



PROCEEDINGS OF THE GIBRALTAR PARLIAMENT

AFTERNOON SESSION: 5.15 p.m. – 7.40 p.m.

Gibraltar, Tuesday, 20th July 2021

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The Gibraltar Parliament

The Parliament met at 5.15 p.m.

[MR SPEAKER: Hon. M L Farrell BEM GMD RD JP *in the Chair*]

[CLERK TO THE PARLIAMENT: P E Martinez Esq *in attendance*]

Appropriation Bill 2021 – Second Reading – Debate commenced

Mr Speaker: The Hon. the Deputy Chief Minister.

Deputy Chief Minister (Hon. Dr J J Garcia): Mr Speaker, it is good to see this House meeting today in order to debate the Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure. The events of the last 15 months have shown that nothing can be taken for granted, not even this traditional, set-piece annual fixture.

This is my 23rd Budget. Thirteen have been in Opposition, 10 as a Member of the Government – one of which failed to materialise in the usual way, as we all know, as a consequence of the pandemic.

We have seen how a virus first detected in China at the end of 2019 has now taken millions of lives, destroyed families everywhere, decimated economies across the planet and quite simply turned the world upside down. The pandemic has challenged everything that we took for granted: the simple right to leave our homes, the right to meet who we want when we want to, the right to gather in hundreds or thousands, the ability to travel smoothly and simply, the right to open the doors of our businesses, our relationships with our loved ones and the elderly in particular. Those multiple challenges have complicated our existence. They have thrust to the forefront of the debate the delicate balancing act between freedom and the protection of life, and difficult decisions have had to be taken.

Mr Speaker, this global pandemic is a watershed. It will mark a before and after. COVID-19 has taken a heavy toll in many different ways and in many different areas. It has had a devastating economic impact everywhere, first because governments have increased their expenditure, and second because government revenues have shrunk. That is the basic pattern repeated in different places, and we all know the reason why. Governments have had to spend money to protect their citizens, here in Gibraltar too.

Our own COVID-19 Response Fund already runs into hundreds of millions of pounds as we have strived to save lives and protect businesses. Our intensive preparations have cost money. This covered areas like general medical supplies, PPE, a field hospital, ventilators, medication and investment in doctors, in nurses and in frontline staff. We all agreed this expenditure here together, emergency spending to face the threat to our people.

At the same time, the private sector was effectively shut down as we faced two lockdowns. The taxpayer was called upon to support the business community in a number of different ways through Government rents, rates, taxation and import duty, and importantly support for private sector salaries.

All this comes with a price-tag attached. This is exactly what these estimates reflect. It means more money going out and it means less money coming in. That is the financial cost of COVID-19,

a cost which runs through these Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure. I have never seen anything like it in over 20 years in this House and the consequence of this is simple mathematics. It was already spelt out to the country by my hon. Friend the Chief Minister on Thursday, 20th May, and it is laid bare in the numbers tabled before this House today: a deficit announced then of £138 million with a further deficit of £51 million projected for the next year.

Those stark figures represent the financial consequences of our actions. The numbers reflect the decisions that we took, that both sides of this House took together. We agreed and established the COVID-19 Response Fund in the knowledge that what mattered was the present and that the protection of our people from this deadly disease was paramount. We all did what needed to be done, for we were not only dealing with the unexpected, we were also dealing with the unknown, and to an extent we still are. When people look back in 20 years' time and write the history of this period, that unity of purpose will not be lost on anyone. It is, of course, nothing new. For more than three centuries Gibraltarians have united against countless threats, some of those perils blatant and visible; others, like this one, covert and invisible, not the usual type of threat and certainly not from the usual quarter.

The people of Gibraltar, for their part, have trusted their leaders to manage the pandemic and we all rose to that challenge. Everyone did. Hundreds of volunteers put their names down to help. Our health and care services made us proud, our frontline and emergency workers, our civil service and the wider public sector; our elderly, particularly those over 70, who were called upon to make sacrifices for the common good; our young people too; our business community, who have taken a serious hit.

I want to take a moment to praise the work of those who brought everything together: the Chief Minister at the top; the two Health Ministers, Paul Balban and Samantha Sacramento; the Minister for Public Health, Prof. John Cortes; and all my other colleagues, each in their own area. Gibraltar can be well proud. We have become a world leader in testing for COVID-19 and we have led the world with our vaccination programme, thanks to the unstinting support of the United Kingdom.

Mr Speaker, this public health background must be at the centre of our debate here today because it would be a serious error of judgement to view these estimates in splendid isolation as if nothing had happened, as if we had not faced a threat to life, as if the overriding priority had not been precisely to protect our people. It would just be plain wrong to belittle all this, to ignore the catastrophic economic cost of this global pandemic and to pretend it never happened.

Sadly, we suffered a human cost too, something much greater, a cost that cannot be measured in pounds and pence. COVID-19 took 94 souls away from us, lives which were ended before their time, and we will never forget them. Thankfully, many more were saved. This destruction of human life is unknown in Gibraltar since the Spanish Flu of some hundred years ago, and globally *four million* people have now lost their lives.

As families come to terms with their loss and we grieve for those who are no longer with us, the shattered economies across the world struggle to find their feet. Variants, mutations, vaccinations, genomic testing, PCR, antigen, face masks and social distancing are part of the legacy that COVID-19 has left us – a new lexicon for a new era. We hope and pray that all this is over soon, but then who knows? The fact remains that this global pandemic has had a terrible human cost and we can never forget that, but for the purposes of today we should recall that the global pandemic has had a disastrous economic cost as well, and that Gibraltar, regrettably, is no exception to that rule.

Mr Speaker, COVID-19 is the crisis of a lifetime, our departure from the European Union the challenge of a generation. As the House knows, the COVID-19 pandemic has coincided in time and space with our exit from the EU, and we as a Government, a Parliament and a people have had to contend with both. In their time in office, any government might expect to deal with one such unusual eventuality, but we have been particularly unlucky to be faced with two, and both of them at the same time. The double blow of Brexit and COVID has been a real test. It has stretched our resources, it has probed deep into our resolve and it has pushed Gibraltar to the very limit.

90 The referendum of 2016 unleashed a huge volume of work for the public administration:
volumes of papers, hundreds of meetings, hours upon hours of stress, tension and pressure. The
consequences of our EU exit have been felt across every Department, every Authority and every
Agency because, quite simply, membership of the European Union had percolated into every area
of life – everywhere. Therefore, exit from the European Union, as someone observed during this
process, has been like trying to remove the eggs from a cake after baking it. It has meant at least
95 two detailed strands of work running in parallel, often more. That work intensified and peaked
with each deadline.

There were a number of such cliff-edge scenarios. Several came before the Withdrawal
Agreement had been concluded. Members will recall that our original departure date was set for
29th March 2019, then 12th April 2019 and then 31st October. The intensity rose to new heights
100 with each and every deadline. Finally, the UK and Gibraltar left the EU with a Withdrawal
Agreement on 31st January 2020. The next cliff edge came in the run up to the end of the
transition period on 31st December last year. The New Year's Eve Agreement ensured the
continuation of a semblance of normality. This was accompanied by a series of contingency
measures unilaterally applied by Spain, originally until the end of last month. Those measures have
105 now been extended further until 31st October.

All this comes at a time when we stand on the threshold of the commencement of treaty
negotiations about Gibraltar's future relationship with the European Union. The draft negotiating
mandate of the European Commission has just been published this afternoon. The next step is
agreement by the member states in the Council. The content of the mandate should not come as
110 a surprise to anyone. It reflects the opening position of those on the opposite side, and not our
view or the view of the UK. In other words, this is the start of a process and not the final product.
Gibraltar, the United Kingdom and Spain remain committed to an outcome based on the New
Year's Eve Agreement. This is, nonetheless, a most unhelpful mandate. It contains very little that
we can agree with and it simply may not be possible to arrive at a new treaty on this basis.

115 We will know more once the mandate has been approved by the member states and the
negotiations commence, but at each and every stage, including this one, we have faced a cliff edge
and Gibraltar has had to plan for different outcomes. We have prepared for the consequences of
an agreement and also for the consequences of no agreement at the same time.

In relation to the no-deal work, I want to make one thing absolutely clear. It is impossible to
120 mitigate for every consequence of a non-negotiated outcome and it is clear that the Government
can only prepare in areas that we control. In other areas, the new situation will simply reflect what
it means to be outside the European Union.

Businesses and citizens need to make their own preparations too. There is a considerable
amount of information on the Government's website and we will deploy the same well-oiled
125 communications strategy that we have used in the past. I am pleased to inform the House that
the Government plans to update our private briefings on a no negotiated outcome. These will be
delivered to a number of interested parties, including Members opposite, and will be similar to
the ones provided before previous cliff edges.

The Government continues to work closely with the UK government on a No Negotiated
130 Outcome Board, or NNO for short. I chair this jointly with the Minister for the European
Neighbourhood and the Americas, Wendy Morton MP. It met in Gibraltar on 28th June in hybrid
format. This joint no-deal work has been continuous and has now spanned a number of years.

I want to place on record our gratitude at the continuing support of the United Kingdom in this
area. The House knows that the UK has financially supported a number of EU exit projects for
135 Gibraltar. This has included the construction of a ferry access ramp at the port; the purchase of a
waste shredder, compactor, baler and wrapper; and the temporary ferry service from Algeciras,
to allow time for our food importers to adapt to the new EU rules which followed our exit.

The official scheme which facilitated the ferry service from Algeciras came to an end on
15th May. The UK and Gibraltar governments took the view that this contingency was absolutely

140 essential and the bedding-in of the ferry service has served its purpose. The operation has since continued on a purely commercial basis.

Food importers have made use of the additional time to make alternative arrangements. The House will recall that the issue here is the transit of goods of animal origin from the UK and outside the EU to Gibraltar. Those goods are required to enter the EU in transit through a border control post, generally in France, and then to exit through the nearest border control post, which is in Algeciras.

145 This new system, which has operated from 1st January, has presented a difficult logistical challenge for our food importers. It is cumbersome and bureaucratic. The processes and procedures are different. There is more paperwork for the exporter, more bureaucracy for the importer and more rules for the transport companies. This reflects what it means to be outside the European Union.

The Department of the Environment, together with DEFRA in the UK, have maintained a close contact with our food importers throughout the Brexit process, and this regular contact continues to this day. I am pleased to report that the bulk of them have now better understood the new systems. There are some making use of the ferry, there are others importing their goods into the EU and then re-exporting them to Gibraltar as opposed to moving them in transit, and there is an increase in the number of refrigerated and other container traffic arriving by sea. This has had the effect of reducing our dependence on the border and is part of the strategy for a no negotiated outcome.

155 Mr Speaker, the number of containers arriving at our Port has increased considerably. The average number was some 400 a year. This year we have over 300 already. Indeed, at one point there were so few containers arriving at our Port that the viability of the fortnightly service was put in doubt. That trend has now reversed. This increase in container traffic has led to improvements in infrastructure at the Port as part of our no deal planning. I referred earlier to the ferry access ramp. Associated infrastructure was also upgraded at the time. The Government has increased the number of connection points for reefers. These are refrigerated containers used to carry temperature-sensitive cargo. Those power points have now increased from a handful to 30. The plan is to go to 60, if needed. This will increase our storage capacity for refrigerated goods. Electrical, resurfacing and other works are also in the pipeline.

160 As I said earlier, it is just as important to prepare for no treaty with the European Union as it is to prepare for a treaty. The Government nonetheless very much favours a positive outcome based on the New Year's Eve Agreement, but we still need to prepare for the worst.

