



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

**1630 on Thursday 11th July 2019 at the Court House**

### **MEETING SUMMARY**

Present: Steven Chandler, HH Administrator  
Dr Philip Rushbrook, HE Governor  
Allen Cansick, Acting Attorney General  
Gareth Morris, Director of Resources  
Councillor Terence Young  
Councillor Keturah George

In attendance: Alasdair Blain, Policy & Projects Officer  
Helen Tyte, Clerk to Council (Acting)

Apologies: Councillor Alan Nicholls  
Councillor Nicholas John

#### **1. Welcome**

The Administrator welcomed all those present and gave apologies for Councillor John and Councillor Nicholls. There was no need for the meeting to be quorate as it was informal.

#### **2. Matters arising** (from last informal meeting on 18<sup>th</sup> June 2019 – updates in italics).

##### **2c) Firearms Ordinance**

*Update: A/AG is still planning a teleconference with Inspector Dave Kewley to go through the draft ordinance.*

**Action: A/AG to prioritise this for the next meeting.**

##### **3c) Operations update – Street lighting**

*Update: Due to issues with the FIRS not all of the necessary parts for the street lighting are currently on the island. When they are AIG will start a pilot test and report back.*

**Action: Dir Ops to report back once all of the equipment is on island and has been tested.**

##### **4) Income tax rates and allowances Ordinance**

The amendment for this was agreed at the last formal meeting.

##### **6e) Care for Georgetown greenery**

*Update: A Tree Management Policy has been drawn up, implemented and emailed to Councillors for their information. This policy is now in place and will govern how requests for tree management are dealt with. It was also confirmed that the watering of plants throughout Georgetown was now underway.*

##### **4) Medical Complaints Policy**

*This has been completed and was agreed by the Administrator at the Formal meeting on 27<sup>th</sup> June.*

### 5) Electoral Register

This is to be updated as a priority once the Clerk to Council is back from her leave.

**Action: Clerk to Council to update this when she is back off leave.**

### 7b) Role of Community Governor

*Update: This investigation is in progress. The role of and make-up of the School Governing body is currently under review, with a new induction pack, code of conduct and agreed terms of reference planned for September. The possibility of a councillor forming a mandatory part of the Governing body will be discussed further as part of this review..*

**Action: Dir Resources to give update at a future meeting.**

### 7c) MUGA

The possibility of purchasing nets to cover the MUGA and protect balls from the Mexican Thorn was discussed at the previous council meeting. The decision was made to review again after seeing the impact of current efforts to remove offending bushes from the immediate area. The soon to be formed Charity Board was suggested as an appropriate forum to bid for funding.

*Update: The membership of the Charity Fund Board has now been agreed. Over the coming weeks board members will be timetabling meetings, setting terms of reference, and pulling together application for funding forms. There will then be a notice issued to make the public aware of the Fund, and encourage people to submit applications for funding.*

## 3. Animal Welfare Paper

The Policy & Projects (P&P) Officer was thanked for his comprehensive paper that had been circulated to Councillors. It contains information gleaned from old records and new information regarding potential management of feral donkeys on Ascension for welfare purposes. The P&P Officer explained that the welfare of the donkeys had been an on-going concern since at least 2002, which is the earliest written record of similar discussions taking place. At a meeting of the Council in April a paper had been laid by Dir Conservation outlining a number of potential options. From this the Council requested several of the options be detailed further. The P&P Officer outlined the following information based on the Council previous request. This was drawn from his own research and discussions with key stakeholders, including AW Shipping, Dir Cons and Joe Hollins, the Senior Veterinary Officer (SVO) on St Helena.

