

DAVID ASHFORD

CANDIDATE FOR DOUGLAS NORTH - HOUSE OF KEYS ELECTIONS

Pear elector,

Hopefully you will have had a chance to read the introductory letter I sent out a number of weeks ago which told you a bit of background about myself and also laid out in brief what I believe to be the biggest fundamental national and local challenges that we as an island will face over the next five years. Here in my more expansive manifesto, I seek to lay out in more detail what I believe those challenges are and the direction of travel that I believe we need to take over the coming five years. It has been an absolute privilege to serve the constituency of Douglas North as one of the two Members of the House of Keys over the last five years, along with serving the island



as Minister for Health and Social Care for just over three and a half years. Over that time I have tried hard to balance one of the most difficult and at times controversial jobs in government with continuing to represent constituents. It has been a difficult balance and I am sure I have not always got it right, but trying to help individuals has been my favourite part of the role and something I would like the opportunity to continue over the next five years. I have been out canvassing for approximately just over six weeks and I will hopefully have had a chance to speak to many of you in person. I will be continuing to canvass right up until the evening before polling day and will be seeking to get round as many of the over two thousand properties as possible. After reading this manifesto and if you feel that I am the right person to continue to represent the constituency, I would be honoured if you would consider casting your vote for me on Thursday 23rd September.

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THE CLIMATE CHANGE AGENDA

Strategic Vision

If we are going to successfully achieve the islands climate change goals then having a detailed strategic vision will be key. In the past, the reason for lack of progress has been schemes which have been done in isolation or targets set without any real definition around how those targets will be achieved. As an island nation and the only biosphere nation in the world, we have a unique opportunity to lead the way by showing what can be achieved in a small contained jurisdiction. But the serious risk is that without strategic planning, this risks becoming a costly monolith that does not actually achieve its aims. One of the first acts of the new administration needs to be to publish a comprehensive strategic vision with timelines and deliverables.

Ensuring Inclusivity

One of the key risks we run with the climate change agenda is having a two speed society. One where some can afford to adapt their life styles and properties and reap the benefits from it, while others cannot and either struggle to meet the changes that are required or become debt ridden as a result. If the climate change agenda is going to work in practice then there needs to be inclusivity with targeted support grants and schemes to ensure that those who cannot afford to take the necessary measures are not left behind. Local Authorities in the UK can access centralised climate change grants to ensure that they can bring their properties up to scratch whereas here on island local authorities are currently being told they need to find the funding themselves. If we are going to move this forward we need to ensure that local authorities are funded to ensure that the public sector can also meet the necessary challenges.

Affordable and Measurable

Another key risk with the climate change agenda is that it becomes unaffordable and quickly grinds to a halt. There needs to be, as part of the strategic vision; a clear mapping out of what changes are required and when. Also a detailed year by year targeted plan which then allows for funding to be identified years in advance. The risk otherwise is that with the competing demands on expenditure schemes, it will falter or not be funded appropriately. Any of the schemes that come forward must also be measurable both in short and long term impact with clearly defined Key Performance Indicators to show what impact any expenditure has had and be reported on an annual basis.

INFRASTRUCTURE - PROTECTING OUR STRATEGIC ASSETS

Telecommunications

With the continual march of technology, there is going to be more and more demand for connectivity wherever we go. This means an expansion of the telecommunications infrastructure on island. It is important that this does not come at the expense of our green space and must be done in a style sympathetic to the surrounding areas. I would support an amendment to the current Development Order to ensure that there must be mandatory mast sharing between providers to limit the number of developments and that any development must take into account and blend in with the surrounding area.

Our Ferry - Our Lifeline

In my manifesto five years ago, I stated firmly that I believed that the Steam Packet Company was our islands life line and that we needed to ensure its future by the government taking over the company and operating it via a golden share arrangement. This has now been done and the Steam Packet has been secured as a strategic asset for the island. Over the next five years, we need as shareholder to set out a strategic vision that ensures that we can provide cost effective travel. With the worldwide pandemic and Brexit people have been holidaying much closer to home and this is something at as an island we must ensure we take advantage of to boost our visitor economy.

Airlines - Open Skies

For many years the island has operated an open skies policy which allows any airline to operate any route into and out of the island. This has served the island very well for a number of years but the time has come for this to be reviewed. Being a small island we are always going to be limited on passenger numbers and the risk open skies poses is if you end up with two operators trying to operate the same route, it can become unviable for both. I firmly believe that our main strategic routes such as Liverpool, London and Manchester should be contracted out to sole providers for set periods to ensure the viability of those routes on which the island depends. Outside of those routes, open skies should remain where any airline can operate any service away from the key strategic routes.

DOUGLAS NORTH

Maintaining the Infrastructure

Many of the roads around Douglas North require works as a matter of urgency.

