EXCO meeting of 12 June 2012

Good afternoon,

 I’m sure many of you will have happy memories of the Jubilee weekend, whether you were joining in the excellent celebrations here in Jamestown in such glorious weather, or watching on television the various events in London including the extraordinary pageant on the River Thames. My thanks to Councillor Derek Thomas and his team for ensuring that the Jubilee weekend here was such a success.

But now back to work and this morning we had an EXCO agenda which included a recommendation from the Planning Board to approve a planning application by SHELCO for a luxury resort development. Councillors noted that the Planning Board was unanimous in recommending that EXCO should approve the application. Council also noted that the Land Development Control Plan, which was recently approved after lengthy public consultation extending over many months, specifically envisages a development of this kind at Broad Bottom. There was evidence of wide-ranging public support for the principle; but it was reported that the Board had received expressions of concern about some of the details of the application. Councillors wished to read for themselves the various comments which had been submitted before giving definitive advice on the decision to be made. To that end, after a good discussion and a technical briefing from officials, EXCO agreed to meet again at 09.30 on Friday this week, 15 June, when it would meet in open session to make a decision on the Planning Board’s recommendation.

Our next paper was simply to approve that a Bill for an Ordinance to amend the St Helena Development Agency Ordinance so as to rename the body ‘Enterprise St Helena’ (and to make a few other minor amendments arising from that) should be introduced at the July sitting of LEGCO.

We then considered a paper entitled the Criminal Justice (Sentencing) Bill and agreed that a Bill of that name should be put to the next meeting of LEGCO. The Bill is to address a few technical anomalies in the criminal justice system related to the length of sentence attached to an offence and whether the case is heard is in the Magistrates’ Court or in the Supreme Court. It does not increase maximum penalties but removes procedural anomalies in order to ensure that cases where the likely sentence is within the limit of the Magistrates’ Court can be heard in that Court rather than the Supreme Court. A press release will provide more detail in due course.

Our next agenda item sought approval of a recommendation from the Health and Social Welfare Committee for an increase in Statutory Fees related to such matters as the fees levied for meat and fish inspection. An underlying objective behind this was to recover the actual costs of making such inspection visits and reports. Councillors decided that they needed more information on some aspects of the proposal and deferred the paper to the next regular meeting of EXCO.

We then took a paper which covered a request from Saint FM for several additional frequencies in the FM radio band. Councillors noted that Saint FM already had several unused FM frequencies that were allocated some time ago. Noting that FM frequencies were a valuable resource, Councillors considered that they would need some expert advice before they could reach a decision and the paper was therefore deferred until such advice had been received.

Under Any Other Business we received an update from the Financial Secretary on the ongoing discussion with Cable and Wireless in relation to their proposals for a new 10 year exclusive licence with SHG. A robust discussion of the issues followed in which Councillors registered mounting concern about the present very high cost of telecoms and of Broadband internet services in particular.

Our meeting then ended at around 1pm.

Finally a reminder that tomorrow, Wednesday, is of course polling day to elect a new Councillor to replace former Councillor Michael Benjamin. I do hope that all those of you entitled to vote in the by–election will do so.

Thank you very much for listening and a good afternoon to you all.