, been seen as penny pinching and at times out of touch with public thinking. So I would say the government has handled the major challenges well on the whole but hasn't got everything right.

International matters will be very high on the list with continuing challenges to our international relations seeming very likely. Government needs to change and change quickly. We have talked for too long about a cultural change which will speed up decision making, allow staff to get on with the jobs they're paid for and reduce cost and bureaucracy but we still haven't delivered this. Our economy is still growing but we need to do much more to encourage economic growth. We have neglected the local economic sectors of construction, retail, food and hospitality for too long and need to be much more supportive. We also need to be bolder and more willing to take a risk in making decisions to attract new business to the Island. We need to reconnect people with politics, give more power to local communities to encourage their areas to become more vibrant, better looked after and more caring places to live. In all of the above we must strive for fairness so that nobody is disadvantaged by government or left

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

behind by society.

We will need to ensure that more Ministers share the responsibility for international affairs to ensure that there is a broader level of Ministerial experience at this level in the future. To address issues such as Brexit we will need to actively engage all stakeholders from both public and private sector to ensure all areas are adequately considered. We also need to urgently review all constitutional options for our future from full independence through to staying as we are, to see which offers the best future for the Island. Reforming a culture developed over generations will not be easy but there are simple measures which can speed up the process. We need to enhance and expand government's digital services, make government a single legal entity to ensure all parts of government are working together, urgently review all government's procedures and processes with a view to cutting out unnecessary bureaucracy and streamlining what's left, place a legal duty on the Chief Minister and his Minister's to defend and support civil servants who operate outside of their normal 'comfort zone' to get the job done. There's much more detail in my manifesto. With

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

regards to the economy there are some relatively simple things we can do to encourage and assist all sectors of the economy. Firstly we must stop talking about difficult times ahead, stop the universally unpopular and unfair charges and start talking up the Island. We need to give greater power and responsibility to each economic sector to support and promote their area, we need to place a statutory responsibility on all Departments to assist business where possible, we need to invest more in our decaying infrastructure to ensure business has a good environment in which to thrive and ensure that we regularly look to minimise bureaucracy and speed up decision making. In terms of community empowerment we need to give more power and responsibility to local government and local community groups to support their areas and community interests. We need a much more transparent and inclusive way of consulting on important issues to ensure that people can once again believe in the process.

It is important to remember that this is a very long term, generational matter which can not be dealt with in a five year term. It is important also to

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

remember that we have come along way since we decided to bring together under a unified Manx scheme the 17 UK controlled public sector pension schemes. We now have for the first time ever in the Isle of Man a scheme controlled by the Manx Government and an affordable but expensive plan to pay for future liability. There is more to be done but we must be careful not to overly penalise existing public sector workers for past decisions which with the benefit of hindsight we now see were mistakes.

The crucial area of change for the better is with government finances. While this may not have directly improved people's lives immediately it does mean that over the next five to ten years things should get better for us all, more quickly. After losing £200 million a year as a result of the changed VAT revenue sharing arrangement with the UK we have reduced our deficit in income over expenditure to just £75 million a year. Taking account of the money we make on our reserves each year we are approaching break even now and over the past five years our reserves only reduced by just less than £30 million. The work to reduce this deficit has resulted in cuts to some services and increases in

charges but the pressures faced in the Isle of Man are significantly smaller than those in the countries that surround us.

The other major improvement has been in relation to new equality legislation which will be of particular benefit to people with disabilities.

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

Across the board people are paying more for government services and receiving less. This is an inevitable consequence of having to adjust to reduced government income but also to the downturn in global economic circumstances. Looking for the silver lining to this public services cloud, we have fared much better than people in the UK and Éire, but it has certainly been a difficult five years for many in our community. The other change for the worse is the increasing certainty that economic uncertainty appears to be with us for some time to come. Five years ago there were still people who were predicting an economic bounce just around the corner but there are few people predicting this now.

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

Our economy continues to become more diverse each year so we are much less reliant on any one sector than we

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

have been in the past. That said I feel that we have neglected our 'local' economy a little over the last few years and need to increase our focus on supporting the key local sectors of retail, construction, hospitality and food. While these are not the main economic drivers for our country they have the potential to provide extra jobs and tax and help us feel good when they are thriving and we can afford to support them. We do though need to be continually pressing to find the next big sector for economic growth and the innovation in the IT sector clearly presents great opportunities for us.

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

I don't feel our economy is too reliant on one sector anymore, but we mustn't be complacent. Continued pursuit of new sectors and a greater drive to ensure the 'Can Do Economy' is a reality and not just an aspiration will be essential in the coming years. We also need to do more to encourage businesses and sector interests and groups themselves to lead on new business development in their areas.

I am in favour of reviewing all potential new constitutional positions while we wait to see what the UK eventually

If you are, in which areas?

decides to do about Brexit. It may be that options for increased independence compare favourably to the current status quo but until we have properly assessed the options we will not know.

My natural instinct is that decisions are better taken by the people most affected by those decisions so it makes sense for us to take full control over immigration and foreign affairs (the only areas currently under UK control) where possible. That said there will be many occasions where working with our larger neighbours will mean that we have a greater influence on global affairs.

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

Yes. I fully support the recommendations put forward by Lord Lisvane in his recent report.

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

Many of our parliamentary processes are old and creaking and desperately in need of reform. I believe in democracy and the right of people to decide who will represent them so the Legislative Council in my view should either be directly elected by the people or abolished and replaced by part time independent advisers who can bring career experiences to supporting

Who should have the responsibility of electing the Chief Minister?

Ministers fulfilling their duties. As a compromise though, I would be willing to support Lord Lisvane's suggestions of reducing the power and influence of the Legislative Council.

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

The Manx people should decide on who fills this important role.

I have worked tirelessly to try to improve both air and sea travel to and from the Isle of Man. In none of the exhaustive research I have reviewed within the Department of Infrastructure and the Strategic Sea Services working group have I seen any strong argument for full nationalisation of either air or sea routes. The research shows that nationalisation tends to lead to inflated costs and poorer services so unless a strong case can be made in support of nationalising services I would struggle to support it. Partial ownership of ships or aeroplanes may offer some solutions though.

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

Yes. I've been pushing hard to get legislation in place to allow us to develop our territorial sea for renewable energy projects. This could bring in tens of millions of pounds each year in

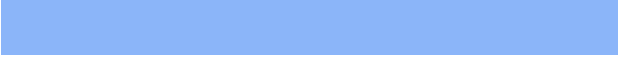
Are you in favour of an increase in means testing for financial support and/or services provided by Government?

government income so reducing the burden on hard pressed tax payers. Renewable energy will also allow us to retain tens of millions of pounds in our local economy rather than spending on fossil fuels from Russia and the Middle East. They would also help us fight the menace of climate change.

In my view there should ideally just be one means testing department in government and that should be the benefits and tax section of Treasury. Anything more introduces unnecessary complexity, bureaucracy and expense and so should be avoided. Ideally a system should be in place across government but managed through Treasury which allows the most needy, access to most services, those slightly better off to have slightly less support, right through to those who are very well off getting little or no support.

If you are, in which areas?

Public Sector Housing is an obvious area of concern but allowing those in most need to have free or reduced cost access to other government services such as sports facilities should be considered. We must always be careful though to ensure that it is always of greater benefit to people to be in work



rather than unemployed.