Driving licences are a useful example that has undergone a positive transition since we left the EU. Gibraltar started the exit process with an International Driving Permit (IDP) as a requirement to drive in the EU in the event of no agreement. It will be recalled that there are two types of IDP. Spain and Portugal, for example, each require a different permit. This meant that someone driving from here to Portugal would have needed their driving licence, an IDP to transit Spain and a different IDP for Portugal: three documents to take the place of only one. The situation today has improved considerably. The United Kingdom has negotiated agreements for the mutual recognition of driving licences with the vast majority of member states of the European Union. The Gibraltar driving licence is covered by those arrangements. This means that an IDP would now only be required for Cyprus, the 1949 version; and Croatia and Italy, the 1968 versions. The Government is awaiting the outcome of discussions with these remaining three countries. Spain has itself continued to recognise Gibraltar licences without an IDP.

175 Mr Speaker, the movement of persons across the border remains the single most important issue in the context of a no negotiated outcome. This would mean the full application of the Schengen Border Code. Such a move would have a considerable impact on the lives of ordinary citizens on both sides, and on businesses too. It would mean controls to enter Schengen and controls to exit Schengen, passport stamping on the way into Spain and on the way back from Spain and more intensive checks on non-EU nationals. Border guards would have the power to ask questions about the purpose of your visit to the Schengen area, about the duration of your

195 stay, about the cash that you have on you, and about your ability to sustain yourself during your visit. You could be asked for a copy of your travel or hotel voucher. All this would happen with the legal cover provided by the Schengen Border Code. It is the same at any external border of the Union.

200 I must confess that by its very nature no-deal work is very depressing. No part of it is pleasant, so the Government will continue to work tirelessly for a new UK-EU treaty about Gibraltar, but again, as I said, at the same time we must be ready to face the alternate reality in the event that agreement on a new treaty is not possible. We cannot simply bury our heads in the sand and we must be just as prepared to conclude an agreement as we must be prepared, if needs be, to walk away without one.

205 Members will know that the Government hosted a visit of Home Office officials from Border Force International during the week starting 7th June. The object of their visit was to review and advise on our border options in the event of no agreement. The team looked at the physical and geographical layout of the Frontier. They left with a better understanding of the position on the ground. Indeed, the effects of passport stamping were witnessed during the week immediately before that visit, and this will serve as a reminder of what life outside the EU without a treaty on our future relationship could look like.

210 Since 2019, stamping for everyone would have been the norm if there had been no Withdrawal Agreement which included us in its territorial scope, if Gibraltar had been left out of the transitional period and if there had been no New Year's Eve Agreement. The consequence in each case would have been the full application of the Schengen Border Code and the stamping of passports that goes with it.

215 So, it is easy to criticise what the Government has achieved, but facing the alternative reality brings everything into focus and we cannot lose sight of one important point. The Withdrawal Agreement, the MoUs, the Tax Treaty and the New Year's Eve Agreement were all much maligned by some, yet those very agreements have set the basis for a degree of normality – not the full normality we were used to, clearly, because that can only come with EU membership, but a degree of normality all the same. So, I want take this opportunity to congratulate my hon. and learned Friend the Chief Minister because he has led on these constructive and imaginative solutions and because those policies have saved Gibraltar from the worst. I also want to thank the Attorney General, and the Financial Secretary too, and countless officials in Gibraltar, London and Brussels also for the invaluable role that they have all played.

225 Mr Speaker, our border mitigation plans are tried and tested. A hard border with controls and checkpoints will not be new to us. Over many decades, Gibraltar has deployed mitigation measures whenever there have been delays, even during our time in the European Union. Indeed, in that time the border saw three inspection visits from the European Commission. They came on 25th September 2013, again on 2nd July 2014 and for a final time on 27th October 2015. So, it is important to make one thing clear. In the event of no agreement, mitigation measures will not solve every issue. There are some areas outside our control where there can be little or no mitigation, where the alternate world of a no-deal scenario will mean that procedures will be more time-consuming, that processes will be more cumbersome and that rules will be more bureaucratic than before. That new situation reflects life outside the European Union.

235 The advice to citizens and to businesses remains the same as it has been since 2016. The message is that they should continue to plan ahead, to plan and not to panic.

240 Mr Speaker, on 26th June a further visit of UK FCDO officials took place as part of the planning for no negotiated outcome, and this Sunday a further group arrived, which comprised officials from the FCDO, the Treasury and HMRC. This is part of the ongoing deal work on goods, transport and customs. The House knows that Gibraltar has never been a part of the Customs Union or the EU *acquis* for the movement of goods. It is an area where we have always been in a no-deal situation.

The main impact since the end of the transition period has been the new routing via Algeciras for goods of animal origin from the UK. Members are aware that controls on the movement of

245 goods will have an impact on the fluid movement of persons. In other words, even in a common
travel area with the Schengen zone, the potential would exist for cross-border travellers to be
stopped and quizzed about what they may have on their persons, in their bags or in their vehicles,
and it is in that context that the Government has considered looking at the viability of different
solutions to expedite customs procedures. Indeed, the New Year's Eve Agreement itself explains
that a future treaty could foresee a bespoke solution in this area.

250 As the House knows, we left the EU on 31st January 2020 and the transition ended in December
last year. This means that we then lost the legal framework provided by European law. A new legal
structure came into being to replace it. This includes, for example, the European Union
(Withdrawal) Act, the European Union (Withdrawal Agreement) Act, the European Union
(Application of International Agreements) Act, and the European Union Laws (Voluntary
255 Implementation) Act, among other legislation. So, while we have retained EU law in our statute
books, we have also proceeded to update and amend it accordingly to take account of Gibraltar's
new reality. Work is also ongoing to expand our new international legal framework.

I turn now to report on our office in Brussels. This can be found at head 12, subhead 2(7). Hon.
260 Members will see that the estimated expenditure for the financial year 2021-22 reverts to
£260,000. This follows a considerable underspend in the combined financial year 2019-21 of
£350,000.

265 Since its expansion in 2015, our representation in Brussels has offered invaluable support to
the Government. It has spearheaded our engagement with the EU institutions, with its member
states, with the representations of third countries and territories based there, as well as with the
many non-governmental organisations headquartered in the heart of the European Union. This
has been especially true since the UK's decision to leave the EU in 2016.

270 First, it supported our work to secure Gibraltar's inclusion in the Withdrawal Agreement, then
it assisted during the negotiations on the Framework Agreement, and thirdly it continues to work
as we prepare to commence negotiations on our future relationship with the EU. Gibraltar House
in Brussels has been there every step of the way.

275 The office has also engaged with other Brussels-based stakeholders, despite the challenges of
last year. Those challenges were considerable. Up until lockdown, the office maintained its regular
programme of face-to-face contact and direct engagement. This has proved important in recent
years, ever since we enlarged our footprint in Brussels. However, the serious impact of COVID in
Belgium significantly altered working practices. The EU bubble too had to adapt. The pandemic
reduced personal contact in formal settings. It also impacted on the soft lobbying and networking
typically done at events and conferences. Like everywhere else, engagement at one point
migrated entirely into the online sphere. Nonetheless, throughout this time, the office has been
able to keep up with its daily monitoring of EU developments and our assets there continued to
280 attend online events and conferences.

It is positive to note that, recently, restrictions in Brussels have started to ease. This will allow
a resumption of our successful programme of familiarisation visits to Gibraltar. These have, over
the years, provided MEPs and officials with a unique understanding of our issues.

285 The team at Gibraltar House continues to co-ordinate its efforts with the UK mission to the
European Union. Deep ties at all levels have been established. That engagement has been
continuous and across the board on Gibraltar matters. This contact was particularly important in
the run up to the Framework Agreement. There is also ongoing co-ordination with regard to wider
public diplomacy objectives in Brussels. Indeed, it is worth noting that the UK mission is itself
transitioning to a new role. This followed Brexit and the ratification of the UK-EU Trade and Co-
290 operation Agreement. UKREP, as it was known, has now become UKMis Brussels. This engagement
with the UK mission is supplemented by continuous contact with the wider British presence in
Brussels.

295 A group of Brussels-based UK offices and organisations continues to bring UK-linked interests
together. It comprises over 50 entities, including the devolved administrations. This allows for
co-ordination, for exchange of information and for a framework within which to liaise on many

important matters. Gibraltar House plays a central co-ordinating function in this organisation. In addition to this, our team in Brussels currently leads its Digital Working Group. All this is complemented by the Government's recent membership of the British Chamber of Commerce in the EU and Brussels.

300 The pandemic impacted on the calendar of ministerial visits to Brussels during 2020 and 2021. In February 2020 I had the opportunity to travel there on an intense and fruitful visit. This was topped off by a reception at Gibraltar House, where we hosted friends of Gibraltar, diplomats and other dignitaries, and the event was also used to introduce Daniel D'Amato as the new Director of Gibraltar House. Daniel took over from Sir Graham Watson. Sir Graham was pivotal in expanding
305 our presence in Brussels and assiduously led the team for five years. I know that hon. Members will join me in in thanking Sir Graham for his staunch defence of Gibraltar throughout, first as one of our Members of the European Parliament and then as the Director of Gibraltar House. As we look forward, I want to highlight the solid and professional work that Daniel and the team have continued in Brussels. This includes the provision of wider support to other Government Ministers
310 and Departments as well.

As I mentioned earlier, the team at Gibraltar House provided important support during the course of last year's negotiations on the Framework Agreement. They were involved in many areas from information gathering to the provision of advice on specific issues. They also provided technical assistance on no-deal preparations. It is clear that the role of Gibraltar House will be just
315 as essential as we move into the next phase of the negotiations. The conversation will then move from the trilateral space into a multilateral space. When that happens, putting across our position to the EU member states and the European Parliament will be vital. I remind the House that the EU27 acting collectively and the European Parliament will have to consent to the text of any treaty that emerges from our negotiations with the European Commission.

320 The Government expects that in the months to come there will be intense activity in Brussels, and we hope that we will be able to conclude the Brexit process that began all the way back in 2016. It all seems so long ago now.

Mr Speaker, the Government expects that Gibraltar House in Brussels will evolve into a new role in the context of our planned new relationship with the EU. In the event of an agreement on
325 a treaty, new areas of co-operation and engagement could go deeper than they did when we were members. Many other territories which enjoy tailor-made relationships with the EU have such presences in Brussels, as do Monaco, San Marino and Andorra. The Channel Islands, for example, which have never been part of the European Union, maintain representative offices there. Indeed, Bermuda, a UK Overseas Territory like Gibraltar, actually opened an office there in 2018 after the
330 vote to leave the European Union had taken place. So, our presence is important and the Government have no plans to change that.

Gibraltar has left the EU but the effect of EU policymaking on Gibraltar will continue to be felt, no matter what happens. Therefore, with a treaty or without one I am certain that the value of Gibraltar House in Brussels to our country will only continue to increase, and I know the House
335 will join me in thanking Daniel D'Amato and the team in Brussels for their work in very difficult circumstances.

I move on now to Gibraltar House in London. This can be found at head 12, subhead (2)6. The estimate for this financial year is again £1.2 million.

340 The COVID-19 pandemic has had a profound impact on the work of Gibraltar House in London. The office found itself operating on altering work patterns throughout the pandemic. It was subject to UK government restrictions, both on opening and in the way in which it operated. The building itself was reviewed and made COVID-19 compliant. For some periods its doors were closed to the public. However, it did provide a service by telephone and email. The staff worked remotely for some periods.

345 London resembled a ghost town during the height of the lockdowns. I am told that, similar to many other major cities, it looked like a scene from a horror movie: shops and restaurants closed, pavements deserted and hardly any traffic, everything stripped back to the very essential alone.

350 The Director and his deputy regularly attended to the building and worked from the office in person, in order to ensure its security. Members will recall that a hotline was opened for Gibraltar students in London and that support was given where this was possible.

