



## **Informal meeting of the Ascension Island Council**

**17:00 on Thursday 04 November 2021 at the Courthouse**

### **MEETING SUMMARY**

Present: HH Sean Burns, Administrator [Remotely] Councillor Andrew Ellick  
Gareth Morris, Director of Resources Councillor Alan Nicholls  
Councillor Douglas Miller  
Councillor Nicholas John  
Councillor Kitty George [Remotely]

In attendance: Xander Halliwell, Head of the Administrator's Office Apologies:  
Aine Hurley, Acting Crown Counsel [Remotely]  
Diane Baum, Director of Conservation and Fisheries  
Siobhan Stewart, Clerk to Council

The Administrator welcomed all parties and thanked everyone for attending. Due to the Administrator undertaking arrival isolation, he requested that the HoAO chair the meeting whilst the Administrator remained on the phone. Councillors agreed.

The matters arising were addressed via the actions tracker and current topics discussed were as follows:

- **Animal Welfare [pets]:** A seat has been reserved on the January 2022 Titan Shuttle in the hope that circumstances will allow the vet to visit Ascension. Councillor Ellick asked if the vet will be conducting a visual check of the donkeys, to which the DoR explained that whilst it had been completed previously this trip will be time limited due to the Titan shuttle turnaround time.
- **Connection Issues with telecommunications in the Courthouse:** A television has been purchased, however some IT difficulties are still being experienced. The appropriate microphone and video system is being considered for procurement.
- **Schuyler ferry service to and from the Pierhead:** SLNC have been made aware of their obligations and are currently amending their notice to reflect the additional health and safety requests. It was agreed to remove this action from the tracker.
- **Progress of Employment Legislation and estimated timeline requested:** Email has been sent to the ERWG regarding the Implementation Schedule from the Policy Officer on 14 October 2021. Councillor Nicholls requested that this is dealt with as expeditiously as possible. Councillors requested that the original email be redistributed.
- **Advisory signage regarding the dumping of fish waste to be clearly displayed at the pier head:** Signage is now in place. It was agreed to remove this action from the tracker.
- **Update requested on the Blue Marine Endowment Fund:** The DoCF provided an update to Council on 04 November 2021.
- **Green Mountain Infrastructure – Future plans for the Red Lion:** The Park Warden carries out monthly health and safety checks of the Red Lion, fire safety, extinguishers, obvious faults in the building etc. Extensive clearance is on-going in the area. Further discussion was had regarding recent volunteer work on Green Mountain and the future potential of the Red Lion building and the key infrastructure investment required for some suggestions such as employee accommodation. Councillor John recommended that the limited resources available to the AIG are prioritised to tackle areas such as children's playgrounds and Two Boats School where the need is greater. Further discussion was had regarding the increasing use of Garden Cottage and the wider mountain infrastructure needs, with the DoR explaining that the mountain road is due for maintenance before Christmas 2021.

- **Public Notice regarding convalescent COVID-19 rules:** A Public Notice was distributed on 15 October 2021 as well as the information note distributed to Councillors on 04 October 21 via email. Councillor Ellick requested that the original email be redistributed.
- **COVID-19 Cover – Insurance providers to be displayed on the AIG website:** The immigration page of the Ascension Island Government website has been amended to refer applicants to the St Helena Police Ascension Island Detachment, who can provide more information on companies offering acceptable insurance policies.

The DoCF provided a brief background update to Council on how the £2 million **Blue Marine Endowment fund** came about following the designation of the MPA around Ascension, and how the intention is that the interest accrued and capital gain on the £2 million would be used to fund community projects on island. The DoCF explained there has been a lot of discussion with Blue Marine as to the measures that could be put in place to ensure any projects funded were completed within budget and to a good standard ensuring that the liability did not lay with the AIG. Blue Marine were developing a draft Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between AIG and Blue Marine that would establish how the fund would operate. The DoCF provided Council with a summary of Blue Marine's proposed MoU on recent discussions: Projects would need to fall within one of four categories being; community, education, environment and heritage to be viewed as eligible to apply for funds, with a committee based in the UK deciding what funds would be available each year working on the recommendation of projects from the Ascension Island Council and the AIG.

Further discussion was had regarding match funding and the management of deliverable projects. The DoCF reported that £10k per year from the fund would be allocated to the Ascension Island Charities fund for smaller community groups. Flexibility was on offer in terms of money rolling over to the next financial year if unused, with the added option of using funds for overtime. The financial management of projects will be managed by the AIG Finance Department, with a six monthly report providing an update on project progress and spend so far. Blue Marine would like the MoU to contain a provision that the fund could be paused or stopped if the MPA is no longer managed well. DoCF had asked Blue Marine to define what they meant by good management and Blue Marine looked likely to agree that implementation of the MPA Management Plan would meet this criteria. This has still to be confirmed with Blue Marine. Finally it was explained that Blue Marine had proposed a requirement that before any payments can be made there should be inshore fisheries regulations in place. Councillors felt strongly that they would not be pressured into implementing inshore fisheries regulations as there had been no previous mentioning of the requirement until now, which Councillors found to be of coincidental timing. Further discussion was had regarding the criteria set by Blue Marine and the origins of the funding. Councillor John recommended caution and full consideration to be given considering the substantial amount of money available for Ascension, although he highlighted concerns over too restrictive controls being put in place. Councillor George suggested that council continues to proceed carefully and cautiously, whilst refuting any pressure. Councillor George requested that a written document be provided detailing Blue Marine's criteria be provided to allow Councillors to digest the information. DoCF explained that she was waiting for Blue Marine to provide a draft MoU incorporating the discussion about using the MPA Management Plan as a criteria for good management. Once this was received from Blue Marine, it would be distributed to Councillors.

