

North Douglas

NEWS

From your MHKs
**BILL HENDERSON
AND JOHN HOUGHTON**

and update

MAY 2006



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A message from your MHKs

Dear Constituent,

As your Members of the House of Keys we have pleasure in sending you this North Douglas Update and hope it finds you in good health. It has been a very busy time and a lot has happened since the last time we wrote to you. Major developments have taken place locally, nationally and internationally, coupled with the introduction of important new legislation, and we are grateful for all your letters and calls expressing your views and concerns on these and other topics.

Thank you for your support - we need this to keep going, and it is very much appreciated.

We have set out our latest constituency update to give a national overview and assessment of where the Island's current position sits in terms of our economy and the political scene. Then we turn to national politics and our individual input into that process. In the final section there is the all-important North Douglas Constituency Report illustrating the constituency work undertaken on your behalf and successes achieved for you.

Bill Henderson and John Houghton



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National Overview

Tynwald is one of the oldest parliaments in the world. Our unique political system is the bedrock of our stability and success, but so too is our unique independence from the United Kingdom, giving us the freedom to develop successfully in our own unfettered way in recent years, earning us justly deserved international recognition such as our (Standard and Poors) 'Triple A' credit rating.

These vital elements of our social and political make-up have gained us access to the international financial stage, and to other world markets in which we now operate and compete. This is vitally important for our economy and continued future survival in the new and expanding global village where we now find ourselves.

Unfortunately over the past two years the Island has had to face some of the worst challenges in its political history, causing unease and very real concern. Our community is angry, fed up and completely disenchanted with the current political manoeuvrings and calamities which have beset our Island. People feel socially and politically isolated as a result. There is a feeling of being ignored by our government, the community being set adrift, and the Council of Ministers being there in spite of, rather than for us. A pall of political fallout has been hanging over this Island masking and spoiling our special qualities and achievements.

It started with the Mount Murray scandal, and has continued with the MEA blowing us almost right out of the water. This has been interspersed with a disgraced Chief Minister who had to resign his position, child care inquiries following deaths of young people, IRIS meltdown, a DHSS bursting at the seams trying to cope and failing in areas such as the ophthalmic clinic with two-year waiting lists for simple eye operations, along with the sacking of loyal staff. Other much needed improvements, such as a digital hearing aid service, have been refused. This has been a recipe for near disaster.

Our community has suffered as a consequence, and feels disenfranchised. Spiralling energy and heating costs, with pensioners and folk who are on low incomes freezing because they can't afford their heating, have led to the very real issue of people facing fuel poverty. This has all added to our consternation.

We need a Tynwald and government of robust individuals, loyal first and foremost to their House of Keys oath with the ability and courage to stand firm in the face of challenges- a government not run in deference to outside influence - whether they be from the UK, Europe or elsewhere. We should not pander to external pressures.

Our UK, European and other international neighbours might respect us if we were more robust, challenging, forging more working relationships and better communications, being assertive with Whitehall in this respect and having better representation in Europe. Whatever happens in Europe, we still have to trade with these nations. Getting to know our neighbours on a detailed day-to-day working level is critical for the Island's successful development.

Our call here is - Europe certainly does not know enough about us, nor we about them. This situation needs to improve drastically as a matter of urgency, especially when it comes to our farming derogations.

The Island needs MHKs who have the courage of their convictions - not perceived nodding donkeys - but people who have the guts to make waves when necessary. People who are willing to stand up in Tynwald and say what needs to be said, and are committed to making the difference we need. Politicians who are stalwart enough not to be afraid of falling out with each other over what matters, but strong and confident to work together in the interests of this Island when we face serious challenges. Both your MHKs fully subscribe to this view.

We have to rid ourselves of the current stigmas, and work towards being proud of ourselves once again, of our Tynwald, our Island and all our other special qualities, which have helped make us successful. We intend to work towards that goal, and beyond, if re-elected.

Roundup

Island clocks up record achievements

Many developments and new legislation have primarily affected our economy, including the way in which government manages its fiscal arrangements: the new Isle of Man tax strategy, the International Monetary Fund finance sector assessment, and government business planning initiatives.

New legislation enacted includes: the Human Rights Act, Anti-Terrorism and Crime Act, Data Protection Act and the Income Tax Act, which makes way for tax credits for the less well-off. We also saw the introduction of the Matrimonial Proceedings Bill, which makes new provisions to tackle domestic violence and offers solutions to property matters. Legislation currently on the way through the House of Keys includes: the Employment Bill 2006, the Income Tax Amendment Bill 2006 and the Agricultural Marketing Bill 2006.

We have also witnessed the Queen presiding over Tynwald, Prince Philip opening the new gas fired power station at Pulrose, the new Southlands care of the elderly complex and the opening of the new Noble's Hospital. This year saw the Island's most successful business and finance year ever with a budget reporting an estimated revenue collection of nearly £550 million with a surplus of £12 million. These are all major milestones in the Island's development.



Government Offices and Council of Ministers

This success is down to our community. Everyone has played some part in this, individually or corporately, and that needs to be recognised.

Paying the price of success

The Mount Murray inquiry has finished, and has given rise to some highly complex recommendations for the government to grapple with. Bill was instrumental in passing a successful amendment in Tynwald which caused the Council of Ministers to take the recommendations of the Mount Murray report back to Council and devise ways of addressing them - the report was otherwise perilously close to being voted out by government.

Waste management charges have also come to the fore with the advent of the all-Island incinerator and, again, your MHKs judged this type of charging to be unfair and voted against its introduction. Luckily, this government initiative led by Minister John Rimington has been thrown out. Government was defeated in spectacular fashion. However, the Council of Ministers made a serious political error in attempting to bring forward a recycling strategy alongside a waste charging policy. This should have been subject to a separate initiative. We both feel strongly about recycling and this subject is set to return to Tynwald until we have the desired process in place - one that is appropriate for the community.

The Island is still suffering from a major shortage of first time buyer affordable housing and accommodation. This is having its own effect on our constituency, both for constituents requiring accommodation, and the Department of Local Government and the Environment pushing to have land rezoned for housing at Watterson Lane, Ballanard Road and the old GPO site at Linden Grove. The outcome of these areas will be discussed later in the Constituency Report.