355 The lockdown affected all offices and departments across Whitehall. This included the main department of state that Gibraltar deals with, the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office. Most staff there worked remotely and engaged virtually. MP offices at the Westminster Parliament operated in the same way. Therefore, the lobbying activities of Gibraltar House were mainly virtual during this time.

360 Gibraltar House continued to work closely with the other UK Overseas Territories during this period. This happened mainly under the umbrella of the United Kingdom Overseas Territories Association (UKOTA). The Association brings together Anguilla, Ascension Island, Bermuda, the British Virgin Islands, the Cayman Islands, the Falkland Islands, Gibraltar, Montserrat, Pitcairn, St Helena, Tristan Da Cunha and the Turks and Caicos Islands.

365 The territories engage the UK on matters of common interest. Needless to say, there are also times when different territories have different interests and priorities. I was pleased to participate in the Political Council of UKOTA which took place on 27th May, together with my colleague the Minister for the Environment, Prof. John Cortes. The meeting covered Brexit and COVID matters. It also included an update on COP26, where my colleague has been leading for the territories.

370 On another matter, a co-operation agreement has now been signed between UKOTA and the Overseas Countries and Territories Association of the European Union. The objective is to foster greater co-operation between the Overseas Territories of the UK and the Overseas Territories of the EU.

375 The Government is also keen to develop further our relationship with the institutions of the Commonwealth and with its member states. In March last year we started this process with a series of meetings in London. This included a meeting with the Secretary General of the Commonwealth, Baroness Scotland. The Government also engaged with a number of High Commissioners from the main Commonwealth countries – places like Australia, Canada and New Zealand. Sadly, this programme was cut short by the pandemic and the ensuing lockdowns both in Gibraltar and in London.

380 The Commonwealth Heads of Government meeting which was rescheduled to take place in Kigali, the capital of Rwanda, in June this year was postponed for a second time. The Government had planned to send a delegation to participate in events which were timed to coincide around that meeting. This happened very successfully in London the previous time. Then, Gibraltar was represented at the Business Forum, the Women's Forum, the Youth Forum and the People's Forum.

385 The Government has nonetheless been able to continue to work with the Commonwealth Enterprise and Investment Council. This is the commercial and business arm of the Commonwealth. Lord Marland, the Chairman of the Council, was here a few weeks ago to formally inaugurate their new offices and welcome their new Country Director. The door is now open for businesses in Gibraltar to take advantage of any new opportunities that the Council may offer them.

390 Mr Speaker, the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Gibraltar (APPG) continues to meet on a regular basis. Indeed, it has met throughout the pandemic. One plus point has been the increase in the number of MPs present at virtual meetings. Technology has allowed them to attend from their own homes. Sir Bob Neil, the chairman of the group, continues to organise very useful meetings for MPs. This includes briefings during which both the Chief Minister and I have updated parliamentarians on the latest developments affecting Gibraltar. Seven APPG meetings have been hosted since the start of the pandemic. This has allowed the Government to brief MPs on a number of matters, including the progress of discussions about the future relationship of Gibraltar with the European Union. Gibraltar House in London has arranged both private and public engagement with the UK Parliament and there have been meetings with the Foreign Affairs

400 Committee of the House of Commons and with the European Union Committee of the House of Lords.

The pandemic saw the 2020 party conference season operate on virtual platforms. This very much reduced the reach that we usually have at these events. In more normal times Gibraltar has had a physical stand at these conferences. The Government also hosts a reception and these have traditionally been very well supported. Sadly, 2020 was different. All the main conferences were virtual, although Gibraltar had an online presence in each of them and I was able to host a well-attended virtual fringe on the Liberal Democrat platform. This year, the indications so far are that the two main parties will hold conferences in person, the Conservative Party in Manchester from 3rd to 6th October, and the Labour Party in Brighton from 25th to 29th September. The Liberal Democrats have again opted for a virtual conference in the autumn. There will be a Gibraltar presence at the DUP and SNP conferences too. The Government still needs to determine what shape this presence will take.

The House knows that there will be no National Day rally this year. Gibraltar House will host an event in London for some MPs, in keeping with the rules in force at that time. Dominique Searle and his team will also organise visits to Gibraltar by small groups of MPs. This will be important as we continue our work for a future relationship with the European Union. I am pleased to say that since restrictions were eased in London in April, Gibraltar House reopened, first to staff and then to the public. The office has, from 17th May, operated as normally as the rules have allowed. I want to thank Dominique Searle and his team for the work they have done over the last 18 months in these taxing times.

420 Mr Speaker, the pandemic and the ensuing restrictions have had a serious impact on our lobbying activities in the United Nations. The Chief Minister and I have been unable to address its committees there since 2019. Last month the representative of the Government of Gibraltar in the United States, Mr David Guerrero Liston, addressed the Committee of 24 instead. I want to thank Mr Liston for his intervention. This ensured that the voice of Gibraltar continued to be heard. We hope that time will allow us to attend those important sessions again in the future. Over the years, the Government developed a strategy in New York which went much further than the set-piece appearances before the organs of the United Nations. Indeed, on many occasions we stayed behind in order to develop this strand of work behind the scenes and away from the glare of the cameras. We hope to be able to resume this when the pandemic subsides.

430 The level of our engagement with the US Congress in Washington has also been affected. The public health crisis has prevented us from lobbying in Washington in person, and no working visit to Gibraltar by US Congressmen took place during 2020 or in 2021 so far. While on this matter, I want to report to the House that Congressman George Holding has now retired. He did not stand for re-election in November. The Congressman was, and remains, a staunch supporter of Gibraltar and of the United Kingdom. He is a standard bearer for the special relationship between the United Kingdom and the United States of America. Indeed, this House will recall that we unanimously bestowed the Gibraltar Medallion of Honour on Congressman Holding in February 2017. This was presented to him in person in the Lincoln Room of the US Congress Capitol building the following month. I was able to wish him well in a virtual meeting after the US congressional elections. I know that the House will join me in thanking George Holding for his support. The Government will continue to work with other friends and allies, within the constraints that exist, in order to promote the views of Gibraltar.

440 Mr Speaker, I now move on to my responsibilities for civil aviation. This can be found at head 13. The estimate for this financial year is £2.9 million.

445 Our departure from the European Union does not affect the operation of domestic flights between the UK and Gibraltar. We continue to be covered by the International Convention on Civil Aviation, known as the Chicago Convention. This provides a framework for aircraft on existing routes to overfly the EU and divert to airports there, if necessary.

450 While on the subject of air routes, I want to highlight the invaluable work of my hon. Friend the Minister for Tourism, Vijay Daryanani. He has negotiated more flights to more destinations

from Gibraltar Airport than ever before, including our first air connection with Scotland, and I take the opportunity to congratulate him for this.

Our departure from the European Union has been reflected in our aviation legal framework. This has followed the same pattern set in other areas. A number of EU regulations were published
455 which brought EU law on aviation safety and aviation security into our own domestic legislation.

On another matter, in early 2019 the UK issued a revised State Safety Programme. This sets out the basis through which aviation safety is managed in the UK, the Crown Dependencies and the Overseas Territories. In September 2019, as a consequence of this, the Gibraltar State Safety Programme was updated.

460 Mr Speaker, the 2019 pandemic has reduced the audit programme undertaken by the Director of Civil Aviation and UK Civil Aviation Authority over the last 12 months. However, a programme has now been agreed going forward. Separately, the International Civil Aviation Organisation (ICAO) has announced that the UK, including its Crown Dependencies and Overseas Territories,
465 will be audited in 2022. The objective is to confirm the compliance of its safety oversight system with ICAO standards and recommended practices. The UK was last audited in 2009. This 2022 audit is intended to show the ICAO that the UK oversight system has not been unduly impacted by the UK's departure from the European Union. It is, however, unlikely that the ICAO will come to visit Gibraltar. However, there remains the requirement to ensure the extensive compliance
470 checklists associated with the 19 annexes to the Chicago Convention are reviewed and updated in the light of Brexit. The Director of Civil Aviation has already commenced this review.

The Airport held its annual emergency response exercise in November 2020. All areas of the emergency procedures and levels of command were tested. The involvement of St Bernard's Hospital and the Ambulance Service was, not unsurprisingly, scaled down given the pandemic. This exercise, as always, helped to identify useful lessons to improve the effectiveness of the
475 response by the myriad organisations that play a part in the emergency orders. The aim is that a table-top exercise to practise the plan will be followed with a full live exercise in November.

Local interest in the operation of drones continues to grow exponentially. In 2019 there were six local operators, four of whom were offering commercial services, and 75 permits were issued during the year. By 2021 there are now 23 local operators, eight of whom are offering commercial
480 services, and by the end of May alone over 75 permits had already been issued. New legislation introduced in late 2019 now requires that all operators have their drones registered with the DCA. In addition to this, all operators flying drones that weigh more than 249g must now prove their piloting competence. Given this situation, hon. Members will have seen that the Government has published a Bill to improve the enforcement of the control of drones. This important safety and
485 security measure is already on the legislative agenda of this House. I want to place on record the thanks of the Government to the Director of Civil Aviation.

Moving on now to the Gibraltar National Archives, the estimates can be found at head 12, subhead 1(1) and subhead 2(20). The Archives continued work throughout the pandemic. Although a number of their officers were redeployed to other tasks during 2020, very popular
490 virtual displays and exhibitions were organised during the periods of lockdown. There were 131 registered visitors in person during the last financial year. The website received 26,311 hits from 135 different countries. On 1st October 2020 the Archivist, Anthony Pitaluga, curated an exhibition on the 75th anniversary of the end of the Second World War in Europe, known as VE Day. That exhibition had been delayed as a result of the pandemic. I want to thank Anthony
495 Pitaluga and his team for getting together such an interesting and relevant display.

This year marks the 100th anniversary of the establishment of the City Council in 1921. An exhibition is being planned to mark this important event. The City Council was, in many ways, the first very small step on our road to greater self-government. The Government hopes to be able to organise the exhibition at the gallery on the ground floor of the actual City Hall itself, if this is
500 logistically and technically possible. I am grateful to my hon. Friend the Minister for Culture for his assistance in this respect.

Mr Speaker, I now move on to cover some capital projects. The Government has posted a budgetary deficit for this financial year and for the coming year. It means that we are more restricted in the delivery of capital projects than we were in the years when we operated on a surplus. I know that this is obvious. The huge cost of the pandemic means that this year we will do less than we intended.

I will now say a few words on the Parliament building, the Northern Defences and the Mount in that context. There is no provision in the Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure for the refurbishment and restoration of Parliament. This means that it will not happen during this financial year. However, the Government will use the time to seek all the necessary permits and consents. The objective is to table a planning application. Therefore, a concept design will be presented to the Development and Planning Commission, through which the Government will seek permission for the project. That design has already been produced. The Clerk of the House and the staff have been consulted. A presentation on the designs was given to the Leader of the Opposition and to the Hon. Damon Bossino on 7th April. Separately on that day the same presentation was also given to the Hon. Marlene Hassan Nahon.

In general terms, I think I am correct when I say that there is agreement in this House as to the need to refurbish and restore the Parliament building. There is also recognition of the need to improve facilities for Members and for staff. The House is also very aware of the imperative requirement to provide access to the Chamber for persons with reduced mobility. The two main points raised during the preliminary consultation were, first, the need to future-proof the Chamber in case there are more Members in the years to come, and second, the need to have a multi-purpose room on the ground floor with more than one entrance, which could be used both as a board room and as a venue for Select Committee meetings. Members were given hard copies of the designs to take away for further consideration and they were invited to come back with any further comments. No more comments have been received so far.

I am pleased to tell the House that the Government had a generous commitment from the Parasol Foundation to pay for the construction of an external lift. That lift will now be internal. Nonetheless, the Parasol Foundation has very kindly agreed to pay for the external beautification of Parliament House instead. The Government is very grateful to the Parasol Foundation for their continued commitment to Gibraltar. This part of the project may be progressed earlier, as it will have no impact on Government funding.

