

Infrastructure Debate

By

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Throughout the night I had lots of different thoughts, the main one being that action is needed. There's no point in sitting around debating things for weeks on end and then not even taking any action.

It was clearly identified that people were unhappy with the current States. They were accused of not listening to local businesses needs and also being extremely slow in making decisions. Now the main aim of the night, which some clearly didn't listen to, was to provide creative and positive feedback.

On the matter of the States, yes I do agree that they take too much time to deliberate over things. However, the simple solution in my opinion is to decrease the number of states members to thirteen, one for each parish except for St Peter Port which would have two. The voting system would then change to an island wide voting system and pay for deputies would double, becoming more appealing for new experienced and professional perspective deputies.

The subject of connectivity came up numerous times. Whether it is the quality of broadband and telecom services or airline links, it needs to be improved for years to come. Personally, I feel that it isn't the correct time for a runway extension for Guernsey. Once average capacity reaches higher levels and demand for services increases further, then the extension of the runway should be looked at again. However for now I don't see it being necessary in the near future.

Another 'hot' topic of the evening was education. The area of ICT came up towards the end of the evening with many people on the students table saying their level of education in this area was minimal. For me this wasn't the case, prior to Grammar Sixth Form I studied at Les Beaucamps, our level of ICT was of a high standard unlike many of the other schools. The next day I went about finding out about other people's experience to find that St Sampsons also had a good standard of IT, maybe the other schools need to take tips, yes it could do with increased funding and also an increased emphasis on the subject and the importance of it.

Another area which would also help to increase connectivity would be development of the harbour, improving the facilities which we already have. It can't stop there. The need for increased competition on the sea routes is greatly needed with condor holding a huge monopoly, hence why I was so pleased seeing the possibility of Bumblebee providing proposals to launch a inter-island ferry service between Guernsey and Jersey, increasing competition and hopefully bringing down prices for consumers. Also being owned locally it keeps profits within our circular flow of income, helping to increase economic growth further.

One of the biggest questions was how would we possibly pay for it? It's all well and good coming up with great ideas but if you can't afford them they are pointless.

The most simple way is government borrowing. Through the issuing of bonds and loan notes capital can be sourced, but it comes at a cost. A plus side about using loan notes as a funding method is that it could support local business by issuing them with The International Stock Exchange. Other ways which I feel could work well is the restructuring of welfare benefits, a six month system in which the level of benefit decreases month on month until you reach a base level. It would give people an incentive to get

a job. I know it wouldn't save enough to fund large infrastructure projects but it would decrease unemployment which would both help to increase aggregate demand in the economy and increase government tax revenues. The government could also alter fiscal policy further and impose heavier taxes on de-merit goods, one in particular being a sugar tax which I feel is needed.

Private and Public Sector partnerships are a real possibility for the states when attempting to raise capital, with many firms interested in improving the island and giving something back.

Taxing fuel more and more isn't sustainable, hitting lower income families harder and harder. I don't agree with taxing fuel when the substitutes such as electric cars are not cheap. Road taxes should therefore be introduced and fuel taxation rises should decrease from what they currently are.

The survey carried out prior to the evening indicated that people would be happy to pay slightly higher taxes to pay for new infrastructure projects. I would propose a two tier system, having no effect on the lower class.

For me the night was a fantastic experience and I'd like to thank everyone. I learnt a number of new things and spoke to some very interesting people finding out about current possibilities in Guernsey.