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Glenfaba & Peel



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No one could have predicted how tough 2020 was going to be and we continue to chart unknown waters as a result of the pandemic.

As we all know a state of emergency was declared on 16 March, unprecedented in modern times. Until that point Covid-19 seemed somewhat remote. Little did we know what a profound effect it was going to have on us all. Tragically lives have been lost and lessons learnt but by taking the measures that we did, we prevented an even worse loss of life and managed to contain the infection. We can only thank every one of you for working together and observing the lockdown, putting up with the queues and social distancing. It was definitely worth it as now the Island has been Covid free for over 100 days at the time of writing this newsletter and life here is relatively normal.

Sadly we can't say the same for elsewhere. We are one of the few countries that are Covid free and this poses problems as to how and when our borders are relaxed. The last thing any of us want is to have to go back into lockdown. We can of course now travel off the Island but everyone returning faces up to fourteen days quarantine. Until a vaccine is available or the virus is brought under better control in the UK, we will need to take extra care and keep restrictions in place.

The economy has taken a big hit. The recent budget update highlighted the uncertainty of the future. We must stimulate our economy, get people back to work, generating income and tax receipts. For some sectors getting up and running is extremely difficult such as tourism. Consequently the government has provided specific support for both individuals and businesses where necessary including our local fishing industry.

One potentially positive shift in working practice implemented during the crisis was 'working from home' which if continued may lead to environmental as well as social benefits. It won't of course be possible to work from home all the time but there are great benefits from doing so such as reducing car journeys and overheads, as well as improving the work life balance.

The pandemic emergency showed how well our community could come together. We looked out for each other and we are forever grateful for our Health Service workers and all other frontline workers who did an amazing job, keeping our vital services going, including transportation and waste disposal.

In addition to all this, local farmers and other local businesses adapted to keep us all fed and helped maintain essential needs.

The programme for government was paused during this time, so will inevitably suffer delays and will need to change to meet the new world we face.



Geoffrey Boot

Our joint introduction covered Covid-19 but as Minister for Department of Environment Food and Agriculture it would be remiss of me not to comment on the effect that it has had in my specific sector.

Food

At the beginning of the crisis there was a fear that the logistics chains may breakdown and if many people got ill we would have difficulty in the farming community, shops etc and we rapidly had to develop emergency plans on a 'just in case' basis. Fortunately that did not happen. Ownership of the Steam Packet meant we were able to maintain two sailings a day which kept the logistic chains together. On top of that our farming industry, the Meat Plant, Creamery, Laxey Glen Flour, our bakers, processors and producers all did their bit to maintain local supplies. This exposed some of our wonderful local produce more generally and I do hope this will have a knock-on effect and people will continue to appreciate and buy local.

On a sector specific basis

The farming industry received advance ADS payments and the Agri Environment Scheme, which required external advice and resource, has been put on hold until next year to help the farming community with cash flow.

The fishing industry was particularly hard hit with overseas markets vanishing overnight as country after country locked down. To save the sector Tynwald was persuaded to provide a support package for the whole of the industry, boat owners, processors and brokers as well as the other aid schemes that were available.



A second tranche of support was agreed until 31st August and it is hoped that this will be sufficient as markets, particularly for queen scallops and whelks, recover. Make no mistake, the fishing industry is and has been going through a very difficult time. Almost a perfect storm combined with low stocks - now as we turn the corner and stocks have improved, we have no market. Rest assured that I will continue to seek support where necessary.

The Environment. The pandemic put a number of projects on hold as staff were diverted to frontline services. However, we managed to retain our small Climate Change team. I was pleased to be able to make a statement in July Tynwald regarding

progress laying the draft climate change bill which has been out for consultation over the summer period. This is an important piece of legislation that will lay a roadmap right up to 2050 to achieve net carbon neutrality.

For the first time ever in the Isle of Man we are setting up a citizen forum to work with the Climate Change Transformation Board which will have 36 places. If you wish you can apply (application forms will be available shortly) for one of 12 places, another 12 will be selected randomly from the electoral role and the remaining 12 places will be taken by stakeholders.

In the meantime, Brexit seemed to recede into the background but I can tell you that there has been a lot of work going on behind the scenes, particularly from the agriculture and fisheries sector in my Department. The UK is out of the EU, some people seem to forget that. We are in the transition period and maybe before you receive this newsletter, decisions will have been made in the negotiations that are ongoing with the EU. We are small players in this but have batted above our station in maintaining the Isle of Man's profile. We can only hope that all the effort we have put in, pays dividends and that we get continued access to EU markets which is particularly important to our fisheries, meat and creamery products.

I will finish by saying, more than ever during the lockdown, I think our biosphere status came to the fore. We had some wonderful weather and as restrictions lifted people seemed to have rediscovered the beautiful and enchanting Isle of Man. Biosphere is about man and the environment, this does not just include the environmental issues where we score highly, as you only have to look around the Isle of Man at its landscape and coastline but also our culture. Staycations this summer will no doubt mean more people than ever enjoy the Isle of Man 'O gem of God's earth'.



Ray Harmer

On the 10th March, we were all preparing for Summer, the local elections, the TT, the opening of the railways and the trams, and of course for the ongoing work on the Promenade. 2019 was a record year in airport passenger numbers and 2020 looked promising.

Other projects were well advanced – such as Isle of Man Ferry Terminal in Liverpool and the work to remove the silt from Peel Harbour.

On the 11th March the World Health Organisation redefined the Coronavirus outbreak as a pandemic and the world changed.