Mr Speaker, clearing-out works at the Northern Defences will enter their sixth year. The transformation of the site from a jungle into a jewel continues to progress extremely well. Needless to say, the past year has been a very challenging one. I have to congratulate the team in rising up to the challenge and adapting their work methods accordingly. Having to adapt to new conditions whilst maintaining consistent progress on an incredibly difficult site has not been easy. The Government acknowledges the dedication shown by all those working there.

In previous years our focus has been the clearing of debris and vegetation to expose our historical monuments. This has proved to be incredibly successful. I have announced discoveries and progress to this House and in the local media as these have been made. However, this past year we have had to be flexible. In line with the commitments we have made, efforts have been directed to the creation of leisure and recreational areas within the site. The results have been truly remarkable. Even though not officially open, the Northern Defences have provided many people with a central, much needed open space during these tough times. The exposure the Northern Defences has received in social media, both locally and from abroad, has been exceptional. This is where we can appreciate the engagement with the public. Hundreds of people have converged on the site over the last year, many of them families with children, most of them very curious to explore an area from which they had traditionally been excluded. The ongoing progress has allowed for formal tours to take place, some organised through the Heritage Trust and others conducted by the Project Director, Carl Viagas himself.

The work has exposed the value of the site for other activities also. I have to praise, for example, the initiative displayed by the Gibraltar College. The College chose this site as a case

555 study destination for its students as part of its Business and Travel module. They did so instead of
the overseas locations that had been selected in the past. The students exposed the potential of
the Northern Defences as an adventure destination. The enthusiasm displayed, not only by
students but also by teachers as the area was explored, abseiled and climbed, demonstrates the
quality of the product that Gibraltar has to offer: a unique combination of heritage, history, thrills
and adventure. It also demonstrates the potential for employment in an outdoor environment
560 which is not enclosed by four walls. I have to personally thank all those teachers who went out of
their way to provide such a rich learning experience for their students. Hard times were turned
into a new opportunity, an opportunity that has ensured that our students would not be deprived
of this practical aspect to their education.

565 Even though works have focused on the creation of family recreational areas and nature trails,
it does not mean we have ignored the historical context – far from it. Indeed, this would be
impossible, and in any case the two are not mutually exclusive. The Northern Defences already
comprises a series of over 50 listed fortifications. This equates to approximately 40% of all our
protected fortifications, making it our most densely fortified historical site. New locations have
been uncovered which add to its historical value. I mentioned the Hanover Line during our last
570 Budget debate. Today I would remind the House that the remains of the Spanish-built Round
Tower have since been uncovered. This was the only location which fell to the enemy during an
attack in 1705. The Amphitheatre Gallery, built in 1779, has also been found. This is a defensive
gallery which consists of a formidable glacis which was recently exposed. It will be added to our
current list of protected fortifications. Never has there been a heritage initiative which has
575 uncovered and exposed so many historical assets in the same place.

This year there are three aspects to this project: first, work will continue with the laying of
essential infrastructure; second, the Government is actively considering improving the existing
direct access point from Casemates Square itself; and third, the Government has commenced
discussions with one of the three entities that submitted an expression of interest for the site.

580 I want to thank my colleague, the Minister for Heritage, Prof. John Cortes for his constant and
continuous support in relation to the Northern Defences. I am also grateful to the Heritage Trust
for the tours that they have provided and continue to provide to the area. I must also praise the
project director, Carl Viagas, whose vision, enthusiasm and professional approach have made this
success story possible.

585 Mr Speaker, the Government's commitment to historic sites is not limited to the Northern
Defences. I will now update the House on progress at the Mount. Work has continued in clearing
the grounds at the Mount during the last year. The Mount is one of Gibraltar's most prized
possessions. It represents much more than simply a beautiful 18th century property in a
picturesque setting. The Mount was the home of Major-General Sir William Green. His effort in
590 preparing Gibraltar's defences prior to the Great Siege is well documented by historians, scholars
and artists. It is fair to say that Sir William Green had a profound effect on our urban landscape.
His defensive works had a decisive influence in keeping Gibraltar British. He also formed a new
military unit here, which had a crucial influence both on our own local history and at a wider,
global level. That unit became the Royal Engineers. The Mount was later the home of successive
595 Admirals and Flag Officers Gibraltar for almost two centuries.

Any intervention in such a site is obviously complex due to its heritage value. It would also be
extremely expensive, due to its sheer size. Therefore, our approach towards this site is similar to
that which we have taken in other complex and sensitive areas, like the Northern Defences. The
watchwords are 'slowly' and 'prudently'. This centres on spreading out the intervention on the
600 site over a number of years. First, much of the undergrowth has been removed. This has exposed
the true extent and condition of this vast area. A network of paths and terraces has been
uncovered. These would have been part of the original grounds and were inaccessible until
recently. Secondly, while this exercise is still ongoing, we have been able to survey the entire site
and determine its condition. This has been no easy task. The grounds are approximately the size
605 of the Alameda Gardens. This exercise has allowed us to produce concept proposals for the main

residence and for the gardens, which are very interesting. The Government intends to present a planning application shortly. This will propose different uses for different parts of the property. The Heritage Trust, GONHS and the Environmental Safety Group have all been taken to visit the site. The submission of a planning application will mark the start of the formal consultation process with the community at large.

There are ambitious plans to move the Marriage Registry to the Porter's Lodge at the Mount. This will provide an ideal setting for visitors and residents who choose to have a civil marriage. The intention is for part of the grounds along the western terraces, the events hall and the Porter's Lodge to be used to register and host weddings and other similar events. There are hundreds of people who fly out to Gibraltar to get married every year. This, in turn, generates economic activity. For too long has our community been limited in the use of outside spaces for such celebrations and has often had to resort to seeking venues elsewhere.

The eastern slopes which creep into our Nature Reserve are being explored for educational outdoor experiences. I have once again to thank the Parasol Foundation for their interest and commitment to assist the Government with the Mount. They have pledged at least £1 million for its regeneration and restoration. Their commitment to work with the Government towards its vision reflects what is special about Gibraltar as a community, particularly during these difficult times. Their contribution will see to the creation of paths, nature areas, tree-hopping activities, educational areas and an adventure park.

All of this will bring the property to life in a sensitive manner which seeks inspiration from its history. In the same way as in the Northern Defences, any intervention will be carried out in phases over many years. In the event that the plans are approved by the Development and Planning Commission, the aim would be to commence works during this financial year as a result of the funding from the Parasol Foundation.

In conclusion, Mr Speaker, this is an extraordinary Budget for extraordinary times. The financial impact of the pandemic has had a serious knock-on effect everywhere. It has impacted on every page of the Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure before this House today. This pattern has been repeated all over the world, it is not unique to Gibraltar, so we should not talk ourselves down. Such talk would be defeatist and unfair, and would be a serious mistake because better times will come. Over the centuries the people of Gibraltar have displayed the resilience, the determination and the courage to rise above every challenge. This latest challenge will be no different. In the meantime, the focus must be on rebuilding and reconstructing.

And so I want to thank the staff in the Lands Office and at Land Property Services Ltd, my personal staff in the Office of the Deputy Chief Minister at 6 Convent Place, the Clerk and the staff of the Parliament, and you too, Mr Speaker, for your support.

I too want to say a special word of thanks and wish a happy retirement to the Clerk, Mr Paul Martinez. We know this will be his last Budget debate. It has been a genuine pleasure to work with him all these years.

Thank you. *(Banging on desks)*

Mr Speaker: The Hon. Prof. J E Cortes.

Minister for the Environment, Sustainability, Climate Change and Education (Hon. Prof. J E Cortes): Thank you, Mr Speaker.

The world is in crisis. The climate has changed in our lifetime, and this change is accelerating. Only this month we have seen record temperatures around the world leading to deaths from heat in countries we have always considered to be cold, and torrential rains, flooding and death across Western Europe. Parts of the Earth will, in a few decades, become uninhabitable through heat. There will be thousands of climate refugees heading north from the tropics. We will be on the front line of that wave, and of the effects of sea level rise. A two-metre rise will render our airfield unusable, while a rise of three metres will flood all the low-lying inhabited areas of Gibraltar, including Laguna, Glacis, all of the Westside reclamation and the lower town. This is no joke. Those

of us who are parents or grandparents need to realise that this is the world – the Gibraltar – facing those young people and children whom we love. Indeed, with all the many obstacles this community has overcome through the centuries, including the pandemic we are still navigating, the effects of climate change are the ones most likely to see the end of Gibraltar as we know it in my grandchildren’s lifetime. Budget deficits will be insignificant in comparison. While Gibraltar’s contribution to global emissions is very small, absolutely every gram of carbon we emit into the air is a gram too much. Let us, all of us, take it on the chin. As leaders and parliamentarians, Government or Opposition, as businessmen, as ordinary people in ordinary jobs, as rich residents in luxury accommodation, as family members, as you and as me, we are not doing enough. We must be bolder. We must embrace the necessary changes before those other changes destroy what we know, what we treasure, what we love. So, in reaction to an increase in the price of electricity, or when in the coming weeks we publish the Climate Change Strategy, do not let anyone complain. Do not, anyone, say that our targets are too ambitious. Tell me instead that you want this and more, that you will support and work to making it go even further, and that you will, in your work and in your personal lives, make the changes that you need to make. Follow our leadership.

Mr Speaker, with my preamble over, let me say that I was determined that this year’s speech would be a short speech, but I regret that in the end it will not be so. Not only do I have a wide range of responsibilities to which I need to do justice, but there has been so much activity around COVID. The speech covers two years, a year of plenty followed by a year of challenge, and looks towards a lean year. While not purporting to be the Prince of Egypt, I like to think that, despite this, the future is bright. We will have to do things differently, but things we will do, because being in Government gives us an opportunity to serve. We have a duty to find ways of achieving for the benefit of the community against all adversity, but this requires that very community to reset, to rethink, to accept the reality.

In all my past Budget speeches public health has been but a small section, but for much of the past two years, public health has dominated my time and my life. When I look, in deep frustration, at all those things across my Ministry that I wanted to do but did not, I ask myself, ‘How come we haven’t done this?’ or ‘How is it this wasn’t followed up?’ And then I remember. I think back to the spring of 2020, to the days of lockdown, of driving through silent streets to empty offices to deliver one of the daily press conferences or to attend one of the strategic meetings. Did it really happen, or is my mind recalling a distant nightmare? How did I get through those days of worry for the community, as well as for my own family? How easily I forget the many hours researching, listening to advice, considering what advice to give, monitoring what was happening in Gibraltar and comparing it against what was happening in the rest of the world, being part of taking impossible decisions that went against everything I stood for. COVID-19 took over our lives. So many people did so much, but I must single out the strong and effective leadership shown throughout by the Chief Minister, through incredibly difficult days, with sensitivity and firmness, with heart and with soul. I cannot for one moment imagine how we could have pulled through like we did without Fabian. Keep your tissue in your pocket this time, Chief Minister. It is heartfelt, Mr Speaker.

We have pulled through – though, as we are seeing, we still have a way to go – but what we must never do is forget the lessons. One of those lessons is the importance of public health and how it is different from what we normally think of as healthcare. The close link is clear. In fact, I have worked closer with my friend and colleague the Minister for Health and Civil Contingencies, Samantha Sacramento, during the pandemic than I have ever worked with any other colleague, other than the Chief Minister and Deputy Chief Minister. COVID has shown that those with underlying health issues are particularly susceptible to the challenge of a new disease. Many of these underlying conditions – obesity, diabetes, high blood pressure – are preventable. Often they are related to lifestyle choice, and it is here that Public Health has a vital role. Sadly, the team at Public Health has, over much of the past two years, been working almost exclusively on COVID, but the latest Health and Lifestyle Survey, shortly to be published, will confirm where our health

710 problems lie and allow us to strategise the public health function in order to make a real difference
so that our community is as healthy and well prepared as possible for any future but possible
pandemic. I must take this opportunity to thank all those in Public Health, including its Director
Dr Sohail Bhatti, Angela Bula, the health promotion officers and all the staff, including those
715 redeployed there from different Departments in the vital role of contact tracing, for their
outstanding work during all of this time, including right now as cases rise.