Cronk-Y-Berry in particular has suffered from a lack of investment in the past. New schemes are planned to take place over the next 12 months including in relation to Cronk-Y-Berry and I, if elected would continue to push for more pro-active maintenance of the road layout rather than the reactive maintenance that has been seen in the past.

While I welcome the fact that proposals have come forward for Tromode Road, I do have serious concerns around the shared space aspects of the proposals, particularly the unsegregated plans for the mixing of pedestrians and cyclists. Also on the initial proposals, the cycle land feeds directly on two busy junctions and I remain to be convinced as it stands, it dramatically improves safety for pedestrians or cyclists.

Road Safety

In some areas of the constituency this is becoming a serious issue particularly when it comes to road crossing points. The Tromode part of Johnny Watterson Lane is lacking any form of safe crossing point, which means that children cannot safely exit the estate without being accompanied. As part of the Tromode Road proposals it is important that pedestrian safety on the wider feeder network is also considered. Within Governors Hill there also needs to be consideration around appropriate traffic measures including restrictions on parking on blind spots around the estate.

Housing Provision

I am disappointed that Douglas Council has not been able to finalise a scheme for sheltered accommodation at the old Police station and Methodist Hall site. While the general flats housing scheme that is being built instead is still welcome and will meet a demand for general housing as the largest social housing estate on the island, it would have been valuable for Willaston to have a sheltered housing block. This would have allowed many of those struggling with the current size of their properties to downsize while at the same time remain within the estate. I will continue to engage and work with local councillors, to ensure that the housing stock is fit for purpose and seek to resolve the issues of damp that still affect many properties including refurbished ones.

It is also important that other areas of the stock including Edmund Chadwick Grove and Ballanard Court are maintained and it does not become a case of “out of sight, out of mind”, which unfortunately does appear to have been the case on some occasions.

PLANNING - REFORMING THE MONOLITH

User Friendly System

One of the most daunting areas of government is the planning system. The current system as it is structured, has evolved over several decades with various elements added to or taken away over the years. Over the last five years, I have spoken to numerous individuals that have had to deal with the process, either as potential developers, landowners or indeed those opposing an application. The feedback from all of these groups is that it has been one of the most daunting and stressful experiences of their lives. An over arching holistic review of all planning legislation is required as part of the next administration, to ensure that the system is modernised, user friendly and crucially accessible to those that need to use it whether they are developers, applications or objectors.

One Area Plan

Currently the island is divided geographically by region into four area plan sites. In the modern world this makes no sense and means that there is no strategic interlinking of planning across the island. Area plans can be developed years apart and rather than looking at the long term development need across the island, focus instead on an arbitrary section of the island. Due to the other areas plans potentially being years old does not provide a true strategic plan of what development the island actually needs. There should be one area plan which links in to the overarching strategic plan, thereby allowing for an overarching vision for long term planning across the island.

A Joined Up System

Currently there is no automatic check between what people submit to Building Control and what has actually been approved at the planning permission stage. This means that currently, the Building Control requirements only require any development to be checked against the Building Control plans submitted and not what actually gained planning permission. This means that years down the line, issues can be identified whereby something has been built in line with the Building Control plans but not what had obtained planning permission which can then become costly for any impacted party who may discover this as their only option is to seek legal action through the civil courts. I would welcome and support a change in the law to ensure that building control applications at the time of submission are checked against the planning application plans.

HEALTH & SOCIAL CARE - OUR SOCIAL PROTECTION

Paying for Social Care

One of the biggest social debates that has rumbled on for many decades, is the cost and funding of social care. Unlike health which works on the principle of free at the point of delivery, social care has always been different and based on income and assets. This means you can have a situation where someone saves their entire life, only to find that in later life they face the loss of their home and savings in order to pay for their care, while someone with no savings is paid for via the benefits system. This disparity is an issue that must be addressed in the forthcoming administration. Over the last four years, a lot of work has taken place in developing different options and proposals around establishing a social care fund and a social care insurance. A major priority of the next administration must be to complete these proposals based on the work already underway and bring forward proposals for a more inclusive system that ensures that people do not reach later life and find that suddenly they lose all of their assets to pay for the care they need.

Access to Treatments

Currently NICE approved drugs are not automatically funded on island. This means that patients here on island cannot access in an equitable way the same drug treatments as those patients in the UK and instead have to go through a long winded process to obtain approval for funding. This is not a sustainable position, particularly when people are receiving treatments in the UK but are not able to access or be prescribed the same drugs as a UK patient would with the same condition. During my time as Minister for Health and Social Care, the department has made three attempts to seek funding for NICE drugs for this very reason and have been unsuccessful. If re-elected, I will continue to campaign for equality of access to treatments for Manx patients via NICE approved drugs.