Importantly, we have seen the introduction of the tax credit system. However, we still feel government is not passing on the benefits of our strong economy in a more meaningful way to the community. Yes, we can all benefit from the new hospital and the new power station, but the needy and vulnerable members of our society could be receiving a better deal, and the recognition they deserve. As much as these projects are needed, and it is marvellous that they are there for us, they make little difference to a family struggling to make ends meet every week.

Government (Council of Ministers) is now slowly starting to recognise the huge impact of ever rising fuel costs. This recognition is demonstrated by way of £3.5 million of additional money in this year's budget to assist people who are in receipt of tax credits/personal allowance credits. Both your MHKs have been campaigning hard for assistance in this area, and are glad that along with that of others, our efforts are starting to pay off. We need to continue to campaign for this welcome progress so it benefits even more those who need assistance most.

Internationally, the most important issues affecting the Island are undoubtedly the European tax directives concerned with the exchange of information on Island deposits. The international trade organisation, the OECD consisting of all the major industrial nations, and the EU maintain an interest in offshore low tax jurisdictions. To this end we have now seen the introduction of the zero rated company tax which applies a level playing field, and the introduction of exchange of information. Both these

measures help meet our international obligations. The 2006 Budget report confirms that the introduction of these proposals have not, in overall terms, had an adverse impact on the economy.

It is becoming ever apparent that the Island must work towards a renegotiated position regarding its independence, and become less dependant on the UK. We must work towards representing ourselves better in European and other international forums, rather than be represented by third parties (UK) who have not been looking after our best interests lately. We need to consolidate and strengthen our European and international standing - we need to be able to 'box clever' and look after our own corner in a more direct way.

There is no doubt that the Island needs a renegotiated position with the UK as we do not want a repeat of the situation nearly six years ago when the Edwards Team arrived unannounced from Whitehall to look into our tax affairs. Even the Chief Minister was not informed.

The Isle of Man Budget - 2006

Redressing the balance and helping to restore public confidence

"An extraordinary budget considering all that we have been through. This will help readdress the balance even with the MEA, and places the Island in a much stronger position".

Principally our Island's annual economic health check reveals that we have had the best ever annual return - over half a billion pounds in revenue. A record achievement - approximately 10% growth on last year.

This is above predicted levels and delivers a £12 million surplus, a £27 million operating balance and a planned £519 million spend for public services - well up on last year. This is backed up with healthy reserves - now a record breaking £1 billion plus.

Considering all that the Island has been through over the last 24 months, including the MEA issue, we should be proud of this achievement. But that is not all - the projections for this year are also set against the introduction of the new tax strategy and demonstrate we can very ably deal with its implications. However, this will require close monitoring as we cannot be complacent about this or the impact on businesses, especially small firms.

Nearly all government departments have received generous increases on last year as a result. This has to be welcomed. On average, government spending is nearly 10% up on last year. National income per head of population

is now 106% of the UK equivalent. We are well ahead in comparison with our Island neighbours in terms of public service commitments and, in that context, are setting a high standard by anyone's estimation.

We note and welcome large cash injections for the Education Department and Home Affairs. The education of our children is an investment for our and their future. We may complain, but our education system and student grants scheme are the envy of many. The student grant system must be protected and not be subject to any cuts.

Community safety is paramount. It is everyone's right to be and feel safe. Our police force requires reorganisation getting officers out of their cars and offices and on to the beat - and rostered for the busy times, not banking hours. More needs to be spent on CCTV - it does work, and more rehabilitation initiatives are required to help offenders change the pattern many have become used to.



Willaston School crossing - safety measures working

One of the most important initiatives recognising rising fuel and energy bills has to be the additional £3.5 million towards the tax credit/personal allowance credit, and also the removal of certain benefits from the tax net. This is excellent news and will be of significant benefit to nearly 6,000 people in receipt of low incomes. Both MHK's have been pushing hard and continuously for this kind of initiative.



New Nobles Hospital

There are some noteworthy initiatives in this financial plan such as corporate tax capping - a bold move which we fully support. The economy needs to be constantly energised and competitive with other jurisdictions. We must be entrepreneurial and innovative to ensure our economy continues to thrive and is in a position to continue to commit to our public services.

We need to continue to diversify the economy as we are doing with filming, e-commerce and the new satellite business. Your MHKs are constantly supporting diversification. Corporate tax capping is fine, but it is heavily weighted to the finance industry.

We also see 'fat cat' tax capping proposals. What this scheme sets out to achieve has some merit, but there are strong moral counter arguments.

Campaigning for fairer assistance to compensate for the impact fuel increases are having.

Bill has been campaigning for the people who fall into what he calls the 'grey area trap' - people on low or fixed incomes who qualify for no assistance. This enhanced tax credit initiative begins to rectify that and is to be applauded, but it has to be the start of a continuous process of help. Fuel bills are set to continue to rocket. No doubt the latest UK energy price rises will affect prices here.

John has been campaigning for an energy rebate scheme for people on low incomes, and put a motion to Tynwald to highlight the plight of those struggling to come to terms with large increases in their energy bills. We've got the money, this budget is proof of that, so again we will continue to pursue the Treasury Minister. "Let this be the start of a continuous process of assistance. People don't want hand outs, they just want what's fair".

It seems that because we have been doing so well and getting used

to a 'feel-good factor', a departmental spend culture has developed. A culture which sees vehicle fleets replaced every couple of years or so being one example. Is this necessary? Vehicles today will give a good 10 years or more service life quite easily.

Bill made an urgent call for a cross-governmental working party to be set up, which the Treasury Minister has accepted. We don't want any more health cuts. Of course we have to spend, but we need to cut out the 'departmental empire fat cat spending culture' that has been developing over the last five years.

Beneath the veneer of success and achievements so far and somewhat hidden, are persistent and progressive problems which require more direct, forthright and innovative approaches.

Government economic planning needs to connect directly with the community in a more meaningful way, especially for those earning less than the national average earnings, and also those who are not economically active, such as our pensioners, those with health problems, family commitments - such as looking after dependent relatives - and other problems which prevent them engaging in full-time employment.