The effects of COVID ranged far and many of our projects, as we have heard, have suffered
setbacks. Work on one of the new parks was just weeks away from commencing, works on three
new schools were a couple of months away, and work would have started earlier this year on the
Cultural Hub and National Theatre. Many other smaller projects, as well as large cultural events,
720 have sadly and disappointingly also had to be cancelled or postponed. All of these in their different
ways add value to our community, and I will refer to some of them later.

I had the honour of being given responsibility for Culture following the 2019 General Election.
I immediately carried out a significant restructure of the administration of the Ministry, as well as
a full assessment of cultural premises, and I met with representatives of all of the many cultural
725 groups. I commenced planning of the new-style Gibraltar Music Festival, took the plans for the
new Gibraltar National Theatre to an advanced stage and started preparing for innovative and
creative initiatives across all cultural disciplines. And then COVID struck. While many things now
had to wait, what I was not prepared to do was allow culture to be stopped in its tracks. It is of
course, almost by definition, impossible to stop culture, but there were those who felt that it was
730 an irrelevance, unimportant and of low priority while we were struggling to cope with a crescendo
of COVID concerns. The opposite, of course, was the case. Never before had keeping us
entertained, hopeful and enriched been so important, and the cultural world of Gibraltar, a world
that I love so much and which I have often called the heart and soul of the community, rose to the
occasion. While the GHA, ERS, Public Health and the emergency services did their incredible work
735 as professionals on the front line, Gibraltar Cultural Services and myriad groups and individuals
from singers and dancers to writers and artists, musicians and even lone buglers were there in
support and holding up that most vital of elements that is morale.

I was fortunate to have taken over the Culture portfolio from my friend and colleague Steven
Linares, who did sterling work over the years. Indeed, leading on from his Budget speech in 2019,
740 I am happy to once again reiterate the Government's commitment to the development of culture
locally and exporting our arts at an international level in order to get Gibraltar known and
respected even more in that world. As Minister for Culture, I am delighted to confirm that since
the Cultural Development Unit was established in Steven's time, our cultural service is thriving
and moving from strength to strength. While sadly this coming year the level of grants to cultural
745 organisations has had to be reduced, the unit continues to introduce training programmes for
cultural officials, groups, coaches, performers and cultural persons generally. The unit continues
to work with Government Departments and Agencies and other stakeholders to be able to provide
more platforms for our cultural community.

I am very pleased that in December 2019 we presented the first ever Cultural Awards. These
750 recognise potential, ability, talent and achievement of those in our community who have
supported our cultural development. The first two lifetime awards, given to Cecil Gomez and
Arturo Harper, show the calibre of those in our community who deserve recognition.

Cross-frontier and international exhibitions, including those with Morocco, continue to be
held, as is the Youth Arts Jamboree, with projects including technical theatre workshops, creative
755 writing and poetry workshops and a voluntary scheme offering students work experience
opportunities at the John Mackintosh Hall and Library.

At this point I want to recognise the work of all the many cultural groups that enrich our
community. GAMPA continued its training in music and performing arts online and was involved
in many of the cultural initiatives during COVID. Many dance and drama groups continued their
760 activities online also, despite the frustration of not being able to perform to live audiences.

This spring we were able to hold the Drama Festival once again – the first such festival anywhere in the world for over a year – the Gibraltar International Dance Festival, the Festival for Young Musicians, the Young Art Competitive Exhibition and the ever popular World Book Day celebrations. In November 2020 my team at GCS produced a successful Literature Week dedicated to local authors. We will build on its success as we promote and encourage Gibraltarian literature.

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Three street art murals were completed, with more planned. The Street Art Committee also approved more Gustavo Bacarisas works in other areas of Main Street as a continuation of the Castle Street/Bacarisas Street Art project.

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One of the most significant cultural events for me was the retrospective exhibition that celebrated the life and legacy of Gibraltarian Elio Cruz. We felt Elio deserved this recognition with the exhibition celebrating his talent as an artist, playwright, poet, musician and designer. This was organised together with Alice Mascarenhas. You will recall, Mr Speaker, that this Parliament awarded the Gibraltar Medallion of Honour to Elio Cruz posthumously.

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In September 2020 we launched a new video archives portal, Culture TV. The portal was one of many COVID projects planned and produced during lockdown. The portal provides local entertainment and the public will be able to access a variety of shows and other performances staged in Gibraltar over the years as a tribute to Gibraltar's richness in culture and forms an important part of our social heritage. If you watch carefully you may see a number of performances by a certain Minister for Culture that if you did not know that side of him may well leave you in shock.

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We continue to promote the use of our art galleries and have also opened one of the vaults at GEMA to local artists and groups, with several successful exhibitions and other events taking place in this culture and heritage space over the last year. Two rededications have also been organised this June, both at the National Gallery and at GEMA, promoting newly acquired works.

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In 2020, within COVID guidelines, my team at Culture produced a Cultural Summer Programme for young people, which provided for around 40 children, and GCS will continue to support the Summer Sports and Leisure Programme again this year. Over the last two years, with the exception of the COVID cancellations, Culture Services also ran its usual annual programmes and festivals, including the Gibraltar Fair, National Celebrations, New Year Celebrations and the Christmas Festival of Lights – many of these, of course, online.

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Importantly, GCS has absorbed other cultural programmes, events and administrative duties, including the running of the Mayor's Office and organising events formerly co-ordinated by the Ministry, which has been significantly restructured and streamlined to become a smaller but more efficient and highly effective team. This has eliminated duplication and allowed GCS to be better able to support the many groups and associations and to better co-ordinate and develop cultural activities. The new Office of the Mayor supported His Worship John Goncalvez during his tenure and is now providing similar support to the new Mayor, Christian Santos. Not surprisingly, His Worship's plans include a great deal of cultural use of the City Hall and we are working together on a number of exciting initiatives. I want to thank John Goncalvez for his work during a most difficult two years and congratulate Christian and Deputy Mayor Carmen Gomez on their appointments.

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As ever, our team at the John Mackintosh Hall was instrumental in supporting the Gibraltar Parliament and the election teams with the European Election and the General Election of 2019.

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The 2019 Island Games were perhaps the highlight of Gibraltar's social calendar in the last financial year before COVID. GCS formed an integral part of the organising team and supported the Island Games Committee with all cultural aspects relating to the Games.

The Government launched the Safety Advisory Group (SAG) early last year with the aim of bringing together key agencies to ensure the safety of all events in our community.

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In other areas, 87 new artworks were acquired for the Government Art Collection over the last two years, including purchases at auction and from private collections. Special purchases include works by Gustavo Bacarisas, Christian Hook and Rudesindo Mannia.

815 The John Mackintosh Hall Library social media platform continues to generate and oversee content promoting related initiatives, storytelling sessions, school visits and literature. After tracking patterns of use, we introduced new opening hours at the library, including Saturday morning opening, which suit members better and with very positive feedback. Several projects to improve the service of our national lending library have been completed, including updating of member records, computerising logging processes and reviewing and cataloguing the extensive Gibraltar collection. The Library received its latest delivery of 295 new books during the lockdown in April. A new area has been allocated for new books, which is visible on entry to the library and has a comfortable seating area for users to peruse the books at their leisure.

820 Mr Speaker, we are proud of how we manage our cultural facilities. The refurbishment and maintenance of all our facilities plays an important part in allowing us to support culture. A new online booking system has been developed for clients to book across all facilities from one platform. We hope that this will help the user to book and pay more easily as we encourage paperless and sustainable methods.

825 During most of 2020 the John Mackintosh Hall and Ince's Hall were made available for community use for dance and drama groups who were lacking in space, always strictly adhering to Public Health advice.

830 Work at the Central Hall and Ince's Hall are clear examples of our commitment to providing the best possible facilities for our cultural community and the public, and we were able to carry out important work before the impact of COVID hit. Work included, at the Central Hall, complete refurbishment of the main ballroom, exposing heritage walls and ceilings plus the original ceiling and stonework, doing justice to its former use as a place of worship. The refurbishment also included the paving of the rear and exterior areas and the renovation of the entrance lobby. The stained glass window will shortly be replaced with a contemporary design, a stained glass window that no one even remembered had ever been there. This is one project that illustrates the close relationship between culture and heritage, one which my Ministry builds upon.

840 We have made the Ince's Hall theatre accessible to all for the first time ever. This has been long overdue, and moneys were invested for this project prior to COVID. It includes a lift and disabled toilets, making the theatre accessible for persons with reduced mobility. We have also refurbished changing rooms and other areas of the facility, upgrading it in line with the Government's disability policies. Other cultural facilities and venues have also seen upgrades and facelifts, many with environmental aims, including recycle bins, bicycle racks, installation of water fountains and the purchase of technical equipment; this together with other work at GEMA, the Gustavo Bacarissas Gallery, the Mario Finlayson Gallery and of course the many premises that we manage and which are used by many clubs, associations and academies.

845 We are now having to curb spending in view of budget constraints, but we still have plans and we hope to be able to fulfil them as things improve. This is important. We have thousands of members of our community using cultural premises that need work and investment. My Ministry carried out a survey of all of these just before COVID and hopes to be able to work before long in areas such as North Jumpers Bastion and Europa Road. I am well aware of the need for space, for rehearsals, studios and so on, and we are working on a plan to provide more. Among other things, we are further opening up community use of premises such as in the new schools.

850 As we have seen, culture has played an important role during COVID-19 and the social lockdowns. GCS led a cultural initiative and programme that transformed the way our community interacted with cultural events. These included GCS and GAMPA working together on various cultural initiatives. As part of a daytime service, an online programming of shows, performances and other educational initiatives aired during weekdays. Lego grew in popularity and relevance during the times of lockdown, and an exhibition approved by LEGO HQ in Denmark was held at the Mackintosh Hall Gallery, proving to be one of the most popular in a long time. The Frontline Workers exhibition where Portraits of our frontline workers were exhibited in collaboration with the Fine Arts Association attracted 52 artists. Online events included the National Week Classical Concerts and New Year's Eve Celebrations.

865 Apart from senior support to CTB, GCS seconded 12 members of staff to the vaccination centre at the ICC and their maintenance and facilities teams redecorated the centre prior to opening, with equipment and furniture provided from their stock to help facilitate the quick opening of the centre.

870 In May this year the Chief Minister opened another major landmark exhibition, 'Culture versus COVID', which paid tribute to artists, performers and the public, displaying all the cultural events and work done throughout the pandemic.

875 Mr Speaker, Gibraltar needs a real theatre. Many thousands of our people are or have been involved in the performing arts – dance, acting, music – through the decades, at least as many as in sports and at least as successful. So many Gibraltarian artists have become established around the world. Only this year we have heard of the success of two of our young dancers, Jonathan Lutwyche and Simon Anthony, now working in the West End, joining Nolan Robba, who is there too. Imagine where they all would be if they had had proper facilities here. In present facilities we are unable to host professional productions and we have to spend huge amounts on bringing in stages, lights and technicians when we do. Add to that the need for studio and workshop space for the visual arts and the potential for expansion in our national lending library, and the case for the planned National Theatre and Cultural Hub is more than made. Work on this would have started already, but the pandemic stopped that particular performance too. But for all the above reasons, as recently announced, the Gibraltar National Theatre Foundation has been created to continue with the project, seeking alternative funding until better times come. I wish now to acknowledge the already significant contribution to this fund by the Kishin Alwani Foundation – more details to come later. The plan is that with the theatre will come facilities to create a larger cultural centre at the John Mackintosh Hall Complex, providing for additional venues which will allow for the introduction of new cultural activities and community use, refurbishment and extension to the public library with a new music library and a significant extension of the children's section.