Utilising Technology

One of the things that has expanded during the pandemic period, is the use of virtual consultations. This has resulted in patients not having to needlessly travel off island on what can be an exhaustive journey. Manx Care are currently using virtual appointments to bring down waiting lists by delivering 12,500 virtual appointments across specialities between September and March. This needs to be embedded as a permanent option to allow people to receive consultations remotely where it is appropriate.

ECONOMIC REFORM - EXPANDING OUR BASE

Diversification

As we emerge from the pandemic period, we need to ensure that economy has reliance and new markets in which to grow. The fact that we have agreement to form part of any UK trade deals around the world resulting from Brexit, gives us the opportunity to widen our economic scope and enter new marketplaces. At the moment our economy is heavily invested and reliant on the UK economy but this means that if the UK economy suffers any form of shock, there will be a trickle down impact on ourselves. Over the three years 2016-2019 our GDP has grown by 12% but there are real opportunities to expand further. By encouraging new industries onto the island with links to wider economies around the world we lessen our interdependency with the UK which in turn strengthens our ability to weather economic storms.

We in particular should be encouraging the range of new digital sectors to base themselves on the island and be making ourselves into a business data hub which can then feed other jurisdictions. As more and more business goes online, it is important we ensure that we keep pace with the changing economic reality.

Research & Development

I continue to believe that the island is an ideal base for research & development industries based directly between the UK and EU (Republic of Ireland) marketplaces. Many of the sectors we have on island are seeing ever increasing technological innovations including Agriculture, Telecommunications, Engineering and Information and Communication Technology. As a small jurisdiction, we would be perfectly sized and positioned for experimental technologies relating to these sectors to be trialled. This also ties in with the climate change agenda, where we should be encouraging companies to operate on the island, looking at innovative solutions around tidal and wind power.

Restructuring Business Support

Over the years, various forms of business support packages and schemes have emerged and are much welcomed. However, the time has come to take an holistic look at the schemes provided and refocus them to ensure they meet the needs of todays businesses. The Micro business grant scheme has been a particularly good innovation, allowing support for new businesses and the Strategic Capacity Scheme that has helped support the tourist sector. As we move out of the pandemic period we need to ensure that we also focus on providing targeted support for existing businesses, particularly in the hospitality sector to recover from what has been a two year disruption.

SOCIAL POLICY - INVESTING IN OUR FUTURE

Affordable Housing

One of the big domestic challenges for the next administration will be ensuring that there is affordable housing provision across the island and across the different housing sectors. In terms of first time buyers, the schemes need to be updated with new ways of helping people get onto the property ladder. We need to be looking at long term equity, shared equity schemes, invest to save and loan schemes. The current schemes are now outdated and no longer reflect the reality of the market place or the reality of the financial position of those looking to use the schemes.

But it is also important that the government ensures that there is a well regulated private rental stock and investment in social housing to ensure that a mix of housing is available.

Minimum Wage v Living Wage

In my manifesto five years ago, I spoke against the differential in minimum pay between 18 and 21 year olds and I was delighted that Tynwald voted to remove that age differential. While the 18% increase in minimum wage over the last five years is welcome, over the next five years the gap needs to be closed between the minimum wage and the living wage. This needs to be phased over the next five years to allow businesses to plan for it, even more so after the disruption many have seen during the pandemic period to give them the time to recover from the economic shocks that came as a result. We should be helping and supporting businesses in the interim to become living wage employers.

Benefit Reform

The benefit system has become over time unwieldy and is in need of urgent review. The Tynwald committee on poverty, recently concluded that the system was difficult to navigate and the application process was not easy to complete. A prime example of this is the disability living allowance process which involves the completion of a booklet of several dozen pages with multiple questions that mirror each other. Not only does this have to be completed by new applicants but also by those already in receipt of the benefit each time the review period comes up, rather than a simple medical process of their condition just being reconfirmed. The benefit system needs to be simplified with clear sign posting for applicants in order to easily navigate the different benefits that they may be entitled to.

A 21st CENTURY TYNWALD / GOVERNMENT - MODERNISING OUR DEMOCRACY

Local Devolution of Power

I am a firm supporter of local authority reform. Much of the current set up dates from the late 1800's and despite over a century of discussion little progress has taken place. In November 2017, I moved a motion in Tynwald to set up a committee to investigate Local Authority reform which unfortunately Tynwald did not support at that time. I remain committed to seeking local authority reform and personally believe that there should be five authorities, North, South, East, West and Douglas. This would create local authorities of an appropriate size for central services to be devolved. Over the last few decades, government has centralised services rather than decentralising them to where they should belong, at a local level. With appropriately sized authorities, local government would be able to take on services that in any other jurisdiction would be run at a local level. Car parking is a prime example where this should not be a central government function but one operated at a local authority level.

