



Propositions

Planning policy – lodged by an independent member

The Assembly is of the opinion that -

- (a) No new housing or commercial developments should be approved in the 'green zone' outside of St John without specific parliamentary approval
- (b) All new housing and commercial development should be focused on the urban parishes of St John, St George and St Luke and should aim to revitalise brownfield sites.
- (c) The government should impose a 10% levy on the profits derived from any housing or commercial development which is not located on a brownfield site
- (d) The Minister for Housing is requested to bring forward the legislation necessary to implement paragraphs (a) to (c) by June 2018.

Report

This Parliament has stood by for too long as our countryside has been desecrated by inappropriate development. We are at a crossroads. If things carry on as they have done before, our beautiful island will be ruined by ribbon development, "social" housing and blocks of flats. If we need more housing, it should be concentrated in the urban areas of the island, which can accommodate high-rise development.

We have lots of areas in town which need redeveloping and the government should step in to incentivise this. A 10% levy should prove significant in that regard. The Minister has said before that it would be complex to administer but his department will find away. I understand that the developers are unhappy and say that it will do little except push up prices, but perhaps they would say that wouldn't they?

Economic support – lodged by a government backbencher

The Assembly is of the opinion that –

- (a) The Agricultural Loans Board should be wound up and the grants provided to carrot and dairy farmers discontinued
- (b) A Digital Industries Assistance Scheme should be established, to make grants to digital start-ups and to attract digital entrepreneurs to Commonwealthland
- (c) An Adventure Tourism Scheme should be established, to make grants to firms and individuals offering adventure tourism, including scuba-diving, kayaking, and surfing.
- (d) £2 million per annum should be provided from the Digital Industries Assistant Scheme and £500,000 per annum from the Adventure Tourism Scheme
- (e) £500,000 per annum (representing the balance of the funding available for the Agricultural Loans Board and the funding for the proposed new schemes) should be invested in the Commonwealthland Strategic Reserve



- (f) The government is requested to bring forward the necessary legislative proposals and amendments to the Medium Term Financial Plan by September 2018.

Report

The previous government's priorities for economic development were flawed and our government now has the chance to change things for the better. £3 million per annum is ploughed into the farming industry but that should be capable of standing on its own feet. The carrot and dairy trades are both buoyant and could do even better if freed from government intervention. The dire predictions of farms closing, land being sold off for housing, and our culture being lost come out every time someone questions farming subsidies. It's about time we stood up against this special pleading and took a commercially sensible decision.

We need to diversify our economy and that's the motivation for the two new assistance schemes I am recommending. We have a government priority to develop the digital sector but it's not backed by any hard cash at the moment. This new fund would send a clear signal that we want to develop digital and attract talent to the idea to kick start this part of the economy. We need digitally-qualified incomers to train up our population in these new skills. We can accommodate more people and we need to recognise that we cannot rebalance the economy without bringing skills in from elsewhere.

I am also suggesting some investment in adventure tourism, so that our tourism sector can be incentivised to diversify. We need people coming all year around, not just in the summer, and we also need people who are prepared to spend money here. Historically we have done well at capturing the summer market but increasingly holidaymakers want more than a week on the beach.

Ideally I would like to see government intervention in the economy eliminated. I am suggesting a short-term focus on two sectors to help get the private sector underway. The overall effect of these changes is to put an extra £500,000 per annum in our reserves and I hope when we next look at our medium term financial plan we can cut these grants back as they will have worked and the case for government support will have gone.

Skills – lodged by the Government

The Assembly is of the opinion that –

- (a) The government should develop a skills strategy, aimed at significantly increasing the proportion of the workforce who have digital skills and qualifications
- (b) All degree courses offered at Commonwealthland College must include a digital component
- (c) A bursary scheme should be introduced from 2020 to support less wealthy Commonwealthland students undertaking degree courses with a digital component abroad, with up to £2,500 support offered to each student per annum



- (d) A loan scheme should be introduced from 2020 to cover the cost of tuition fees for degree courses with a digital component

Report

This government was elected to rebalance the Commonwealthland economy so that we can become a centre for excellence in digital skills. There's a lot of work to do which is why we are pledged to introduce a wide-ranging skills strategy which will map out how we can foster digital skills, both amongst the existing workforce and with new cohorts of employees.

This proposition provides the opportunity for the Assembly to endorse this direction of travel and to agree three initiatives we can get on with straight away.

The first relates to our own Commonwealthland College. At the moment it offers degree courses in a range of agricultural and arts subjects. Although these subjects are not without merit, we need to focus on digital. This proposition sends a strong signal to the College that it must build digital components into its existing degree courses or change what it offers. For example, the College has for many years offered degrees in land management and dairy farming. Some people have argued that these courses may have to be abandoned but with some imagination it should be possible to include the latest digital tools and techniques in these traditional areas.