The stark reality is if we have an estimated population of 76,000 people, with approximately 30,000 working, then that leaves 46,000 people who are, in the main, not working for the above reasons (this does however include youngsters). 15,000 of the working population earn less than the national average wage of £480 a week. 7,000 of those earn under £300 a week, so we have the large proportion of our population not doing as well as they could, or should be, in comparison with the 'feel-good factor' the new budget attempts to instil.

Both John and Bill are fully committed and will continue to campaign and work through Tynwald and beyond the forthcoming election, if returned, to sound community principles which ensure that budgets such as this connect with the less well-off in a more meaningful and beneficial way, and provide a more realistic minimum wage.

State pensions are not rising with inflation. In fact, the State pension in the last few years has not received a full inflationary boost. As a result, pensioners are now getting less for their pension. This must be addressed in a forthright way. Again, both Bill and John are committed to this principle, and will campaign for fairer pensions through Tynwald.

Looking at the budget as a whole, it is, at first glance, excellent. Looking at it in close-up however, we can begin to see the holes, especially with reference to the areas we have outlined. We can't help but feel it is weighted towards the financial sector of our society - private and corporate. We must strike the right balance. We must re-engage fully with our community.



Nobles Park

North Douglas Constituency Report

Our Constituency Community

The constituency of North Douglas is one of the largest in the Isle of Man in terms of population, and is certainly very busy socially and in terms of constituency work. We have nearly 4,000 postal addresses. The constituency boundary runs from the junction of Johnny Watterson's Lane with the Mountain Road at Cronk ny Mona, and runs east down the TT Course to Sign Post Corner, down to Governor's Bridge, then on to Victoria Road as far as its junction with Marathon Road, and then southerly along Marathon Road to its junction at Broadway and then right, up to St Ninian's, over the crossroads, back to the junction of Ballanard Road and Watterson Lane - Willaston Corner, and up to Cronk ny Mona.

The constituency also includes Hightonwood Hill Estate, Ballanard Road, the Abbey Woods, Castleward Green and up to and just past Castleward Green to the little bridge which is the boundary with the Parish of Onchan.

We are home to the Island's Police HQ, the TT Grandstand and several churches, namely: St Ninian's, St Andrew's, Willaston Methodist, St Joseph's and the Greater World Spiritualist Church. Other important facilities are Cronk y Berry Primary School, Willaston Primary School, the Special Needs Education Service, Isle of Man College, Social Services special needs units - Radcliffe Villas and Eastcliffe. We also have two of the largest nursing/residential homes in the Island, these being Glenside and Elder Grange, and the provision of sheltered housing at Ian Cannell Court and the Cubbon House. Sports clubs such as Corinthians FC and Douglas Royals FC are present in addition to rugby and cricket clubs and Douglas Snooker Club on Ballaquayle Road.

The Cat With No Tail public house is at Governor's Hill and the Manor Hotel is in the heart of Willaston. There are also many shops, three sub post offices, several fast food outlets and, of course, Noble's Park, the Island's largest public amenity area, and the Island's correction centre, the prison.

North Douglas has some of the Island's largest community estates - Willaston, Governor's Hill and Cronk y Berry. Our community police station for North Douglas is based at Willaston, opposite the shops.

We are also home to some very worthy charities - the Manx Foundation for the Physically Disabled, the Manx Lupus Support Group and the Joey Dunlop Foundation, which plans to establish an injured rider's lodge at Victoria Road.

We welcome any new residents to the constituency and those of you who have recently moved to the Island. We also extend a special welcome to those of you who have just moved to your new homes at Linden Court, Victoria Road, and Fenella Court, Willaston.

The Role of an MHK

MHK stands for Member of the House of Keys, the popularly elected branch of the Manx Legislature, similar to the House of Commons in the UK, which primarily deals with legislation and the laws of the land. Being a 'Keys Member' gives an MHK membership of Tynwald - the Manx Parliament - where the upper house, the Legislative Council (not popularly elected) and the Keys come together once a month to debate important national issues, national policy and monetary matters.

Tynwald is the oldest continuous parliament in the world - dating back more than a thousand years. It is very special and unique to the Island ensuring Ellan Vannin is well known throughout the world.

An MHK's job is extremely varied from core constituency work, considering and debating legislation in the House of Keys, to a wider parliamentary role in Tynwald, representing the Island and scrutinising government (Council of Ministers) policy.

Constituency MHKs - Locally and Nationally

Both your MHKs firmly believe that when it comes to our constituency, it is vital to work together as a team. This enables us to operate in a consistent, determined and co-ordinated manner, which has proved to be a very successful strategy for North Douglas. Difficult problems require double the effort!

No better example could be given than fielding all the 'gas complaints' following the gas conversions within the constituency, and working in close liaison with senior management of Manx Gas, the Office of Fair Trading, and the government Health and Safety Inspectorate to ensure your problems were quickly and effectively resolved.

However, constituents are reminded that they are free to contact either MHK on an individual basis, and your concerns will remain completely confidential, the MHK working for you on an independent and individual basis. Your MHK is there to help you and is easily contactable.

National politics is one important aspect of our role, but this is built on the base of the constituency and your support. Our constituents, and the constituency of North Douglas, are very important to us.

We are there for you, not in spite of you. If you have an individual problem, concern or larger issue, please do not hesitate to contact either of us. Please keep in touch so that we may continue to represent your views and speak up for North Douglas, Douglas Town and the Island as a whole.

Both MHKs have approached constituency and national issues with vigour and determination when representing residents' individually, North Douglas as a whole, Douglas Town or the Island. Thousands of letters, faxes, emails, documents and reports have been compiled and prepared on your behalf to progress these matters.

Hundreds of hours have been spent meeting ministers, chief executives, senior officials of government departments, councillors, senior officers of Douglas Corporation and other agencies including the police, in trying to resolve problems, achieve improvements, and bring about changes.

This has also included many 'on site' meetings, getting the feel of a problem first-hand, enabling a more effective solution to be worked out, and so cut through 'red tape'. It also requires media campaigns and press releases - to keep you informed, to put the pressure on and get the job done. It is not a matter of 'grabbing the headlines', but an integral part of achieving our objectives for you as a constituent, or for the wider national interest.

