

## IoD Debate Blog

Having the opportunity to attend the IoD debate in Guernsey with a focus, mainly, on infrastructure was an interesting insight to what happens in the world of infrastructural investment on-island.

The evening started with a very interesting talk from the keynote speaker, Richard Abadie. He focused on the rise of renewable energy and future investment on self-driving cars. Though Alistair said the evening should be as positive as possible, Abadie slipped in that while China grew by 50% between 2007 and 2015, the opposite happened in Europe of the same magnitude. What with an impending estimated infrastructure-spending deficit of 16%, it was not a great start on positivity, but an interesting one. While not Guernsey-relevant, Abadie's astute introduction into infrastructure investment globally proved to be an apt setting-of-the-mood for the evening.

Next, Gavin St Pier addressed the audience. He talked about the importance of being at the top of the digital infrastructure game and how he planned to get Guernsey up there. Investing in world-class technology seemed to be his solution. However, an obvious and recurring problem Gavin reiterated was how to pay for this investment. Should the States raise taxes? If the States aren't willing to raise taxes, how else will all this investment be paid for? However these decisions are made, Gavin explained that solidarity within the community about such decisions is needed (how solidarity will be reached with 38 deputies is a mystery to me). Another ideal that Gavin highlighted was moving to make Guernsey one of the happiest nations in the world, to which a panelist responded with a comment claiming that "happiness comes from strategic plans".

As it was such a broad topic, it was hard to guess what the debate would be focused on. Being inexperienced in the realms of infrastructure, I had foreseen discussions about road closures and sea defense. Much to my content, I did not have to endure any such considerations. There was a fairly clear focus on air links and digital, as well as social, infrastructure. With a massive debate from the panelists and the audience about extending the runway, the debate became very opinionated with everyone's priorities coming to light. Fiona, a panelist, was heavily in favour of improving air links, whereas another panelist thought that investing in the harbour was of utmost importance. The latter was not mentioned again that night. I feel this speaks for how important everyone else thought the matter was.

On the topic of air links and the airport issues, Fiona raised concern about the link to London City airport. There was lots of objection from the business sector about this issue. With a focus on attracting business to the island, perhaps this air link is a large factor (along with the lack of corporation tax). Surely getting rid of the air link to London City directly conflicts the attractiveness of the island to businesses.

Another topic that caused discussion, especially from the students' table, was education. What with the States' deliberation about fees for the future college set up having been concluded on the day of the debate, it was a topical issue. One point that concerned me was how the government could incentivise post-graduate students to come back to the island to live and work here. The way I see it is that there are many reasons to go, but few to actually return and contribute to Guernsey's future economy. I know this is alarming, seeing as our generation will be replacing those working now and this opinion of mine is not an unpopular one. Perhaps one thing that could incentivise young people to return back to the island is by making it easier for us to join the housing market. Building more homes so that the price of housing reduces could do this. The problem with this, however, is: where could these houses be built? Direct confliction between aesthetics of the island and high house prices is the trade off decision that should be made here.

Of course, another way that I would be incentivised to return would be to make it easier to get off and on the island with ease. This, I feel, is very much a popular opinion amongst everyone on Guernsey.

The final discussion was about how these investments would be paid for, as mentioned by Gavin earlier in the evening. A clear consensus was reached in that tax rates should be increased if this revenue was to go towards infrastructural investments to benefit the whole island. It seems obvious to me that a private-public sector partnership is the most efficient way to go when these projects are underway. It would be selfish for one to disagree with the higher tax rates proposed seeing as Guernsey has the 4<sup>th</sup> lowest tax to GDP ratio in the developed world; thus meaning Guernsey can afford investment.

With all of this being said, I have realised that there are definitely worse places to live. However, seeing as we can foreseeably make our living situation better, why shouldn't we?