**EXCO meeting of 20 March 2012**

Good afternoon.

On our agenda today we had the meaty issue of the Land Development Control Plan. You may recall that one of the central planks of the Memorandum of Understanding agreed with HMG in 2010 was that SHG would review the existing Land Development Control Plan to achieve a more development friendly, non-discretionary planning regime, incorporating appropriate environmental safeguards.

In all there were 30 weeks of extensive public consultations across the island. These sometimes proved difficult and it is fair to say that there were some heated moments during that process. But of course, it is only to be expected that discussion of controls on land use should at times become an emotive issue. So it was no surprise that our discussion today of the final details of the new Land Development Control Plan proved to be lengthy and detailed with firmly held views expressed on many points.

It was an excellent discussion from which it was clear that all Councillors in EXCO were sharply focused not just on the interest of the people of St Helena today, but also for the generations of Saints to come.  On such a sensitive subject it's impossible to develop a comprehensive plan that will please everyone, but after much careful consideration we were able to settle on the final outcome which will become SHG official policy from 1 April 2012.

The Attorney General’s Chambers will now proceed with redrafting the Land Planning and Development Control Ordinance which will guide implementation of the new policy. The revised Ordinance will be presented to Legislative Council as soon as possible.

On a related matter our next paper sought EXCO’s approval to agree a Land Disposal and Housing Strategy. This too is an important element of the 2010 MoU.  The essence of this piece for work is to give SHG a simpler and quicker way to release Crown Land and housing on to the property market, creating a transparent and development friendly structure.  This should enable wealth creation and retention through land sales and purchases. An important objective of the housing strategy is to make it easier for people to gain access to a range of affordable housing types and tenures.

Our next paper received EXCO approval for revisions to Social Security Regulations to come into force on 1 April 2012. This is to give effect to EXCO’s decision last month to increase the level of the Basic Island Pension and the basic level of Income Related Benefits. The basic Island Pension will increase from £45 per week to £47.12 per week. The maximum income level for IRB recipients will increase £43.30 per week to £45.34 per week.  More detailed explanation of these increases will be made available to recipients of the BIP and the IRB shortly.

After discussion of a few general matters under any other business, our meeting today ended at a few minutes past 2pm.

Tomorrow EXCO will meet with the senior management of Solomons for one of the regular six monthly sessions to discuss matters of common interest.

Thank you for listening and a very good afternoon to you all,

**Mark Capes**

**Governor**

**20 March 2012**