Residents individually, residents' groups and associations have all been effectively supported. A good way to arrive at a solution to a problem is to use a co-ordinated and joint approach - people power! This has included petitions on various issues such as law and order, the opening of our North Douglas Community police station, and road safety problems such as we have seen at Hightonwood Hill and Governor's Hill.

We have also worked with residents' groups and associations at planning reviews. Groups of employees have also been effectively represented such as the fire officers at departmental and parliamentary level.

Your MHKs in the House of Keys and Tynwald

Running in parallel with this, we are acutely aware that we have also been elected as the constituency's choice for national politics, which forms an equally important part of our role. In this respect we have followed our own individual set of political priorities addressing a wide range of issues.

This has been achieved, in the main, by placing hundreds of parliamentary questions in both the Keys and Tynwald, by our own Private Members Bills/legislation and placing motions to Tynwald which bring about national debate on subjects, and can result in a government department having to change its policies. Also, by contributing to important national debates such as the Budget and government policy, your MHKs can put forward their perspective (including your views) and, indeed, on many occasions, help to influence the outcome of a debate or future policies of government.

Inevitably, in the national arena, both MHKs have joined forces in some instances when working on Private Members' issues on your

behalf, and for the Island, and have achieved considerable success in many areas.

We have achieved:

- Improvements to Law and order problems
- Improvements to Road safety issues
- Ensured a full inquiry and investigation into the standards of child care for children under DHSS supervision
- Saved the Hyperbaric Chamber from closure
- Caused the introduction of the Public Order Act enabling police officers to tackle difficult and unruly behaviour
- Pushed for the use of Anti-Social Behaviour Orders to tackle young offenders
- Saved Silverdale Woods
- Brought about Compensation for soldiers and civilians who were prisoners of war of the Japanese during World War II
- Supported local staff for jobs
- Worked towards better employment legislation and employee rights
- Blocked the abolishment of work permits - Bill led this campaign
- The introduction of the 'Noise Bill' - to combat the curse of noisy neighbours (John)
- Blocked Health Service cuts

Health Service

Health issues have always figured as a large part of our work. Pressuring the DHSS to bring down waiting lists for procedures such as hip replacements and eye operations, and to introduce a digital hearing aid service are but a few of the problems and issues we have addressed in this important area. We should have a first class health service able to meet the needs of the community. Everyone is paying into the 'fund' and deserves the service a modern government should deliver. We will continue to campaign for this at every opportunity.

Health Cuts - a public scandal!

Both MHKs were shocked at the revelations revealed in a secret Council of Ministers document which confirmed that at a Council meeting on the 5th of January this year, that Council had agreed to the DHSS seeking approval to close wards, cut ITU and coronary care beds and slash funds to other areas.

Bill placed an emergency question in the House of Keys to force the Health Minister, Steve Rodan MHK, to account for what was about to happen. Due to this and mounting public concern and outrage, along with political pressure and professional pressure from hospital staff, we managed to put the brakes on this and secure a public commitment that there would be no ward closures or bed cuts. A victory for common sense.

Both your MHKs are fully committed to ensure, as far as they can, that this fiasco does not reoccur

John Houghton and Bill Henderson were the only two MHKs to vote for the retention of the birch.

Locally - keeping in touch with you

Constituency Drop-in Facility

Bill and John operate a weekly 'surgery' for the constituency, which usually operates every first and third Thursday of the month from 10am to 12pm at the Willaston Methodist Church. In the evening we usually operate the surgery every second and fourth Thursday of the month from the Willaston police station - next door - in the Police Federation side from 6pm to 7pm. This important facility is central in the constituency and easily accessible for parking. During Thursday daytime, Douglas Corporation operates a rent collection service at this time, and the ladies of the church run an excellent weekly stall with good quality clothing, household items and many other bargains.

Our North Douglas community police officers regularly call in, as do our councillors. The surgery provides an informal and friendly environment to discuss issues and problems with the appropriate agencies at hand. However, this is not the only way to see or speak to your MHK, especially if you can't attend any of the weekly surgeries, as you will see below.

This has now developed into a very important service for constituents and we believe it is the only one of its kind in the Island.

Communicating the information

We try to keep in touch by sending out newsletters to the whole constituency, as well as newsletters for individual areas when we are addressing area-specific problems. It is also crucial to keep you informed using the Island's news agencies by way of media releases and making public comments. We also contact constituents via email or personally by telephone or letter to keep them informed of any developments following requests for help or advice.

Additionally, we make ourselves available through having meetings with constituents on a personal basis at their own homes. Both MHKs regularly call round to see people. Many other constituency meetings have been held during 'office hours' at Government Office.

Larger meetings have also been organised such as the recent residents' meeting at the hospitality suite at the TT grandstand to discuss government proposals for the housing estates to be built at Watterson Lane and Ballanard Road.

Contacting your MHKs

Both MHKs have made it clear from the outset of their election to the House of Keys that they can be contacted at any time by constituents. This is a very important message for us to convey. You are free to contact your MHK at any time if you need to discuss an issue, or are seeking advice, guidance or help. We are there for you and this is part of our role. Many of you have contacted us in the past, and continue to do so, which we welcome.

Your MHKs:

John Houghton - personal profile



John Houghton was the former sub-postmaster at Willaston from 1980 - 2000. He was elected to the House of Keys in 1996 and is 46 years of age. He lives at 3, Willow Close, Birch Hill, Onchan. He is married to Sue and has two children.

John is a former commandant of the Special Constabulary and his total service amounted to 18 years.

He is chairman of the Willaston Youth Club, based at Willaston Primary School, and treasurer of the Isle of Man Karate Club, of which he has been a member for over 30 years.

John was recently invited to act as a trustee of the recently formed Friends of the Manx Diabetes Centre.

Bill Henderson - personal profile



Bill Henderson is 44 years of age and lives at No 7, Oakdale, Governor's Hill, with his wife Helen and son Alexander Finlo. He is a professionally trained psychiatric nurse and health service manager, seeing 18 years service in the DHSS.