When the hospital required extra capacity, Infrastructure was tasked with transforming the unused parts of the Newlands site into a new 50 bed ward. An army of builders, electricians, engineers, craftsmen, caretakers and cleaners swung into action immediately and delivered the first completed bays to the matron in less than 2 weeks.



As an Island we saw a need for us to build our own oxygen generation facility, which we could not have done without first class support from the Island's private sector businesses and contractors who sent all their staff to help us. We had help from fabricators who somehow found and built a whole new industrial unit, tradesmen who refused to charge extra for weekends and local businesses and charities who lent us very valuable equipment. This facility meant that if it were ever needed, we would have the capacity to treat COVID-19 patients at Noble's Hospital with our own supply of oxygen.

As Minister of Infrastructure, key milestones have been achieved since our last newsletter. After acquiring Tynwald approval, land was purchased, and construction began on the new Liverpool Ferry Terminal. In addition, after signing a new sea services agreement, Steam Packet

has commissioned a state-of-the-art ferry to replace the Ben My Cree which is now being built to meet our specific requirements.

The work on the promenade is making steady progress despite the huge challenges due to the uncharted discoveries below ground and due to the impact of Covid-19. The scheme should now be completed in March 2021.

It was wonderful to open St Patrick Court, the second phase of the new Westlands Complex which provides much needed modern sheltered accommodation for our community. The final phase has also now begun.

The Heritage Trail from Peel to Douglas has recently been completed except for some signage and a few other finishing touches. The trail is being used by walkers and cyclists alike and includes a couple of picnic stations. Plans to improve the Heritage Trail from St Johns to Kirk Michael were presented to the public this August.



Minister of Policy & Reform

After having been Minister of Infrastructure for nearly 4 years, the opportunity to take up the role of Minister for Policy & Reform was presented in June to help coordinate our response to the impact of the global crisis as well as other key issues facing our Island.

In particular, in response to Covid-19 we have set up a cross government task force known as the Economic Recovery Strategic Group to kick start our economy which has taken a significant hit from Covid-19.

Within the remit of Policy and Reform, there are a wide variety of other key tasks such as improving our health service through the creation of Manx Care and coordinating the climate change response and action plan across government.

One key task is leading the negotiations with Manx Gas where we are hoping to achieve up to a 12.6% reduction in household bills back dated to January 2020. The heads of terms will go to October Tynwald for approval. If agreement cannot be reached, we may need to implement statutory regulation.

Finally, as well as the island planning policy, another area we are looking at is housing reform. One aspect of this is to tackle homelessness and sofa-surfing. This was alleviated during lockdown with temporary accommodation but now the challenge remains to find permanent solutions.

Peel Marina Silt

It will not have gone unnoticed that dredging commenced during the Coronavirus crisis. Workers were brought in on an essential worker basis and some 14,000 tonnes of silt were removed to a field adjacent to Peel Power Station where it is now drying out. This means the Marina remains operational. The removed material, once it has dried out, is intended to be taken to Turkeylands within the special waste facility and it is hoped that another 10,000 or 15,000 tonnes will be removed next year. In the meantime, work is ongoing to intercept heavy metal contamination higher up the catchment so that in future the silt may be suitable to put out to sea.

St Johns Post Office

Sadly, St Johns Post Office closed in the Spring. Fortunately, the Tynwald Inn stepped in and provided a community shop which was much used during the crisis and still continues.

Broadband

We received a lot of observations and complaints about Broadband speeds particularly since companies and individuals were working from home. This has exposed some of the short falls in the network provision. We are pleased to say the government is working with Manx Telecom to accelerate the provision of a superfast fibre broadband network Island wide over the next 4 years, although some areas of Peel do already have access to this service.

Bus Timetables

A number of constituents have complained about the reduced availability of buses due to Covid timetable reductions and due to the fact there are less passengers and virtually no tourists. We are working with Bus Vannin to get a full timetable reinstated as soon as practical. By the time you receive this newsletter this may have happened.



Schools in the West

The impact of Covid-19 has been significant for all pupils, teachers and parents alike. Thankfully, the decision on grades was reversed back to teacher assessment and we hope things will go better for the new academic year.

Designs on the STEM block for QEII have started and the budget has been approved. However, progress has been painfully slow. Pressure will continue to be applied to see this critical project completed.

Road Repairs

To try to stimulate the economy and keep people working, as soon as Covid restrictions were lifted, some capital schemes for road works have been accelerated. It's fair to say there have been disruptions, such as the Curragh Road, but this is all for the better good. Once these schemes are finished, they are hard infrastructure that will last for many years. Residential streets saw improvements in Close Cubbon and Belle View and rural roads were improved in St Johns, Staarvy Road and Glenneddles.

Bathing Standards—Sewage Treatment

The planning application process is under way for the Sewage Treatment Plant. The planning inspector will make his final report after the public hearing in September. It is critical that there are no more delays after such a long and complex journey, lasting more than a decade and that the highest bathing standards are provided for the West.

Manx Utilities have announced that they will be laying a new water main and sewers on East Quay, Peel commencing 7th September into the New Year.

This is much welcome news as it both provides the necessary infrastructure for the sewage system as well as being the preliminary stage in the reconstruction of badly failing East Quay. The budget for East Quay reconstruction was approved in this year's budget and includes the highway and footpaths. In addition, flood protection work is also planned for East Quay.

Contact

We both have a policy of trying to deal with any queries and issues within 48 hours or at least acknowledge the same. Whilst we both use social media to post items of interest, we have our own personal policy of not replying directly to social media comments and feeds. We would ask that you contact us via post, telephone or email so we can personalise our response in a more specific and considered way.

The Monthly Surgery continues to be the second Saturday in every month at 11am in Peel Town Hall in conjunction with Peel Town Commissioners.