890 There have been and will be a great many other events and initiatives, too many to mention here, but I must say that I am impressed by the work ethics and efficacy of the team at GCS. People often do not realise how much they do, often behind the scenes, supporting organisers, groups and societies, extending their support well beyond contractual requirements. During lockdown they not only kept culture very much alive, they expanded and extended its reach.

895 While large events and performances from artists from outside Gibraltar are great to watch and attend, I believe that my main task as Minister for Culture is the reverse, to nurture our cultural offering and those who engender it here in Gibraltar and to showcase our culture abroad. Those will be the main thrust of our work in Culture in the coming year, COVID or not.

900 Mr Speaker, the year 2020 was the year when everything changed. It challenged humanity in unimaginable ways. I am proud to say that officers in all other areas under my responsibility too performed in an exemplary manner and rose to the occasion in assisting all areas of Government with this challenge. Let me continue with Environment. Over half the staff across all divisions were redeployed to support COVID work. The Department led in the development of COVID analytics and contributed to the daily situation reports. This seriously delayed much of our work. However, work on Brexit continued and ranged from pet passports to food imports to exportation of waste. Significantly, during 2020 the team oversaw the procurement – already mentioned by the Deputy Chief Minister – the procurement, delivery, installation and ongoing maintenance of the waste contingency equipment.

910 As always, Gibraltar continues to work hard with our colleagues in the Overseas Territories and Crown Dependencies. Islands and other small territories largely surrounded by sea are important for the protection of the oceans and are particularly susceptible to the impending sea level rise. There are now many important initiatives to deal with climate change adaptation and the Environment Department has recently embarked on a wide consultation process to ensure that we are prepared for the changes already hitting the planet. I was proud to represent the Overseas Territories and attend COP25, the Climate Change Summit in Madrid in 2019, and I am proud, too,

to continue to chair the Overseas Territories and Crown Dependencies Environmental Ministers Council. In this and other fora we continue to press the UK to ensure Gibraltar's inclusion in international agreements, including the Paris Agreement, the Barcelona Convention, the Ballast Water Convention, ICCAT and the extension of the Intercontinental Biosphere Reserve of the Mediterranean to include Gibraltar. I am pleased to report that the Bern Convention on the Conservation of European Wildlife and Natural Habitats was extended to Gibraltar last December.

The Department has been active over the past two years on the marine front. For example, departmental officers have been accredited by British Divers Marine Life Rescue and have undertaken marine renewable research with the University of Highlands and Islands. A lot of other work has been carried out in this area, including the Atlantic Bluefin tuna sports fishing tagging programme. Additionally, the Department took part in the 2020 Forum of Marine Protected Areas in the Mediterranean. Unfortunately, in February of this year, it had to deal with an oil spill ecological impact assessment and overseeing cleaning operations with drone deployment, together with the Port, and they continue to work with colleagues in the Port Department on improving industry practices in this field. Despite this, the state of our waters continues to improve, as can be seen in our updated marine strategy framework monitoring report published just last week. An otter in our Port, a wintering osprey, healthy dolphin and tuna populations and increased occurrence of whales and other marine life do not happen by accident. The exceptional awareness work of the Nautilus Project has to be recognised in this context.

The Government's term in office has seen an unprecedented level of environmental legislation with nearly 200 instruments published. Recently added was legislation to ban plastic bottles on the Upper Rock and banning the importation of most types of plastic bag, including Devil's Tooth Green Corridor as part of the Gibraltar Nature Reserve, the creation of the Gibraltar National Trails and making it illegal to interfere with the natural behaviour of macaques.

We continue to seek to ensure that the whole public service adheres to the sustainable development goals and consistent with this we have prepared guidelines for sustainable catering and for sustainable events and carried on our work in encouraging young people to pursue these vital goals.

As expected, the amount of waste produced dropped during last year. Recycling volumes were also down, possibly due partly to the persistent but unfounded word on the street that recyclates are mixed after collection. We will be campaigning this year to get recycling back on track. We will also be introducing measures to improve the collection of refuse from the city centre in particular. While on the subject of waste I wish to once again acknowledge the work of the ESG in general, but also specifically in this context in relation to Clean up the World and litter.

The issue of sewage treatment is one that disappoints me most. While the reasons for the slow progress were outside of Government control, as an environmentalist I am still hugely disappointed. A large part of the original delay was the search for a suitable technology, but significantly, as I have explained publicly before, we had advanced well on project funding from the European Investment Bank when the result of the Brexit referendum led to them pulling out after two years' work. Despite this, the pre-works contract with the joint venture that had successfully tendered was signed and work on design and site preparation commenced when one of the two companies that made up the joint venture went into administration. This led to complicated legal issues which further delayed the project. I am not happy with the situation and am immensely frustrated that administrative matters have interfered with a project that had full political support and makes tremendous environmental sense. We are, however, actively pursuing several options and I have no intention of letting this go until it happens.

On air quality, over the last three years the fixed monitoring network run by the Environmental Agency working with UK consultants Ricardo has been supplemented with emerging technologies, providing indicative monitoring in potential hotspot areas and adding to the overall understanding of our air quality. The global lockdown response to COVID caused an unprecedented reduction in global economic and transport activity, which in turn reduced the concentration of nitrogen dioxide and particulate matter levels. In Gibraltar, reductions in air pollutants were quickly picked

up by our stations and demonstrated very early on how even small reductions in traffic can greatly impact air quality. It is important to note that some of the air quality indicators such as nitrogen dioxide, carbon monoxide and benzene had improved markedly between 2018 and 2019, meaning that air quality was improving before COVID considerations came into play. The environmental statistic reports for 2018 and 2019, which clearly show this, have gone live on the Government website this afternoon. Also going live tomorrow morning are our most recent greenhouse gas inventories. In 2020, nitrogen dioxide levels were down across all sites, Rosia Road and Witham's both showing compliant levels for the third year running. PM10 levels have also dropped again, down to 20 micrograms per cubic metre at Bleak House and 22 at Rosia Road. The EU target is 40. PM2.5, which is the most dangerous particulate matter, has also dropped and in 2020 for the first time met the more stringent World Health Organization target of 10 micrograms per cubic metre, compared to 20 for the EU, which we have always complied with. This is so significant given that we have in the past been criticised for not achieving WHO target levels for this contaminant. In general terms the picture across the board is of improved air quality and compliance across nearly all targets, which reflects the realities of the new power station as well as reduced traffic. But I am not complacent. It is clear that traffic is the greatest local contributor, at the moment, to reduced air quality and to our carbon footprint, with shipping also a significant contributor now that we have dealt with the diesel power generation problem.

I take this opportunity to welcome back my friend and colleague Paul Balban to the portfolio of Traffic and Transport and I look forward to working with him on improving and greening transport across Gibraltar, while I look forward, too, to continuing to work closely with another friend and colleague, Vijay Daryanani, in tackling issues to do with shipping, including of course Gibdock and tourism.

This brings me to renewables. The first phase of the solar framework agreement was assigned to successful candidates and we now have solar panels supplying clean energy across 13 different sites in Gibraltar. More will follow as we catch up with the backlog in deployment caused by COVID. While my colleague Albert Isola will provide more information as Minister for Utilities, I am pleased to say that solar power production is slowly but steadily increasing and I predict a considerable jump in solar power production this coming year.

The Environmental Agency continues to advise me in many areas and continues to provide a 24-hour on-call service, which saw environmental health officers engage in 175 callouts last year.

The Agency works closely with the Department on Brexit issues such as contingency planning on food imports and exports of waste in the event of a no negotiated deal scenario.

The Agency remained active during lockdown with measures put in place to protect staff whilst at the same time adapting to continue to deliver critical services to the public as well as ensuring that the administration of waste exports and food imports remained fluid – not easy tasks. The Agency assisted in the disinfection of Government estates, contact tracing and assisting the Director of Public Health in the enforcement of permit conditions imposed on the catering industry. This also involved a collaborative effort with the Royal Gibraltar Police in carrying out evening patrols to ensure that conditions are complied with to ensure an environment which is as safe as possible for both workers in the industry and for the public.

The Agency continues to provide a significant contribution to the Government's anti-dog fouling campaign. So far in 2021, 63 DNA samples have been collected with 11 fixed penalty notices issued to offenders. Officers from the Agency and the Department also carry out patrols during which they check that dogs being walked on the public highway are duly licensed and registered.

The Agency continues to monitor the quality of our bathing waters, where standards have been improving over the past few years. Five of our bathing waters are now classed as excellent, with Western Beach improving and now being classified as good rather than sufficient.

The agency is the competent authority for Control of Major Accident Hazards (COMAH). In conjunction with the Office of Civil Contingencies and the UK Health and Safety Executive, the first

1020 LNG live exercise was organised in January 2020 and carried out with all emergency responders and stakeholders taking part.

On to beaches, Mr Speaker. The Beaches division of the Department works hard to ensure our beaches are ready for enjoyment by all. Two new jellyfish nets, one for Eastern Beach south and one for Catalan Bay, were installed in 2019. The usual beach levelling and re-profiling of beach at Eastern Beach and Catalan Bay was carried out on time in both years. Many do not realise just how much work goes into getting the beaches ready for the bathing season. There are too many examples for me to list.

1030 The management of the cemetery ensured that, albeit with restrictions, families were still able to bury their loved ones in a timely manner. January and February 2021 saw an unprecedented number of COVID deaths in the community and I must thank the cemetery staff for their dedication and professionalism at this time. Despite the unparalleled emotional burden and stress on these individuals, they continued to work diligently, on a half-crew basis, to bury as many as seven members of our community a day during this most difficult of times. I must also pay tribute and thank the former Cemetery Superintendent, Alfred Ryan, who retired in August 2020 after 50 years of service and dedication to the community.

1035 Mr Speaker, planting trees and creating green areas remains a top priority for the Government. Such is the number of trees that we have planted that we now find ourselves struggling to find suitable new areas for tree planting. That said, tree planting continued with nearly 250 planted since autumn 2019. This included those new trees in the refurbished and much improved Governor's Parade, and of course the completion of Midtown Park. It really is incredible how we have greened the heart of our city. This is all part of the way we can use nature-based solutions to improve our carbon performance.

Recently, we were able to dedicate Juan Carlos Perez Promenade, a tribute to the life and work of Juan Carlos Perez, a much loved Member of the House and former GSLP Minister.

1045 The Botanic Gardens never cease to evolve. The Alameda's collection in its nursery of plants from throughout the world continues to grow in size and international reputation, with new species being added to planted areas throughout the gardens. As ever, improvements to aesthetics are combined with the showcasing of plants that are increasingly valuable for education and conservation purposes. Large sections of path were repaired during the last-but-one financial year, alleviating the effects of root action and erosion. Conservation of key Gibraltar species is one of the core roles of the gardens, and it continues to propagate native and endemic species in ways that maximise genetic diversity of these important collections. Thus, the gardens' work is crucial to the conservation of species found only in Gibraltar and nowhere else in the world, as illustrated by the rescuing from certain extinction of the Gibraltar Campion in the 1990s. Hundreds of plants of this species are now produced every year.

1055 The extremely popular children's education programme continues to grow in scope and activity, including its outreach work with local schools. Most importantly for education on the site, construction work is now under way to develop an exciting new education area in the heart of the gardens for outdoor learning about horticulture and the environment. The project has been made possible without any Government funding whatsoever through the very generous contribution of donors, among which the Kusuma Trust, Casais, Gamma Architects and the Rupani family stand out.