Bill helped set up and develop the nursing division of the Transport and General Workers Union where he was the nursing representative for 10 years. He is now the TGWU parliamentary representative and maintains a keen interest in employment legislation and industrial relations issues.

He is also committed to improving our health and social services to better meet the needs of our community, especially the vulnerable and less well-off, our elderly citizens and specialist needs groups such as diabetics, lupus sufferers and people with respiratory problems.

He is a strong supporter of the Island's natural heritage and conservation. The Manx culture, Island heritage, history and language are also especially important to him.



Laureston

In the community, Bill is chairman of Cronk y Berry Youth Club and the Manx Heartbeat Appeal for Noble's Hospital Coronary Care Unit and the Broadgreen Hospital Liverpool. He is also on the committee of the Manx Foundation for the Physically Disabled and vice-chairman of the Manx Rivers Improvement Association.

Both your MHKs gave up their respective careers to work as full time politicians working from the Tynwald Members Office at Government Offices Monday to Friday. However the role of an MHK regularly involves evening and weekend work.

Our Councillors

There are six councillors of Douglas Corporation responsible for the two council wards that make up North Douglas. Councillors are key local authority players in the development of services for the Douglas ratepayers. Our two council wards are - Athol Ward for north of Glencrutchery Road to Governor's Hill, keeping within the general North Douglas boundaries, and Victoria Ward for south of the Glencrutchery Road, although Victoria Ward extends into the constituency of East Douglas.

At present, your councillors for Athol Ward are: Mr I Faragher, Mrs D Kinrade and Mr M Gelling, and for Victoria Ward: Mrs L Ramsay, Mrs R Chattel and Mr G Chattel.

Douglas councillors are responsible for general town management, all public sector housing, and services such as waste disposal and recreational areas for the town. We contact councillors and staff at the Town Hall on a regular basis, and many successful meetings have been held with them.



Cronk y Berry School

Major Constituency Issues

The constituency has been dominated by problems brought about by the gas conversion project. This was a bold initiative that was supposed to bring a stable, dependable price regime, not affected by oil price hikes. Also, road safety issues have featured regularly.

Gas Conversion Programme

What began as an excellent idea for the people of Douglas and the surrounding areas, including Onchan and Braddan, fast turned into a nightmare for many customers.

The concept of natural gas for the Island, a supply not subject to the rigors of the volatile international oil markets, was seen as highly desirable. That was the government spin designed to gain support for the initiative.

Unfortunately, that's where it ended. North Douglas was the first area to suffer the 'gas conversion'. We were the guinea pigs. The flood of calls for help to both MHKs from residents who had their gas cut off and left high and dry with no heat or hot water, was nothing short of a scandal. This caused a huge and massive amount of constituency work. A special contact arrangement with the government Health and Safety Inspectorate, Manx Gas and the Office of Fair Trading had to be organised to ensure speedy resolutions to these unacceptable domestic situations.

The Office of Fair Trading was heavily involved in this with John Houghton leading at the time as chairman of the Island's consumer affairs watchdog. Ultimately, the contractor involved in this programme - Primeshade - was struck off the CORGI health and safety standards register.

One serious matter outstanding is to address the problem of gas flues fitted many years ago - mainly for gas fires - where it was discovered, during conversion, that some flues were below modern CORGI standards. This meant, through no fault of the conversion project, the engineers brought in by Manx Gas to progress the conversion scheme could not reconnect these appliances due to health and safety implications.

We have managed to resolve most of these problems, especially for the residents of Governor's Hill, but problems still exist and it was only recently we managed to have a gas fire re-installed for a constituent! If you are still having problems with any of your appliances, please contact either Bill or John.

We will continue to fight for residents who are still suffering as a consequence of this blight, which is evident throughout the Eastern conversion area.

On top of all this, we then had to suffer the MEA fiasco, which has had a further impact on fuel prices.

General Road Safety

"North Douglas is a large, busy residential area with some of the Island's main arterial roads cutting through it".

North Douglas is a very busy area when it comes to traffic. We have some of the Island's main arterial roads cutting straight through the constituency, or around our borders. We have Watterson Lane taking traffic from Douglas and the north of the Island, not to mention our own constituents from Governor's Hill, Cronk y Berry and Willaston trying to access this busy highway. This road sees 10,000 traffic movements a day. The junction at Hailwood Avenue, Governor's Hill onto Watterson Lane sees nearly 1,000 traffic movements during the peak hours in the morning and evening.

Glencrutchery Road takes traffic from Onchan and the north of the Island as well as traffic coming off the Mountain Road. Conversely it takes much of the traffic exiting Douglas in the evening.

Another problem generated by these routes is that much of the commuter traffic uses 'cut throughs' to reach their destinations. Hailwood Avenue at Governor's Hill, Snaefell Road in Willaston and Marathon Road near Victoria Crescent and 'Olympia', are classic examples. These non-residential increased traffic movements heighten the risk to road safety both for traffic and pedestrians.

Parking Problems

Compounding this are parking problems. People use our constituency as a car park while they are at work, thereby causing congestion. This, in turn, causes parking problems for residents, along with road safety concerns as visibility is hindered, especially at junctions. We have also experienced acute problems when one or two uncaring individuals have parked multiple vehicles in and around their properties. Abandoned vehicles remain an issue we tackle as soon as we are notified.

Road Safety

It has become so busy, that following repeated requests from constituents and ourselves to the police and Department of Transport we have been forced to submit questions to the House of Keys to try to have these issues addressed.

We also have to endure the 'couldn't care less drivers' - those who are either speeding in 'home zones' or participating in dangerous driving practices.

Both your MHKs are very aware of these problems, both personally and from the reports you have given us. We have been out on our own 'road traffic duty', monitoring traffic movements, especially at

peak times, to see for ourselves the very real problems.

Road Safety - What has been achieved?

This in turn has led to many meetings with officials, the Minister for Transport and the police. As a result of pressure from us and other MHKs, we have seen the development of the 'Home Zones' for Douglas, and especially for our constituency, which have undoubtedly helped to calm down the speed of traffic. Also, we pushed to have measures put in place for our constituency schools, which have now been implemented.