#### a) A Donkey Sanctuary

A number of significant difficulties were noted with this option. This would necessitate an enclosed, fenced area suitable for donkeys, with ongoing maintenance. Many of the male donkeys would have to be castrated to stop them fighting and there would only be room for a limited number of animals, necessitating a cull. Donkey feed would have to be shipped in as grazing would not be possible due to the restricted area. Donkeys would need to be provided a certain level of care given they would no longer be feral, necessitating the importation of medication and expertise to deliver this to the animals in times of need. It would be very difficult to rely on volunteers to run the sanctuary, as many people are only on the island for a short period of time. Therefore this would be a costly and complex solution which would require an ongoing commitment of finance and specialist resource. The P&P Officer expressed his opinion that this was not a viable option.

b) Move Donkeys to the Donkey Sanctuary on St Helena

When he had enquired about this the P&P Officer had been told that St Helena Council had asked that the possibility of moving their donkeys to Ascension Island be explored. Due to its location and lush pasture the donkeys tend to develop fatty liver disease and have chronic problems with their hooves. This means the sanctuary on St Helena is actually a bit of a headache for the Government. Andrew Weir shipping indicated they would be open to working with the SVO on St Helena to move the animals, although this would require a DEFRA certificate. The SVO however indicated it would be extremely unlikely that the certificate could be issued as the donkeys are wild animals. They would have to be sedated and would spend two and a half days travelling on a boat, which would be deemed too stressful and would create a severe welfare situation. The P&P Officer expressed his opinion that this was also not a viable option given neither a transport certificate would be issued and that the St Helena sanctuary did not want the Ascension donkeys.

c) Castration of Males

Although time consuming and resource intensive this option may be viable. The males would have to be corralled into a secure location and then sedated under general anaesthetic before undergoing the castration surgery. This would be very stressful for the donkeys and would carry a high risk of danger to those trying to catch and sedate them. Vets would have to be flown in to carry out this procedure, and they would need to remain on the island until all the males had been caught and castrated; although whether this had actually been achieved may be difficult to determine with any certainty. This would have to include waiting for the young colts to reach sexual maturity, which occurs between the age of 11 and 16 months. There would also likely be pregnant females carrying male foals, further prolonging the amount of time expertise would be required. Any lapse may see another donkey fall pregnant with a male foal, again prolonging the exercise. The South Atlantic Environmental Research Institute (SAERI) had recently conducted a cultural ecosystems service project to map the cultural heritage of Ascension Island. Green Mountain was first in the poll, followed closely by the donkeys, indicating the animals are very highly valued by the population here. In 2002 a similar proposal for castration of the donkeys was discussed, and over three hundred people signed a petition against it. The P&P Officer feels that it would be a possible solution to reduce the number of donkeys on Ascension, but that this would require a more in-depth assessment by qualified experts. Again this would be a costly solution, and is one which would likely generate negative feedback from the population on the island. Given the lengthy period of time necessary to ensure this option is effective in its aims, full support of the Council and AIG would be required to ensure it is fully followed through on.

d) Donkey Cull

A donkey cull would remove the question of welfare in the long term, although welfare in the short term would need to be carefully considered. A cull would need careful management and would require oversight from suitably qualified professionals. Each donkey would need to be rounded up as it would be extremely difficult to humanely euthanize a donkey from any sort of distance, and this would need to be done individually to avoid fights and distressing donkeys through witnessing others being euthanized. If this option were to be taken forward a comprehensive public information campaign and consultation would be needed and the P&P Officer noted that a large portion of the population on the island may not be in favour of this given the results of the recent SAERI project. The P&P Officer felt that this route could be explored, but cautioned that it wasn't a straightforward solution, and would again be very costly. The P&P Officer noted that on Tristan da Cunha a donkey cull had been voted for by the

Island Council, but which was then stopped due to public outcry. However the cull was initiated due to a serious lack of available pasture for livestock which resulted in 8% of the cattle herd being lost over the winter. The P&P Officer pointed out that that the public on Tristan da Cunha had accepted an earlier castration exercise, so the donkey population as already non-breeding, but were against an outright cull even though they were utilising limited grazing pasture.

The P&P Officer believed that a programme of castration or culling would be possible solutions, but they would both be costly, and both had the potential to be met with opposition from the public. It would require a lot of commitment over several years, including having a vet stationed here for much of that length of time. Dir Resources pointed out that this would mean there was a vet on the island for two years, benefitting those here with pets. However as there are so few pets on Ascension there would be very little for a vet to do.