1060 The impact of the pandemic on the Nature Reserve was both good and bad. Sadly, tourism numbers plummeted, as did our revenue, which had grown steadily since the fee system was revised a few years ago. We are still a way from returning to pre-COVID levels of tourism, although this has increased significantly in the last two months, but the Department has been working hard maintaining sites, clearing paths and cleaning up during this time. Habitat management continues and has improved areas for wildlife. Speed ramps were introduced and new picnic sites were prepared. I am delighted to report that Tovey Cottage field centre was completed and inaugurated this spring. Schools have wasted no time in visiting the centre, which has been a complete success.

1070 The Gibraltar Nature Reserve team ably manages the different parts of our reserve. I am convinced that the Upper Rock is at its best in recent decades, both as a tourist asset and for wildlife. The improvements continue and more will be seen as soon as funds allow. Now we have an obligation to maximise on the income that the Upper Rock can generate, while always ensuring that residents can continue to enjoy this, our only real bit of countryside, without charge. We will
1075 therefore, following discussion with stakeholders, be introducing an increase in the entry fee to non-residents by no later than 1st April next year.

The recently launched St Michael's Cave experience is a must-watch and is already awing audiences young and old. We will continue to search for modern, attractive and environmentally friendly ways to give Gibraltar a creative market edge which will ensure return visitors to the Rock, no doubt to the delight of my hon. Friend Minister Daryanani.
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The management of the yellow-legged gull continued throughout the pandemic, and as a result we have ensured the long-term trend in the breeding population of gulls in Gibraltar continues to be one of decline. As an example of evidence of this, GONHS recently reported to me that while up to about five years ago counts of young gulls on our beaches and at sea at this time of year reached 500 in a day, a count last week revealed just 38 young gulls. I must thank the Avian Control Unit for their efforts and dedication during this time.
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The GONHS Bird of Prey Unit continues its formidable work in rescue, rehabilitation and tracking with extraordinary success, and continued to do so throughout the pandemic. A number of release and reintroduction programmes are ongoing, including the hugely successful breeding and release of Barbary Partridges, with other initiatives planned.
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Macaque management is another of those areas of wildlife management which, of necessity, continued unabated this past year. For the second time in many years we have had zero growth of the monkey population without mass culling as a result of the benign contraceptive measures that have been implemented. Incursions into town were much less frequent, even during the pandemic. Lack of disturbance and illegal feeding by visitors which ensured that the animals did more natural foraging within the Upper Rock are likely to have contributed to this. As they too are susceptible to COVID-19, special measures were introduced in law prohibiting human contact with the macaques, as we aim to ensure that this disease is not transmitted to these animals and then back to humans.
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Mr Speaker, as we know, thanks to the work of my friend and colleague Albert Isola, Gibraltar already enjoys a reputation for leading in financial services and for robust regulation. During the past year we have been developing legislation and working with relevant stakeholders around the world through virtual workshops for a new regulatory framework which will cater for Green Instruments. The framework will provide for Green Instruments to be issued and traded on regulated marketplaces in or from Gibraltar. The objective is to facilitate trade as widely as possible, but only of Green Instruments which demonstrate significant environmental integrity. The international trading of environmental assets has an important role to play in achieving the targets set by the Paris Agreement. The issue preventing that market from reaching its full potential is the lack of trust on the part of investors. Our legislation will provide just that assurance. There is a dire need to reassess the way economies are run and assessed. Economists globally have so far failed to attribute real value to environmental assets, including biodiversity. I am hoping that Gibraltar will be among the first to do so, following the game-changing review published last year by Sir Partha Dasgupta.
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In respect of heritage, the Heritage and Antiquities Advisory Council (HAAC) has now consolidated its functions and is an efficient tool in ensuring that Heritage is protected and well managed. Earlier this year I established a subcommittee of HAAC in order to produce a heritage management plan for Gibraltar, a vision document that will ensure a future for our past.
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The small Heritage team has been successful over the past two years in executing a number of small, low-budget but important projects. After so many years of neglect, Nun's Well Cistern was opened for the first time ever for all to enjoy. This included the beautification and natural
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landscaping of the external areas as well as the cleaning and restoration of the well itself. The Gibraltar Heritage Trust has kindly taken over the management of visitors to the site.

1125 Another important milestone was the launching last week of the Ministry for Heritage website. The website now provides the public and professionals with as accurate a summary of Gibraltar's many heritage assets as possible. In this I would like to recognise the work of Marcello Sanguinetti, recently retired, in seeing through a total revision of how heritage is managed in my Ministry.

1130 In other areas, phase 2 of the tampion and gun maintenance programme was completed and tampions were placed over 23 barrels. The work included the complete restoration of the iconic Koehler depression carriage at Grand Casemates Square. Restoration works are now nearly complete at the Convent. We have also refurbished many of our city plaques, repainted the names on our city walls and restored and repainted our old street signs. We have digitised maps and plans held at HM Dockyard in collaboration with the Gibraltar National Archives and the Heritage Trust. Archaeological works throughout the area of the Europa Point sports complex are now finalised with the walking trail now open. There have also been some interesting finds at the 1135 Garrison Library, including an intact wall, archway and steps leading into what was the Governor's garden from street level, dating from before 1800. Over the past year, restorations have included the medieval vaults in the new Xapo Bank at Casemates and the Old Police Station in Irish Town, private initiatives under the combined supervision of our archaeologist, Dominic Lopez, the Heritage Trust and the National Museum, who have also provided expert advice at the North 1140 Gorge, the Old Casino and Orange Bastion. All of this is only possible due to the close working relationship the Ministry for Heritage has with these other heritage stakeholders together with other departments such Town Planning and Technical Services. In all my years of involvement in Heritage, never before have all the players worked so closely and so much in support of each other, all to the benefit of heritage.

1145 The work of the Gibraltar National Museum continued throughout. While public areas were closed, a highly successful virtual museum was created. The posts were put on standard social media and the response was huge. With the reopening of the Museum, the virtual museum's output was scaled down but not closed altogether.

1150 I am pleased that the Calpe conference programme was not halted. A very successful conference was held on a Gibraltar theme with an impressive panel of Gibraltarian speakers. This coming year's subject is Iberian Neanderthals and the occasion will mark the 95th anniversary of the discovery of the Neanderthal remains at Devil's Tower. All the leading Iberian scientists in this field will be coming to Gibraltar in September, COVID permitting, showing once again how central Gibraltar has become in this field of study.

1155 The work at Gorham's Cave World Heritage Site continues. Researchers are returning to the site and new and interesting discoveries will undoubtedly hit the headlines in the coming months. One recent publication was that of the Gorgoneion, the fragments of a ceramic item depicting the Gorgon Medusa. More recently a wonderful reconstruction of the entire Gorgoneion has been produced by the Museum. It is pleasing to see that the necessary skills and expertise are available 1160 now within the Museum's team for this kind of work to be done in-house and at low cost. Not so long ago we contracted an international team to produce the sculptures of Nana and Flint, the Gibraltar Neanderthals. Now, reconstructions of Calpeia – a Neolithic woman who lived some 7,500 years ago – the Gorgoneion and Yantar have been produced exclusively by the Museum team in house. Yantar was the reconstruction of a Bronze Age male who had been excavated from 1165 Bray's Cave years ago. Genetic work showed that he had come from the Russian steppe. So much of our ancient history remains there to be discovered. The Museum continues to plan new displays and I am pleased to announce that Yantar, along with Calpeia and other exhibits, will form part of a new gallery dedicated to the Pillars of Hercules.

1170 Restoration is an important aspect of the Museum's work, and their support to the Ministry for Heritage on many restoration projects such as the limekiln on Willis's Road is a fundamental part of that work. There is a great deal more restoration to do, which we will have to strictly prioritise in view of finances.

1175 The close relationship with the Gibraltar Heritage Trust continues and is indeed going from strength to strength. The mutual support that exists between the Trust and the Ministry on day-to-day work allows projects to continue unimpeded. The Witham's Cemetery project, now in its fifth year, is an example of the Trust's dedication. Among other work, the Trust has also taken on a voluntary project to restore Lord Airey's Battery, a 9.2-inch emplacement at the top of the Rock.

1180 Challenging as the last financial year has been given COVID-19 and subsequent lockdowns, the Gibraltar Garrison Library team remained in post throughout, and whilst footfall came to a dramatic halt the Library saw a substantial increase in their online outreach. This is reflected in the level of electronic research support to our Gibraltar-based community, including students, and to UK-based university students. Digital copies of materials were produced for these purposes and the library team are continuing in this endeavour. Sensitive heritage-driven capital works were undertaken in the basement for the establishment of a digitisation studio, a conservation
1185 department and a secure climatized repository room. It is also reassuring to know that members of our community are increasingly referring to the Garrison Library as a central repository for gifting their collections. These are special and often rare collections of great Gibraltar significance and it is an initiative that we encourage. The library will now be looking to create a Friends of the Gibraltar Garrison Library with the aim of maximising the commercial potential of the library.

1190 The last two years have been years of exciting renewal and stressful re-profiling in rapid succession in Education. 2019-20 was exciting. We saw the start of long overdue co-education in our comprehensives, the move to the fantastic new secondary schools, realignment of key stages and the start of the move towards more vocational opportunities. In sharp contrast, 2020-21 saw the impact of lockdowns and isolation, with the need to reinvent the way we teach. Online
1195 teaching became the norm of necessity, markedly improving in content during the second lockdown, and, while never the same as face-to-face teaching, it certainly ensured that our children kept learning.

COVID was an incredibly stressful time in education for children, parents and of course teachers. They all had to change what they did and how they did it, and we saw a flexibility and
1200 an adaptation at levels that we had never seen before. But we did it, and my strong view is that our children were much better taught during this time than their peers in the UK and that for the most part they have been able to catch up on lost time. I think that we are now much better equipped to continue online learning components and certainly using the internet to communicate with parents. More fundamentally, the fact that for two years we have not had
1205 formal GCSE or A-level exams has presented to me the possibility of transforming our education system even further and looking at options such as are used in other countries where education is much less exam orientated and more performance based.

Of course, COVID has meant that we have not as yet started work on three of our planned schools – the Gibraltar College, Governor's Meadow and Bishop Fitzgerald. These are, of course,
1210 still planned but delayed. However, the start of work on the new St Mary's School is imminent given that this will have other funding arrangements, and work is proceeding in important improvements in other schools, notably St Paul's.

We sadly had to deal with fire damage at Governor's Meadow and flooding at St Joseph's, but both were speedily repaired and refurbished. My thanks to all the staff and to GEA and GJBS for
1215 their prompt and skilled work.

Special Educational Needs is one of the most important areas under my responsibility. I am pleased to say that one notable project that we have continued is the new St Martin's School, delayed as it was by the difficulties the construction industry faced during COVID. Happily, I can confirm that St Martin's School will open for pupils this coming September. The school has
1220 additional facilities, including a hydrotherapy pool, enhanced therapy areas and specialist classrooms. All staff have been and are working extremely hard planning for the migration to the new building.

The vitally important relationship between the Department and the parents of St Martin's pupils has never been closer. During lockdown there was close communication and collaboration

1225 to discuss ways in which families could be supported, and this positive relationship has continued, as evidenced by the frequent meetings and close working together which will soon result in much improved provision for pupils and former pupils of St Martin's and their families, details of which will emerge soon. I thank the Parents' Association and the Little Smiles charity for all their work here. Indeed, meetings with parents' groups are now a regular part of my agenda.

1230 Our Special Educational Needs Co-ordinators (SENCOs) continue to have a full-time role and are now able to dedicate their time on all SEN-related issues. In addition, there has been a great deal of training in special needs afforded to all the staff, including in such areas as autism and dyslexia.