We have achieved:

- Police undertaking speed control monitoring from time to time which has been successful
- Improved road markings and signage
- Community meetings for areas of North Douglas where we arranged for police and officials from the Department of Transport to be present. This enabled them to hear your concerns which were put directly to them
- Pushed for the introduction of 'home zones'
- Introduction of 'disc zone' parking areas for the constituency. More work is needed to help solve parking problems, which we will continue to undertake
- Busy junction improvements

Two of the biggest successes

Two of the biggest successes for the constituency have been the completion of two major and expansive road works schemes: the installation of a 'roundabout system' at the junction of Johnny Watterson's Lane and Ballanard Road (Willaston Corner) which was formerly a very dangerous junction with only halt sign markings to manage the busy traffic flows; and the road widening scheme at St Ninian's/Ballaquayle Road with a bus lay-by and new zebra crossing. This has improved traffic movements and road safety considerably as this was once a dangerous and congested 'pinch point' where the road was just not wide enough for three lanes of traffic, and no zebra crossing for children attempting to access St Ninians High School.



New roundabout at Willaston corner



St Ninians

At a recent meeting with the Minister and officials of the Department of Transport, we have again managed to see light at the end of the tunnel with regards to our long-running campaign to have road improvements and better driver visibility for Johnny Watterson's Lane. Some of these improvements are now scheduled for 2007.

These will affect the junction of Campion Way at Abbeyfields, the junction of Hailwood Avenue at Governor's Hill, and the junction at Cronk y Berry. There will also be the long awaited and much needed footway from 'The Cat' to Cronk ny Mona. We will keep you informed of developments as and when they are scheduled to commence.

A new pelican crossing is now planned for the north side of the junction of Mountain View. Again much needed, and something we have been pushing for, spurred on by complaints from nearby residents and the general public. We are also pursuing further improvements to the junction of Hightonwood Hill estate.

TT and MGP Races

Road closures during these periods can cause serious problems to the residents who are 'locked in' or 'locked out', as a result of road racing and other events. North Douglas has developed and expanded considerably over the years, mainly within the TT Course - Willaston in the 50s, and Glen Park, Cronk y Berry, New Cronk y Berry and Governor's Hill during the 60s to 90s. This has meant that more and more people are affected by these closures.

This has caused serious problems at times and, to this end, John headed the campaign to have 'road traffic crossing corridors' put in place which we now enjoy when there is no racing or practising taking place. This came to a head when both your MHKs met with race officials and officials from the Department of Transport. They placed relevant parliamentary questions, and now we have seen virtually the last of keeping roads closed all day when it is perfectly obvious that an event can't be run because of inclement weather.

Manx Radio is being better utilised now as a result, with frequent public notices to advise when crossing corridors will be open, or advance notice if an event is cancelled. Although there are still problems, these measures have brought a considerable amount of much needed relief during periods of road closures.

Constituency Local Areas

Willaston

Homes refurbishment - windows, central heating, guttering and weatherboards.

Willaston has been neglected in the past. People were being frozen out of their own homes because of rotting windows which, in some cases, were literally falling out. We were all told we would never see the much needed double glazing UPVC window project in our lifetimes. We would never see central heating. We would be a long time waiting for guttering and fascia replacement programmes.



Chief Constable Culverhouse outside our North Douglas Police Station

Both your MHKs could see the situation was so desperate that people could not go on living in these conditions. We set about conducting a major campaign to have the window replacement programme achieved. This included numerous meetings with Douglas Corporation and the Department of Local Government - from whom the corporation needed to borrow the money- along with writing letters and mounting press campaigns.

It was a big undertaking, but has paid off now with the whole estate benefiting from draught-free windows and the additional insulation they provide. Also, for many people, they can now open their windows for the first time, as the old wooden frames had to be painted shut to keep the draughts out. Ballanard Court windows are due to be replaced this year.



Willaston

But that's not where it stopped. Your MHKs also said that when the windows were done, then they would push for the central heating programme for the estate. This has now commenced and is progressing well. An arrangement was struck with the corporation to use oil fired central heating for most houses, instead of gas. This was achieved as gas prices had started to escalate.

Street lighting and footpaths - John and Bill have worked hard to organise a systematic improvement to street lighting and footpaths for the estate. This is now well in hand, with many areas now completed. However, there are still sections to be done and this will be pursued to ensure it does happen.

Willaston School - We now have in place the much needed traffic calming measures for our children's safety, together with a bus shelter.

Willaston Police Station - This building was originally left derelict and empty with no likelihood of ever reopening. The Minister for Home Affairs (Allan Bell MHK at that time) accused John and Bill of trying to bring back policing of the past. We had other ideas - and so did you!

The residents organised a petition and we mounted a political pressure campaign. Jointly, working with you, we eventually managed to have our constituency police station reopened. John placed a resolution to Tynwald. We were initially promised a sergeant and 10 men to work from the station. Community policing was what we wanted with our 'own dedicated officers' who would get to know the area and its people. Although the original promise did not materialise, we have an operational station with well known and respected officers based there.

We have continued to push for better staffing at the station and as a result we will soon be seeing additional dedicated 'North Douglas community police officers'.

Traffic calming and road safety - Both MHKs over the years have been asking and campaigning for improved road traffic calming initiatives, especially for Willaston. Residents are only too aware that the estate is used as a 'cut through' at busy times and during college hours. This increases traffic movements and dangerous driving levels dramatically.

Home Zones are now in place along with 'speed humps' which do help, although we had to push to get the additional smaller 'speed humps' put in place for the longer roads. There is more work to be done in this area as there are still the 'few' who have no respect for our safety and especially for our children's safety. This will require further meetings with the police and the Department of Transport to develop ways of minimising these problems as far as possible.