On current practice, AIG has taken practical steps to improve the donkeys' welfare. A big issue for the animals is foreign objects in/around their hooves, which most pick up from One Boat dump. The police now have a saw to remove cans from donkeys' legs, but this still requires the donkey to be caught first. There is also a clearer euthanasia protocol so when a call is received about a sickly donkey the police are called out along with a member of Conservation. They make a visual assessment together and decide on a course of action. Due to the lack of a vet on the island there would be no facility for providing medication for a sick donkey, so the options for treatment would be to wait and observe the donkey's progress over a few days or carry out immediate humane euthanasia.

The current euthanasia protocol is to shoot the donkey with a shotgun, which means getting close enough to a wild animal to be able to ensure a direct hit. This can be stressful for the donkey and often it is difficult to get close enough to ensure humane euthanization unless the animal is immobile. Therefore the P&P Officer had looked at other options which included the use of a tranquiliser gun to sedate the donkey before euthanasia. This was looked into by the Agriculture and Natural Resources Division (ANRD) on St Helena and was deemed unfeasible as donkeys would require a large amount of drugs to sedate them, usually delivered intravenously rather than via a tranquiliser dart. The drug that could be used in a dart gun is extremely dangerous to humans, so would have to be very tightly controlled, necessitating the antidote be kept on the person assisting the individual wielding the dart gun. The police on Ascension used to have a tranquiliser gun that Councillor George explained had been used with the drug Succinylcholine, which paralyses the animal. There was a question as to whether this was a humane drug to use on a wild animal as whilst temporarily paralysed it would be conscious throughout. Previously there had been a shotgun club or visiting members of the UK armed forces who would carry out intermittent culling. This had also generated public opposition. Councillor George felt that a public notice should be issued to ask people not to feed or water the donkeys in town, which would mean that the animals would return to congregating around the designated feeding and watering station at One Boat. The Governor understood that this would take the animals away from the towns, but pointed out that this would still leave the issue of maintaining the welfare of any sick or injured donkeys. He felt that the tranquiliser gun would be a far quicker method of sedating a donkey, especially as for example it had recently taken the police 10 days to catch a donkey to remove a tin from its hoof. Councillor George believed that the public would not know who to call if they saw a donkey with a can on its foot, so she suggested that more groups on the island were issued with tools to cut away the cans. She also felt that the public should be encouraged to crush their cans before disposing of them. Food cans tend to be a big problem as they are thrown away with household waste because there

is currently no facility to separate and recycle them. The Governor asked the P&P Officer to request a clearer message from ANRD about what we can do to perform sedation or euthanasia of sick donkeys. He also felt that it would be possible for AIG to use regulations to ensure that people did not feed them in town, reducing the attraction. Councillor Young explained that there had been designated feeding and watering areas, and suggested the possibility of introducing more. He also felt that new people on the island were unaware that these feeding stations existed. The P&P Officer noted that as Councillors John and Nicholls were absent he would be content to discuss this with them further if helpful.

The Administrator summarised that options (a) and (b) appeared not to be viable, and that whilst possible to implement options (c) and (d) were undesirable. He suggested a further option which he called the 'Status Quo Plus' option. This would involve a regular set of communication with the public to explain how they could help ensure donkey welfare which would remind and inform them among other things: not to litter and to crush cans before throwing them away thereby reducing the risk tins/cans would cause problems for donkeys; how to report donkeys in distress; discourage feeding of donkeys in Georgetown and other population centres, and provide details of the designated feeding area(s) at One Boat. Councillor George pointed out that the donkeys cannot get into Two Boats or the American base because of cattle grids, so the majority of the issues come with donkeys in Georgetown.

The Governor felt that a tranquiliser gun should be investigated further and that it should be possible to procure and store the controlled drugs that would be needed. The Administrator felt that the solution should be to accept that the donkeys are an integral part of Ascension Island, that their presence helps attract people here and that many residents would not want to see them disappear. He believed that his proposed 'Status Quo Plus' option should be pursued in order to improve donkey welfare. At the same time we should seek further information about the use of a tranquiliser gun for sedation. Councillors George and Young fully supported this move, believing that the majority of people want to help the donkeys, not get rid of them. Any enticements into town should be discouraged, including for example the use of the bathtub near the hospital to provide water to the donkeys close to where the school bus collects children. The Governor felt that the bathtub should be removed if there was no permission for it to be there.