The second initiative is a bursary scheme to support poorer students studying for degrees with a digital component. More work needs to be done on the details but we suggest that the bursary should be worth £2,500 per annum and be available to students from households whose income is under £30,000 per annum. This would provide a tremendous boost to the take-up of university study by young people from poorer families.

Finally, we want to introduce a student loan scheme to cover the cost of tuition fees for courses with a digital component. Our aim would be for the private sector to provide this scheme but with the government covering repayments by students who do not earn more than £25,000 per annum after graduation. By outsourcing and requiring anyone paid a reasonable salary of £25,000 or more to repay the loan within ten years we are confident that the cost to the Treasury will be modest – no more than £500,000 per annum.

We need time to work up the details of the bursary and loan schemes. One issue we will examine is whether we can use these schemes to reward students who return to work in Commonwealthland – for example by requiring quicker repayment of the loan if the student chooses to settle abroad.

Health – lodged by the Opposition

This Assembly is of the opinion that –



- (a) Primary healthcare should be provided free at the point of access to all children and to adults living in households with an annual income under £50,000 and at a 50% discount to adults living in households with an annual income under £85,000
- (b) The Minister for Health should bring forward the legislation necessary to provide free or discounted primary health care by July 2018 and the Treasury Minister should provide the necessary funding for the remainder of the current Medium Term Financial Plan from the contingency reserve
- (c) Ministers are requested to develop proposals to bring primary care fully into the public sector and to publish those proposals for consultation no later than July 2018.

Report

Many families are now struggling with the cost of health care. With a doctor's appointment costing anything as much as £70 it is little wonder that some people never visit their GP. Even worse, we hear examples of children not being taken to the doctor when they need treatment. The result is more pressure on our hospital A&E as people present with conditions which ought to have been dealt with in a doctor's surgery. There has also been a 27% increase in contagious skin conditions in schools, again largely due to the cost of seeing a doctor.

Yet Commonwealth is a wealthy society and we could afford to create our own nationalised health service if we wished, improving health care and outcomes for everyone not just those with the deepest pockets. It is through political choices – and the choices of this right-wing government – that we end up where we are. This can and must change.

Our proposal is a starting point on the road to a nationalised health system. The state should bear the cost when children visit the doctor; there should also be graduated support for adults, so that ordinary working people and the 'squeezed middle' are helped with the cost of health care. Our estimate of the gross cost is £3.5 million per annum which can easily be found from the contingency budget – we have £8 million set aside for contingencies each year. The next financial plan must be agreed in 2019 for the period after 2020 and by then a sustainable funding mechanism can be found. We will be campaigning for a higher tax rate for the highest earners to fund our health care proposals.

However, there will be savings from this proposal. We estimate that pressure will ease on the hospital and on the school medical service and this will reduce the net cost to £2.5 million per annum. There will also be productivity gains as we benefit from a healthier workforce. All in all this could be a cost neutral proposal.

We note concerns from the doctors that this change could increase demand for appointments leading to delays but believe that this can be managed.

The government does not have a clear health policy so we call on them to embrace our aspiration to create a nationalised health system and to set out how this can be achieved. We're proposing an ambitious timescale but this is an important issue and it ought to be a priority.



Tax – lodged by an Opposition backbencher

The Assembly is of the opinion that –

The Treasury Minister should introduce in his 2018 Budget:

- (a) a tax on plastic packaging, levied on retailers,
- (b) a tax on the sugar content of soft drinks, levied on retailers,
- (c) a charge for domestic waste collection, intended to encourage recycling, and
- (d) a charge levied on owners of diesel-powered vehicles, intended to encourage them to switch to petrol or electric-powered vehicles.

Report

For too long politicians on both sides of the divide have paid lip service to environmental ideals but the time for action is truly upon us – it might well be too late given the latest climate science news. The best way to change behaviour – which is what we need to do – is to use the tax system. Financial incentives work because they hit people where it hurts – in the pocket. Exhortation by leaflets and websites only works on those interested in the environment – most people don't care until they see the financial sense in change.

I have four reasonable proposals, all under discussion worldwide, which I would like the Treasury Minister to include in his next Budget. Firstly, the retailers are utterly irresponsible in the amount of plastic packaging they use, often for no reason. Only yesterday I bought bananas in one supermarket which were encased in a plastic net – yet bananas don't need to be packaged, nature does that for us. I have in mind a tax on the weight of plastic packaging sold by each retailer. This may entail some paperwork as the weight will need to be calculated in some way but the immediate incentive will be to reduce the amount of packaging used which will benefit our oceans. I do not accept the argument from some supermarkets that they would increase prices in response to this tax – I don't believe that customers would accept this. Similarly, retailers should be taxed in proportion to their sale of sugary soft drinks, to encourage a switch to less sugary products. This will help reduce obesity in our population which will save us millions of pounds in the long-term as a result of increasing the general health of the population. I do not accept the argument that Commonwealthland is too small to influence the manufacturers by introducing a tax of this sort – in fact I believe we will blaze a trail for other nations to follow.