Rates

I am completely opposed to an all island rate and also an all island leisure rate. While some supporters of the idea state it would make things more equitable and benefit the larger authorities, I firmly believe that it would actually achieve the opposite. If we had an all island rate then who would set that rate? It would have to be set centrally by government and ultimately Tynwald thereby breaking further the accountability link between local representatives and the people they represent. Also, there is no guarantee it would be set at a rate that is sustainable for the large local authorities services. Would the parish and rural area Tynwald members vote for a doubling or trebling of their areas rates? The risk is that the rate would be set at a lower rate which would not be sustainable for larger authorities to maintain their services. One of the fundamental tenants of local democracy is the accountability of local representatives for the monies they raise and they spend. We break that at our peril.

Strategic Prioritisation

This outgoing administration was the first to bring forward a Programme For Government. While the innovation was welcomed, the programme was unwieldy and a mash of different priorities. The next programme for the new administration must flow more with focused strategic objectives and how those priorities can be delivered across the different departments.

A 21st CENTURY TYNWALD / GOVERNMENT - MODERNISING OUR DEMOCRACY

Legislative Council

I am a firm believer that Legislative Council should be popularly elected by the people of the island. Legislative Council has evolved over the last century and there is no reason that it should not evolve again to be a popularly elected scrutiny body. The argument which is sometimes put forward is that this would mean Legislative Council challenging the popularly elected will of Keys is as far as I am concerned nonsense. They would be popularly elected to do two different roles. Other countries successfully operate with two popularly elected branches with their functions being different and there is no reason that our Parliament could not operate in this same way.

I would also support the removal of the Bishops vote. During the Tynwald debate in 2017 on the Lord Lisvane proposals, I voted for the removal of the Bishops vote. But this was not supported by Tynwald as a whole. I have no issue with the Lord Bishop retaining a seat on Legislative Council and their contributions to debates have been valuable but it should be a none voting role, similar to Attorney General's role.

Collective Responsibility

As a Minister for just short of four years, I have seen and experienced first hand collective responsibility and my views have not changed as a result. I still firmly believe that if someone is opposed to something, they should be free to vote against it without having to risk losing their role. You could have an exceptional Minister who because they oppose something would have to resign, that is not beneficial to democracy. If a Minister disagrees with a policy, they should be able to oppose it as long as they are consistent and do not vote one way in Council of Ministers and then another in Tynwald. I am lucky that I have never had to consider this but I have always been clear that if I am fundamentally opposed to something, then I will not silently sit and support it even if it means me having to resign from a role.

One Entity

I also support Government becoming one single legal entity. Currently each department is a legal entity in its own right with the Minister as the absolute authority. This does not lend itself to joined up government and does not mean that departments need to be abolished or Ministers lose the links with their departments. This would be repeating the mistakes Jersey made. But government becoming one entity can only help with strategic decision making in the long term.

EDUCATION - A LIFETIME INVESTMENT

On Island Provision

We need to continue to expand our on island education provision and our links with external educational bodies in order to help us provide that provision on island. Rather than encouraging people to leave the island for further education, we need to develop a suite of educational courses that can provide practical skill based courses here on island. The changes that have occurred over the last four years in this regard with an expansion in vocational training and practical skill based courses, is to be welcomed but it is something that still needs further work to ensure it is embedded at the heart of our educational provision. Not everyone is academically minded and practical skill based courses are just as important to ensure that every pupil has the ability to achieve their full potential.

Access to early years provision is also crucial and we need to support parents in being able to access that provision on an equitable basis and look to build on and expand the provision that is currently in place.

Blended Learning Experience

The future of Education will be a blended learning experience that plays to the strengths and interests of the individual rather than simply the traditional classroom / exam based academia of old. It is important as an island that we can deliver on island a mix of educational attainment, either through partnership with others or linking in with online provision. It is also important that we continue to work to expand the vocational courses available and seek via University College Isle of Man, to expand our higher education offering. Technology is allowing for new means of learning to come on stream and we must embrace those and ensure that we are at the forefront of provision.

Encouraging Back Our Graduates

We need to ensure that we have schemes in place to encourage our graduates coming back to the island. This should include reducing the repayment of student loans based on the period of time that a graduate returns to the island and contributes to the economic output of the island. This also links in with a graduate business start up scheme, to allow returning graduates who wish to start their own business the ability to put their acquired skills to use and strike out on their own.

POLLING STATIONS OPEN

THURSDAY

23RD SEPTEMBER 8AM—8PM:

CDGN1 Glencrutchery Polling District:

Education Support Centre, Glencrutchery Road

CDGN2 Cronk-y-Berry Polling District:

Cronk-Y-Berry School (Youth Wing)

Hailwood Avenue

CDGN3 Tromode Polling District:

Cronkbourn Cricket Club, Tromode Road

Should you require a postal vote please contact

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ON THURSDAY

23rd SEPTEMBER

VOTE

ASHFORD

FOR DOUGLAS NORTH

INVESTING IN OUR FUTURE