**Action: P&P Officer to investigate the option of a tranquiliser gun and to look into the removal of the bathtub and research the locations of designated feeding and watering stations. P&P Officer will also formulate and launch a public information campaign.**

#### **4. Fuel Station**

The Councillors had been sent a document prior to the meeting that gave details of the recent fuel pilot. This pilot programme took place over three consecutive Wednesdays with eight visits recorded in total. Based on the figures provided by the pilot scheme the opening of the fuel station outside current opening times is not justified when considered against the cost incurred by AIG. One of those who did make use of the alternate hours was a shift worker. It was agreed he would be contacted and allowed to use the fuel station during non-public opening times, i.e. AIG staff opening times. If the introduction of the ability to also dispense petrol means that the station became very busy, further opening times might be considered in the future. The Governor asked about the use of automatic dispensing and the P&P Officer believed that this had been considered when installing the new station, although as he was not involved in the commissioning of the new station could not say for certain. Now that the fuel station is up and running, this might be considered in the future, if there is enough demand to justify the cost. The Administrator

confirmed that the new petrol dispensing nozzle had arrived and had been fitted. Once the safety certification and training was complete this could then be used to fuel cars.

**Action:** P&P Officer to publicise the availability of petrol [completed]. Councillor George to inform the shift worker affected that they will be able to use the fuel station during AIG times. Administrator to inform Ops that this individual has this permission.

## 5. Any other business

### a) Swimming Pool

*Update: The underground pipe and pump have not been tested yet, due to rough seas and other more pressing work commitments. This should go ahead in w/b 15 July.*

**Action:** Dir Operations to update the Councillors as soon as this work is carried out.

### b) Turtle Ponds

*Update: The Administrator was able to confirm that work was well underway with this, although rough seas had hampered progress recently. The work above the ground is almost complete. The work on the underside is often under water and cannot be worked during high tide or rough seas. AIG has given permission for those working on the ponds to claim overtime to facilitate the work taking place outside of normal working hours.*

**Action:** Dir Operations to update as soon as this work is completed.

### c) Club Extensions

Councillor George had received a communication from a member of the public about the extension of club opening hours for children. The Administrator explained that the relevant Ordinance allows the Police Inspector to consider extension requests and grant them or not. Appeals against the police's decision can be to the Administrator. The names of anyone objecting to these extensions would remain strictly confidential.

### d) Anti-social Behaviour

Councillor George wanted to raise the issue of anti-social behaviour in the community. She believes that cases of this are very few and in the past any issues raised had been dealt with quickly and with zero-tolerance. The fact that people found guilty of such actions have had their contract terminated has acted as a great deterrent, as it would also mean having to leave the island. Such a regime should mean that any children attending functions should not witness any anti-social behaviour. However Councillor George has received indications that the general public are starting to feel uncomfortable with the increase in anti-social incidents, several of which she understands have resulted in hospital visits. She felt that a collaborative effort to eradicate these incidents should be made between the police, the hospital and the new social worker. The Council used to have an opportunity to meet with the police and were able to give them feedback about things happening in the community. She urged a return to this arrangement. This could be reinstated at the informal Council meetings. The Administrator felt certain the Police Inspector would be open to requests for meetings from Councillors at any time.

**Action:** Social Worker to speak to Councillors when she arrives in August.

**Administrator to speak with Inspector Kewley about the possibility of regular meetings between the Council and the police.**

#### e) Shopping Basket

Councillor George asked when the last 'shopping basket' was carried out and if there was a future one planned. Dir Resources explained that there had not been a "shopping basket" comparison since 2011. Though a shopping basket may provide a proxy for calculating inflation it has not been deemed adequate for AIG in previous year's budget setting. Dir Resources suggested a new "shopping basket" will be compiled as part of the 2020/21 budget setting.

**Action: Dir Resources to include shopping basket data as part of 2020/21 budget setting.**

#### 6. Date of next meetings

The following forthcoming dates have been agreed:

- Informal – 25<sup>th</sup> July 2019 at 1630
- Formal – 8<sup>th</sup> August 2019 at 1630
- Informal – 22<sup>nd</sup> August 2019 at 1630

There was no further business and the meeting ended at 1745hrs.

**Helen Tyte**

Helen Tyte

Clerk of Council (Acting)