I am proposing two charges on the general population to incentivise better choices for environment. A waste charge can be levied through our property tax system and can be based on the weight of rubbish collected, which I think can be achieved using new digital tools. This will provide a strong incentive to dispose of rubbish in other ways, especially by recycling. Also, we now know how damaging to the environment are diesel vehicles and their owners should bear some of the cost of the problems they are causing. Our vehicle taxation system can be adjusted to achieve this, perhaps by adding 50% to the charge for diesel vehicles and reducing the charge for petrol vehicles by 20%.



These are practical measures, likely to strike a chord with the public, which I urge the government to accept.



Speech from His Excellency the Lieutenant Governor

As the representative of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II, I am honoured to deliver this Address to the Commonwealthland Legislative Assembly.

We have come together to consider important matters, guided by the principles of democracy, good governance, the rule of law, and equality for all. With your enthusiasm, and with your ideas, increased opportunities and prosperity will come to Commonwealthland.

Your government's agenda is clear and focused. It will put the interests of working families and young people at the centre of the work that we do in this Legislative Assembly.

The government's priorities will be growing and diversifying the economy, creating jobs, protecting the environment, increasing accessibility to higher education, and ensuring a sustainable health care system.

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Health care is consuming an ever-increasing portion of the budget. Moving forward, we will face growing pressure on our health care system as our population ages.

Many Commonwealthlanders are concerned about the sustainability of health care for themselves and their families.

Your government is committed to renewing and reforming health care to ensure sustainable, high-quality, accessible care for our generation and future generations.

The path to this goal begins with engaging Commonwealthlanders in the decisions that will shape this change. In the coming months, your government will launch a public consultation on the sustainability of our health care system.

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We know that 70 percent of all new jobs in the global economy will require post-secondary education and training.

Your government believes that all people of this country, particularly youth, should have a real and fair chance to succeed.

In order to support our youth and all Commonwealthlanders in the global economy, it is time to take the next step towards extending the frontier of accessible public education.

Your government will act to increase accessibility to post-secondary education and ensure that every qualified student who wants to pursue post-secondary education has the opportunity to do so. Your government will bring forward proposals to provide bursaries for students from poorer families studying at university and to set up a student loan scheme.

Our youth are the single best investment we can make in the future. And this investment will provide a stronger economy, and a greater capacity to sustain Commonwealthland's system of health care, preserve the environment, and strengthen the country's role in the global environment.



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Commonwealthland's economy continues to prosper, with financial services going from strength to strength. New export markets are being developed for the iconic Commonwealthland Carrot and for cows. Tourism is also important. Your government will build on this strength by providing supports for these industries.

To ensure the economy remains strong, we must also diversify.

Commonwealthland is blessed with amazing human resources, hard-working people who strive for innovation and excellence.

These attributes become ever more important as Commonwealthland's economy transitions and expands, particularly in the service industries.

A growing economy is the key to our future. It means opportunities for everyone, and increased revenue to pay for public services.

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Environmental protection and a strong economy go hand in hand. These are not incompatible goals.

Our beautiful Island is a source of pride for its people. Your government is committed to ensuring that this land remains preserved for future generations.

Pollution and climate change are real challenges that we face.

Your government is committed to finding solutions to the environmental problems facing our country and our planet. Commonwealthland is currently not on track to meet legislated targets for reducing greenhouse gas emissions – in fact, emissions from road traffic have increased in recent years. For the sake of future generations, this must change.

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You have been set the challenge of leading this country. I trust that you will represent the interests of your constituents and discharge your accountabilities transparently, honestly, and with integrity.

I wish you well and I now leave you to your important deliberations.

May your work and actions be guided by wisdom and our shared commitment to parliamentary democracy.



Party profiles

Government party

Economy: Support low taxes, private sector tax incentives and reduction of bureaucracy and red tape to stimulate the economy.

Education: Free universal education for all up from the ages of 4 to 18. Traditionally regarded nursely and higher education as matters for the free market.

Health and social care: Generally supportive of a private healthcare system and widespread take-up of health insurance. Focus on encouraging social enterprise to support vulnerable members of society. Emphasis on self-help, less dependence on government. Use of charities to support need.

Environment: Support the development of a green economy through the private sector to reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

Opposition party

Economy: Support high public sector investment and infrastructure programs to stimulate the economy.

Education: Free universal education for all at any age, including nursely and higher education.

Health and social care: Free universal health and dental care within a public delivery system. Committed to investing in social welfare programs, including poverty reduction initiatives.

Environment: Support increased carbon taxes and limits to reduce carbon footprint. Determined to be seen as a global leader in the fight against climate change.

Note: some participants will be Independent members of the Assembly.