Governor's Hill, Abbeyfields and Cronk y Berry

Our constituents here have had their own set of community problems regularly addressed by your MHKs. These include:

- Road traffic safety
- Road adoption - Governor's Hill and Abbeyfields (ongoing)
- Green areas adoption
- Lakes adoption
- Removal of abandoned vehicles
- Poor drainage
- Flooding
- Adequate bus shelters
- Safe and adequate footpaths
- Road maintenance programmes and white line repainting
- Road closure problems during racing events
- The positioning of the children's playground



Busy junction - Hailwood Avenue / Watterson Lane

Until recently, the roads in Governor's Hill and Abbeyfields were not adopted. This means they were still in the ownership of the original builder of the estates, therefore the Department of Transport could not maintain them - it was up to the contractor. It transpired that there had been protracted talks between the Department of Transport and the building contractors to have the roads adopted. This situation became intractable. As a result, your MHKs mounted a major campaign which included several meetings with all parties, to drive through a road adoption agreement for Governor's Hill, between Dandara and the Department of Transport. The Department of Transport is now responsible for all road maintenance on this estate. This also necessitated questions being raised in the House of Keys to ensure an agreement had been reached.

Abbeyfields - Roads still remain un-adopted and are the responsibility of the estate builder - J G Kelly. More work is required, and John and Bill are progressing this. There may be some good news soon.

Following the disastrous flooding which constituents experienced at The Laurels, Governor's Hill, and intervention from both John and Bill, it became apparent that the green areas and lakes were still in the private ownership of Dandara. It has never been agreed that Douglas Corporation adopt these areas from Dandara and become responsible for their maintenance and upkeep. Currently, Douglas Corporation undertakes the upkeep on a goodwill basis, and they do a very good job for us.

Both North Douglas MHKs have been heavily involved in protracted and continuing negotiations between Dandara and the corporation to resolve this matter. There will also be further negotiations with Dandara to provide improved and appropriate drainage measures to prevent the disasters of the past ever happening again. These talks will continue, and both MHKs have vowed to ensure that these measures are put in place.

Road traffic safety predominates in this part of the constituency. As a result, both MHKs have been working towards improvements. These efforts have paid off and we have achieved:

The organisation of residents' meetings with the Department of Transport officials and the police - so they could hear observations first-hand

- A road safety crossing patrol at Cronk y Berry School and pedestrian 'crash barriers' placed nearby
- Continuing maintenance of road markings, ensuring they are clear to motorists
- Spot checks by police with speed monitoring equipment
- Traffic and pedestrian crossing corridor from the junction of Hailwood Avenue and the TT Course to Signpost Corner when *there is no racing*
- Arrangement of traffic vehicle movement counts to assess further improvement requirements - especially for Cronk y Berry Avenue

Hightonwood Hill, The Abbey Woods, Castleward Green and Ballanard Road

In this part of the constituency we have also had to face road traffic safety issues at Willaston Corner (junction of Ballanard Road/Watterson Lane). Prior to improvement, this was a dangerous, busy junction to negotiate, especially at rush hour times with much of the traffic using this route for commuting to and from work.

Our efforts here have paid off with the introduction of the new mini roundabout system and pedestrian crossing. Not perfect, but it certainly has helped. More thought needs to be put into the pedestrian crossing (including lighting at night time) which we are currently working on with the Department of Transport.

Other road traffic safety improvements can also be seen: improved road line markings and visibility and especially at Hightonwood Hill Estate junction to Watterson Lane. Again, this was subject to joining forces with the residents and launching an estate-wide petition.



Hightonwood Hill junction with Watterson Lane

There are still problems to be tackled though - speeding on Johnny Watterson's Lane and from Willaston Corner out towards Abbeylands. The advent of the new hospital has compounded this issue, which we warned the Department of Transport about.

We have faced major planning applications from the Department of Local Government and the Environment (DLGE) - a 200+ unit housing estate for Ballanard Road and the same for Watterson Lane. John and Bill joined forces with the local residents to mount an extraordinary offensive against the applications, as they were seen as far too ambitious for the area in question. The planning appeals were heard at the Villa Marina over several days.

This paid off to a large extent, and we had the plans for Ballanard Road turned down. The Johnny Watterson's housing project will go ahead, but with refinements. Again, we will need to watch the development of these plans very carefully as we need to ensure that the blocks of flats planned are placed further into the development and do not overlook the properties in the Abbeywoods.

Playing fields

It is most important we ensure that the playing fields aspect at the northerly end of this development go ahead. This is something we have been campaigning for a very long time. It is essential for our area. Also of note are the estate entrances and exits - ensuring they are placed safely, and that the estate plan co-ordinates with the proposed 'Watterson Lane improvements'. Bill and John are tracking the progress of these proposals and have had many meetings with the Department of Transport to ensure they do happen. This looks likely in the next 12 months.

Glencrutchery Road, Park Avenue, Norwood Drive, Mountain View, First, Second & Third Avenues, Hillberry Green and The Nook

- Road safety
- Pedestrian safety
- Upkeep of grass verges and trees
- Tree planting
- Storm damage
- New Water Treatment Plan
- Timely bus services
- Road closures
- Park Avenue planning - MEA sub station. Successfully challenged and re-sited elsewhere
- Park Avenue road safety - used as a cut through

These have been some of the problems concerning this part of the constituency, all of which have been systematically tackled. The major change being that residents can now benefit from road crossing corridors during racing events, and roads being open when there is inclement weather.

Douglas Corporation has been approached regularly in an effort to improve the grass verge upkeep, replace diseased trees and take out roots of storm damaged trees.

More needs to be done here as we are aware that work to footpaths and gutters at the side of streets and avenues still require maintenance.

Road safety issues, especially for the residents of Park Avenue, still require attention and we will continue to address this. Both MHKs have been in protracted talks with the Department of Transport in this regard but will continue to fight for improved safety measures.

Victoria Road, Dukes Road, Poplar Road, Victoria Avenue and Falcon Cliff Terrace

New Prison

One of the biggest battles here was to ensure that plans for a new prison did not go ahead. The Department of Home Affairs, headed by Allan Bell MHK at that time, was intent on extending the prison site across Victoria Avenue up to residents' houses and taking in

Eastcliffe. This was totally unacceptable. Your MHKs led a sustained campaign to ensure this did not happen. We both recognised the need for a new prison, but appropriately sited with minimal impact to the community.

The old prison site should be used for a sheltered housing project for the elderly, something which is appropriate for the area.