The HoAO provided an update on the current **COVID-19** status of the island. The HoAO explained that 1,170 Pfizer and 80 AstraZeneca vaccinations are expected on the next A400 aircraft currently scheduled to arrive on Ascension Island on 16 November 2021. The Pfizer vaccines will be boosters for those already having received their first and second dose followed by a 6 month period, as well as a single dose for children aged 12 to 17 years of age. The Astra Zeneca vaccines are for those who have not yet received their second dose of vaccine. The HoAO explained that the annual influenza vaccination is now available for those who meet certain criteria to ensure those most at risk are vaccinated first. The HoAO requested that council note that on the 08 November 2021 there will be a flight coming from the Falklands, which will be treated as a travel corridor following checks that the criteria has been met to do so. Finally the HoAO reported that the FCDO will be providing a final drop of medical supplies in February 2022, which is expected to last until the end of 2022. Further discussion was had regarding the future procurement of vaccinations.

Councillor Ellick requested an update on when the Senior Medical Officer will be talking to the community regarding Convalescent COVID-19. It was explained that meetings with the SMO have been offered through Employing Organisations but not taken up and that a Public Notice had been distributed through the normal channels.

The HoAO gave an update on the **runway project** reporting that the project is progressing well; however, the completion date is now estimated to be around the beginning of 2023. The MV Corona offload has been completed and the MV Severn has returned and offloading begun. A biosecurity update has been provided to the community in a recent edition of the Islander, detailing recent work which encouragingly shows no biosecurity hazards being found.

Councillor Nicholls provided Councillors with an update on the **Joint Ministerial Council** scheduled to take place from the 15 to 17 November 2021 which he will be attending in London. Councillor Nicholls provided a brief guide on the schedule and topics that will be covered, explaining that the briefing packs will be ready prior to the JMC. Topics covered will be Environment and Oceans, Economic Resilience, Security and Law Enforcement, UK-OT's Relationship, Health and Inclusivity. Councillor Nicholls provided an update on his planned bilateral meeting with the Minister for the Overseas Territories, The Right Honourable Amanda Milling MP, detailing topics he intends to cover. Ms Terri Nicholls, who has recently completed her first class honours degree in Environmental Science and now works in the sustainable farming sector, has been nominated by Kedell Worboys to attend a function on behalf of Ascension Island. Councillors wished Councillor Nicholls a safe journey and a successful JMC.

There was seven items of **other business**:

- i. **Jubilee Celebrations 02 – 04 June 2022:** The Administrator explained that HE the Governor has made a proclamation that Friday, 3 June 2022 shall be observed as a Public Holiday to celebrate the Queen's Platinum Jubilee on St Helena. The Administrator requested that Councillors consider how they would like the occasion to be celebrated on Ascension. Councillor Nicholls recommended that a committee be formed to organise the event, as has been done in previous years.
- ii. **Commemoration of the 40<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the liberations of the Falkland Islands:** The Administrator explained that the commemoration of the 40th Anniversary of the liberation of the Falkland Islands will be on 14 June 2022, the Administrator requested that Councillors consider how they would like the occasion to be celebrated on Ascension.
- iii. **Council representation at the Service of Remembrance:** Councillor George requested that Councillors consider who would like to represent elected members at the Service of Remembrance on Sunday 14 November 2021. Councillors agreed that Councillor Miller would attend and lay the wreath on behalf of elected members.
- iv. **Police Department Drone:** Councillor Ellick requested a status update on the police drone, the HoAO agreed to provide an update at a later date.
- v. **Catering/Welfare of passengers at Air Terminal:** Councillor Ellick requested an update as to whether refreshments were being made available for passengers at the air terminal considering the waiting time at the terminal is five hours. The Administrator explained that on the most recent Titan flight, tea and coffee refreshments were being provided in the terminal. The HoAO explained that NAAFI currently provided a service but if the AIG were to provide catering then the costs would have to be passed on to Titan passengers through ticket prices.
- vi. **Finance Committee meeting:** The DoR provided an update on the most recent finance committee meeting where draft forecasts were considered as progress continues in setting the budget for 2022/2023. The DoR continued that with the AIG in a relatively strong financial position holding a good level of reserves, that funding should be available for investment in capital projects. Further discussion was had regarding the longer term forecast and the favourable financial position expected where commitments can be made to future infrastructure projects.
- vii. **Crown Counsel:** The HoAO welcomed Aine Hurley, the Solicitor General from St Helena who is visiting Ascension Island in the role of Acting Crown Counsel to offer support in the interim between recruiting of a new Crown Counsel.

The meeting closed at 19:15

Siobhan Stewart  
Clerk of Council