1235 The School Counselling Service was introduced in August 2019. I do not know how we would managed without them. They deal with hundreds of cases, and they too were able to continue their work during lockdown through online platforms. Some important initiatives here have included the development of staff well-being. This had been identified as an area of concern prior to COVID and was, of course, exacerbated by pressures brought about by COVID.

1240 There is a growing number of children in our education system who have been impacted by trauma, children who have a high number of adverse childhood experiences. Some of these children are in residential care, some still living at home and others spend time, sadly, in and out of prison. The school environment can be a challenging place for these children, causing high levels of anxiety, frequent meltdowns, violent outbursts, depression or school avoidance. In September 2019 the old St Bernard's Nursery became available and it was renamed Teaching and Learning Centre (TLC) with the acronym putting emphasis on nurture. In the past academic year the TLC 1245 has helped to fill this gap and provide a base and a lifeline for a number of our most vulnerable children. The flexibility outside the school setting has given these children a calmer, more flexible setting where they could access both academic and therapeutic activities.

1250 Scholarship numbers in the 2020-21 academic year were 811 mandatory undergraduate scholarships, 211 postgraduate scholarships and 83 other discretionary scholarships. We currently have 1,105 students in higher education, something to make the community proud. We will this year continue to provide for all the mandatory scholarships and it is likely that we will have more students in higher education than ever before.

1255 All our upper and lower primary schools have now embarked on our digital teaching and learning initiative. The rollout to secondary schools began prior to the disruption caused by COVID, with some teachers receiving their initial training and subsequent professional development. We are targeting the coming academic year to complete the rollout. To date we have rolled out over 2,000 devices in support of the initiative.

1260 The Key Stage 4 curriculum in our secondary schools is now fully equitable with respect to the range of subjects that pupils can choose at the end of year 9. The September 2021 year 10 cohort will be the first one ever in Gibraltar to benefit from this equalisation. This is so overdue, and I am very pleased that all our young people will now have equal opportunities at this stage.

1265 We now have a hair and beauty level 2 course at both secondary schools and the follow-up hairdressing course at the Gibraltar College, which launched in September 2020. Plans are advanced to introduce a vocational BTEC in Music Performance in association with GAMPA.

1270 Both secondary schools have made great strides in offering a Digital Technology course at Key Stage 4 and will now launch GCSE Computer Science as from this coming September. This builds on the revamp of the IT curriculum at Key Stage 3 to deliver a greater emphasis on computational thinking skills and coding. Our teaching and learning initiative has a huge focus on developing digital skills in young learners and some of the learning that is being demonstrated by our young learners is breath-taking. Other developments in this digital area will be announced soon.

1275 The Department of Education worked in close collaboration with the University of Gibraltar to develop a bespoke Post-Graduate Certificate in Education aligned to the teaching standards in the UK. This exciting new programme has now seen two cohorts of students mentored and supported by the excellent practitioners in our schools.

1280 The Department of Education launched education.gov.gi in the midst of the pandemic as a way of providing stakeholders with information. This platform quickly developed as services were digitised and improved upon. To date, the enrolment processes into our schools and the scholarship processes and subsequent contract issuing have been fully digitised. The website also includes information on accessing the educational psychologists and other support mechanisms offered by the Department. Over time we will see the rollout of other support mechanisms for students and parents appearing on the platform.

1285 The challenging period that was the review of teachers' pay was successfully resolved some time ago. More recently, most of the posts that had been acted for a number of years, some pending a TLR review, have been discussed and agreed with the union and have been advertised. This will ensure that subjects and pastoral care are managed by teachers on a long-term basis, which will result in much needed continuity for our schools and much needed consistency for pupils.

1290 This year we have engaged with NASUWT with the aim of developing and completing a zero-tolerance policy for any aggressive, violent or anti-social behaviour in our schools, and we are a footstep away from completing an acting policy and a CPD policy. We discuss matters on an almost weekly basis, and the Social Partnership Forum has reconvened.

1295 There is so much I could say about the work at Education. We have been through a tough year and a half and I cannot express enough gratitude to the professionals who have done so much. I thank them for that and for the way that they welcome me into their schools. I am pleased to say that I have been able to visit every single one of them this last term.

1300 I would like to now thank several people who have retired during the course of the past year. First, Derek Alman, who led my school education projects. I would like to pay tribute also to six outstanding head teachers who have retired over the last two years – Rosanna Hitchcock from St Paul's, Gizelle Montegriffo from St Joseph's Lower Primary, Leon Abecasis from the Gibraltar College, Annabelle Felipes from St Martin's, Fiona Ferro from Governor's Meadow, and Michael Tavares from Bayside – after lifetimes teaching our children and young people. I also wish to thank the outgoing Director of Education, Jackie Mason. I wish them all a long and happy retirement.

1305 I look forward to taking on more and more challenges and working with all in Education to continue to progress on things that have needed fixing for a long time, but more importantly to achieve new and better ways of helping our young people to be better than us.

1310 Mr Speaker, with regard to the University of Gibraltar, this, as hon. Members know, is an autonomous educational institution established by the University of Gibraltar Act, an achievement of my hon. Friend Gilbert Licudi. Since then, the University has continued to develop and grow as an institution, marking its fifth anniversary in September 2020, and I am pleased to be able to report on the following.

1315 Tuition fee income has almost tripled in the past two years, increasing from around £489,000 in 2019 to an estimated £1,325,000 in 2021, enabling the University to significantly progress towards self-sufficiency. The proportion of income, excluding donations, provided by the Government subvention has decreased from 86% in 2017 to an estimated 47% in 2021. This positive progress towards self-sufficiency is expected to continue with the Government's annual subvention being significantly reduced in this Budget to £1.25 million and the University's continued efforts to increase its tuition fee income by providing an excellent product and service and use of targeted marketing.

1320 Students enrolled on core academic programmes – that is excluding students engaged on professional and short courses – have increased from 30 in 2018-19 to 134 in 2020-21. Since September 2019 several new academic programmes have been launched. The University welcomed over 200 students during its September 2020 enrolment week at the start of the last academic year. September 2020 also saw the University welcoming its largest number of international students, from 10 countries in addition to Gibraltar. The University was finally able to hold its first graduation ceremony in December 2020 and was one of the few higher education institutions anywhere able to celebrate a physical graduation ceremony.

1330 The University has recently established a Centre of Excellence in Responsible Gaming led by its Chair, Dr Zolt Demtrovics, and its International Scientific Advisory Board. The University's Gibraltar Maritime Academy commenced operations just the week before last.

1335 Management of the COVID-19 pandemic required the entire University team to act quickly and decisively with a smooth transition to staff and faculty working from home and the delivery of education online. The University laboratory, even though it caused significant disruption to PhD and Marine Science students, was made exclusively available as a COVID-19 screening laboratory to the GHA, using equipment supplied by the GHA and the University, and the lab continues this vital function to date. The nursing simulation suite was made available to the GHA's ophthalmic clinic. The University's ICT Director was seconded to the GHA and the University nursing students played a major role in administering the COVID-19 vaccine as part of their first-year placement.

1340 The University and its officials and academics continue to be involved in international initiatives and to host international events, thus contributing to the high profile and good name of Gibraltar in academic and specialist circles abroad.

1345 I now turn to my legislative agenda for the coming year. While many of the projects I am involved in are sadly delayed, I do however have a wide legislative programme that I plan to introduce. Among the Bills that I intend to bring to this House are Bills for a fully revised and updated Education Act, a revised Entertainment and Culture Act, an Act to set up the Gibraltar National Park, an Environmental Governance Act, a revised Garrison Library Act and a number of Acts which subdivide and modernise the archaic and voluminous Public Health Act.

1350 And there is another important piece of legislation which we are about to publish. This is an exciting initiative that Her Majesty's Government of Gibraltar has signalled in the past, but about which it has not, up to now, made any official announcement. I am, therefore, very pleased to be making a statement on this new potential industry for the first time in this House. It is important to explain that I am making this announcement in my capacity as the Minister for Public Health. The new, potential market to which I refer is medicinal cannabis. I am pleased to report that the draft of a Bill for an Act to make provision for the regulation of the production, import, export, marketing and supply of cannabis for medicinal and for connected purposes is now ready. The House will be interested to learn that the Government is supporting the efforts of the private sector to establish the appropriate legal and regulatory architecture in order to create a robustly regulated medicinal cannabis industry. This regime will be fully compliant with the UN Single Convention on Narcotic Drugs 1961, as amended. Subject to final discussions with Her Majesty's Government in the UK, we very much expect to be in a position to publish the Command Paper soonest and certainly during the course of this year.

1365 At this juncture, we foresee a number of potential outcomes, including regulatory alignment with the United Kingdom Medicines and Health Care Products in respect of certification of local licences, engagement with Her Majesty's Government departments and agencies in respect of UN Single Convention reporting and related matters, exploring product demand that may exist in the United Kingdom that Gibraltar's new economic sector may be well placed to supply, and synergies arising in respect of research and the development of the sector more broadly. We have spared no effort to ensure that the proposed new industry is regulated fully in accordance with Gibraltar's international obligations under the UN Single Convention. It will be the strictest policy of the Government that only the most reputable businesses will be able to be licensed under the draft Medicinal Cannabis Bill. Such businesses must conduct their operations fully in accordance with the proposed new statutory licensing regime.

1370 Finally in respect of this subject, it is important to note that we are of the view that this new potential industry, comprehensively regulated to the highest standards, could well create an innovative and thriving sector of Gibraltar's economy. It could lead to new quality employment and export opportunities to different jurisdictions. It is predicted that medicinal cannabis as a business globally will continue to expand for the foreseeable future. It is vital that we remain open to such new opportunities to maintain our economic growth. This has underpinned our firm commitment to private industry by establishing the relevant statutory and regulatory legal

1380 framework. I trust that all hon. Members will agree with us that we should seize the potentially positive economic prospects that a robustly regulated medicinal cannabis industry can deliver.

Mr Speaker, as ever, I wish to express my thanks to my personal staff and of course to my heads of Departments and CEOs – Liesl Mesilio, Seamus Byrne, the acting Director of Education Keri Scott, and Chris Segovia the Chief Environmental Health Officer – for their hard work at all hours and every day, and to all their staff for their constant support; to all the staff in those Agencies and contractors that work to my Departments; to NASUWT, Unite and GGCA for their constructive work; to all the NGOs, associations, schools and academies, environmental, cultural, educational, who are so committed to what they believe in, often working as volunteers, for being committed, honest and reasonable in pursuing their aims; to sponsors and to the trusts and foundations that support our work, more appreciated now than ever; to all those many citizens appointed to voluntary boards, working groups and committees for which I am responsible; and to all those in other Departments with whom I have regular contact, such as the staff at No. 6 and at the Gibraltar Law Offices, Gibraltar House in London and Brussels, and Land Property Services for always being there when I need them; to you, Mr Speaker, and your staff; to the Chief Minister and Deputy Chief Minister, always a source of advice, support and encouragement; and to all my other colleagues for their own work and support over these two difficult years. Finally, I would like to thank His Excellency the Governor, Sir David Steel, for the genuine and non-political interest that he shows in the work of the different parts of my Ministry.

In doing all of this, I too commend the Bill to the House. *(Banging on desks)*

ADJOURNMENT

1400 **Hon. Chief Minister:** Mr Speaker, I now move that the House should adjourn to tomorrow – when I am reliably informed that various bits of illegible handwritten notes will have been brought together into the magnificent contribution that we expect every year from the Father of the House – at 11 a.m.

1405 **Mr Speaker:** I now propose the question, which is that this House do now adjourn to Wednesday, 21st July at 11 a.m.

I now put the question, which is that this House do now adjourn to Wednesday, 21st July at 11 a.m. Those in favour? **(Members: Aye.)** Those against? Passed.

This House will now adjourn to Wednesday, 21st July at 11 a.m.

The House adjourned at 7.40 p.m.