Flooding

Over the past few years we have seen unusually heavy rain around September/October time. Weather patterns are obviously changing. This caused severe flooding on at least two occasions, and nearly a third earlier this year. Water cascaded out of Noble's Park, across Dukes Road and then straight into people's houses. Poplar Terrace, Poplar Road and even houses on Marathon Drive were flooded. Thousands of pounds worth of damage was caused. It also saw your MHKs being called out late in the evening to help constituents and assist in bailing out and organising the Civil Defence for supplies of sandbags.

The corporation was aware of this risk for years. In the end, due to a major meeting we had with senior officials at the Town Hall, an agreement was reached to have works carried out across the bottom of Noble's Park, which involved a £250,000 scheme - putting in place storm attenuation tanks together with a new drainage system. This was done and has been very successful. However, we are aware that maintenance work is now required on this as it nearly failed in January of this year.

BMX track

Large ramps were to be placed along the bottom of Noble's Park in this scheme. Residents and MHKs fought a successful planning battle here which stopped unsightly structures being placed in front of residents' houses and spoiling their privacy. Our friend the late Jim Bridson is especially remembered for his invaluable help here.

Victoria Crescent, Marathon Drive, Falcon Cliff Terrace - Olympia

The biggest problem residents have faced here in recent times is descending damp from deterioration of the roofs and failed lead flashing. It has spoiled their quality of life. We have worked closely with residents and senior staff at the Town Hall to progress the refurbishment scheme of all the roofs for Olympia.

This has now been achieved, and we have seen the installation of central heating as well. This has to be welcomed, even though it has



Victoria Crescent

caused us problems. The issue of installing a communal satellite system has yet to be resolved, but again, this is something that requires continuation of the work we have already started, and working with residents towards an acceptable solution.



Hutchinson Square

Broadway, Ballaquayle Road, Hutchinson Square, Marathon Road, Princes Road, St Ninian's Road and Laureston Close and Grove

- Road traffic and pedestrian safety
- Parking
- Refurbishment of Hutchinson Square
- Planning applications
- Care home - Princes Road (re-located to a more appropriate area)
- Abandoned vehicles
- Re-location of Crosby Terrace zebra crossing
- Road adoption of Laureston Close and Grove
- Disc parking zones implemented - Marathon Road, Hutchinson Square and Princes Road

All these problems have been successfully tackled. We have had some considerable success, including the much needed road adoption at Laureston Close and Grove and the introduction of a disc parking zone, but more work is needed and, with your help, we plan to continue with issues such as the relocation of the zebra crossing, dealing with abandoned vehicles and implementing further road traffic safety improvements.

Major building projects for the constituency

We have seen some major building schemes in the constituency and have kept a watching brief to ensure that proposals were in keeping with the area, and would cause constituents only the minimum of disruption.

Water treatment works

This is the largest project the constituency has witnessed for years. It was subject to a failed planning permission initially (heavy representations made on your behalf by your MHKs). Now we have something more acceptable. However, we are monitoring progress and liaising closely with the Water Authority on this, as there are still odd problems that crop up and require attention.

This project has led to the clearing up of a large derelict site at the top of Greenfield Road, which has caused everyone numerous problems over the years.

We support this project, but it must be properly and sensitively completed. We also need to monitor any road closures intended for this summer which will affect Willaston by way of road closures for the placing of new water pipes to the new treatment plant.

Manx Telecom - new telephone exchange, Greenfield Road

This is now complete and is in the 'dip' on Greenfield Road, in the former 'Donkey Fields' behind the cemetery. This project has to be welcomed, not only for the improved service it offers for the town and Island in general, but because another derelict site has been cleared which has caused numerous problems for nearby residents over the years. Both your MHKs were in close liaison with Manx Telecom during the construction of this building to ensure the minimum of disruption.

Buses and bus shelter campaign

It is amazing to think that we should have had to have a 'public transport campaign', but in the end it proved necessary because of:

- Poor timings of buses
- Lack of services
- Lack of bus shelters

- Overcrowding on school buses
- School buses not turning up, or being late
- Poor services to the new hospital

Both your MHKs again had to campaign and press for the improvements we now have in relation to the above. There is still more work to be done here, and we will continue to pursue this, especially regarding the services to the new hospital which have caused real problems.

Synopsis

These are some of the larger issues that have affected the constituency. Some have been easier to resolve than others, but both your MHKs have worked together in a co-ordinated and systematic way to ensure that improvements have been made. This has been achieved, in the first instance, with building up working relationships with staff and senior officials at Douglas Corporation and various government departments and, ultimately, adopting a joint working approach to ensure that 'things have been done'.

At times we have been stalled, causing further meetings to be arranged. Hundreds of letters have been written, emails and faxes sent, and if necessary, questions and motions put to the House of Keys or Tynwald. Both your MHKs firmly believe that if at first you don't succeed, try, try and try again. We do not give up easily and know that you are relying on us to try and do something to obtain the improvements and bring in much needed changes. We fully intend to keep on chipping away and continue with what needs to be done for our North Douglas constituents.

With regards to this constituency you can see that both MHKs have been very busy but, notwithstanding that, there have been hundreds of personal problems that we have both been able to assist individual residents with, on a personal and confidential basis. These have been numerous and varied including:

- Pension problems
- Heating problems
- Health problems
- Anti-social behaviour problems
- Social security problems
- Work related issues
- Housing problems - private and public
- Finance issues
- Planning

A final message from your MHKs

We sincerely hope that you have found our work of benefit and help both at local and national level. We have been proud to serve our constituents at constituency level and nationally in Tynwald and the House of Keys. We are hoping to continue the work as there is still much to be done.

There are issues to complete and also the commencement of new projects, both locally and nationally. To this end we both fully intend to stand for the forthcoming General Election and look to you for your support. Without it, none of this would have been possible so far.

Bill Henderson



Contacting your MHK

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Community Drop-in Facility weekly (surgery)

Willaston Methodist Church 10am - 12pm

Usually every 1st and 3rd Thursdays of the month

Next to Willaston Police Station (same building)
6pm - 7pm

Usually every 2nd and 4th Thursdays of the month.