



# PROCEEDINGS OF THE GIBRALTAR PARLIAMENT

**MORNING SESSION: 10.30 a.m. – 12.20 p.m.**

**Gibraltar, Friday, 28th June 2024**

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# The Gibraltar Parliament

*The Parliament met at 10.30 a.m.*

[MADAM SPEAKER: Hon. Judge K Ramagge GMH *in the Chair*]

[CLERK TO THE PARLIAMENT: J B Reyes Esq *in attendance*]

## SUSPENSION OF STANDING ORDERS

### Standing Order 7(1) suspended to proceed with laying of papers

**Clerk:** Meeting of Parliament, Friday, 28th June 2024.  
Suspension of Standing Orders. The Hon. the Chief Minister.

5 **Chief Minister (Hon. F R Picardo):** Madam Speaker, I beg to move, under Standing Order 7(3), to suspend Standing Order 7(1) in order to proceed with the laying of documents on the table.

**Madam Speaker:** Those in favour? (**Members:** Aye.) Those against? Carried.

## PAPERS TO BE LAID

**Clerk:** (vi) Papers to be laid – the Hon. the Chief Minister.

10

**Chief Minister (Hon. F R Picardo):** Madam Speaker, I have the honour to lay on the table the Air Traffic Survey Report 2023, the Tourist Survey Report 2023, the Hotel Occupancy Survey Report 2023, the Employment Survey Report 2023 and the Annual Policing Plan 2024-25.

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**Madam Speaker:** Ordered to lie.

# Questions for Oral Answer

## CHIEF MINISTER

### Q487 and 643/2024

#### Manifesto commitments –

#### New home for Gibraltar Netball Association; building of new homes

**Clerk:** Chief Minister's questions.  
Question 487. The Hon. E J Reyes.

**Hon. E J Reyes:** Good morning, Madam Speaker.

20 Can the Government provide details of the chosen site, cost and expected completion date in respect of its commitment to provide the Gibraltar Netball Association with its own home?

**Clerk:** Answer, the Hon. the Chief Minister.

25 **Chief Minister (Hon. F R Picardo):** Madam Speaker, I will answer this question together with Question 643.

**Clerk:** Question 643. The Hon. D J Bossino.

30 **Hon. D J Bossino:** Please provide precise details of the number of government rental homes the Government intends to build, to include the size and location of each of those homes and when construction will commence.

**Clerk:** Answer, the Hon. the Chief Minister.

35 **Hon. Chief Minister:** Madam Speaker, our position remains as set out in answer to Question 679/2023.

40 **Hon. E J Reyes:** Madam Speaker, I note the Chief Minister's answer. I know he sometimes feels that I am a bit impatient or anxious, but given that the Gibraltar Netball Association have been nominated and chosen to host international games here in Gibraltar, is the Government satisfied that we will have the adequate facilities to be able to properly cater and be good hosts for those games without it being to the detriment of other sports? Sometimes we can use other locations to double up for netball, but it means the removal of allocations and maybe basketball has to suffer in its allocation timetable. I will be glad to hear if the Chief Minister is confident that we will proudly and rightfully host these games. We certainly look forward to the Netball Association having its own home.

**Hon. Chief Minister:** Madam Speaker, yes.

50 **Hon. D J Bossino:** We are curt in our responses. That is the style which the Hon. –

**Madam Speaker:** Does the Member have a question?

55 **Hon. D J Bossino:** I cannot say anything in advance of the question. What is the position, Madam Speaker? I cannot make any comment whatsoever? I simply use the preamble to –

60 **Madam Speaker:** The hon. Member is correct. Preambles need to be short. Preambles are allowed, with the proviso that the preamble is necessary to make the supplementary question understood. A statement as to something which is unrelated to the preamble, i.e. a statement which is unrelated to the supplementary, will not be allowed, because that just prolongs Question Time beyond that which is necessary. If the hon. Member needs to make a preamble to make the question understood – by way of example, the Hon. Mr Reyes talking about the netball issue and explaining that one sport, like basketball, may have to give up for another and that is why this is important – that is permissible, but a gratuitous statement for the sake of it will not be allowed before a supplementary.

The question?

70 **Hon. D J Bossino:** So be it. Madam Speaker, the Hon. the Chief Minister refers the House to the answer that he gave to Question 679 on 23rd November 2023. The position then, in response to one of my supplementaries, was that he would be announcing the proposals in respect of government housing when they are ready, and that when they are ready they would provide more details. He said it was not just a question of time but also as to location. Is the Hon. Chief Minister still not ready?

75 **Hon. Chief Minister:** Madam Speaker, it is not about the Chief Minister being ready; it is about the plans being ready.

**Hon. D J Bossino:** When will the plans be ready?

80 **Hon. Chief Minister:** Madam Speaker, an announcement will be made when the plans are ready.

85 **Hon. D J Bossino:** Is the Chief Minister concerned that he will not be able to comply and fulfil his commitment to the people of Gibraltar, which is now, as he says, government policy? The commitment is set out in the manifesto of the party opposite, which won the election, where it said, and I quote:

The GSLP Liberals would, if returned to office, build additional general rental stock in housing [...] the balance of rental homes will need to be increased.

There is a reference there to rental homes. Will the Government be able to comply and fulfil that commitment in the lifetime of this Parliament?

90 **Hon. Chief Minister:** Madam Speaker, the answer to the first question that the hon. Gentleman has asked, which is whether I think that we will fail that commitment, is no. The answer to the second question the hon. Gentleman has asked, which is whether I believe we will fulfil that commitment, is yes.

95 **Hon. D J Bossino:** And by way of 'fulfilment', what does he mean? Are we talking about the houses and the keys ready to be delivered to the applicants on the housing waiting list for rental housing, or simply a commencement of the construction?

100 **Hon. Chief Minister:** Madam Speaker, we expect to fulfil the commitment we have given as set out clearly in our manifesto. Whether or not we do, of course, is a matter for the public in Gibraltar to determine by the time that the next general election is called.

105 **Hon. D J Bossino:** With the greatest of respect to the Hon. the Chief Minister, I do not agree with that proposition. Whether or not they do fulfil the commitment is whether or not they comply with what they said, which is that there would be a provision for additional general rental stock. It says that they will build additional rental stock. So, what is the commitment? This is why I am drilling down on the detail. Is it that the houses will be built, or simply that they will start building?

110 **Hon. Chief Minister:** Madam Speaker, I confess that with all due respect to the hon. Gentleman, I find it difficult to see how he expects me to provide any more detail than the very extensive detail that he himself has referred to, which is already set out in our manifesto. Our commitment is what is set out in the manifesto, and I think that it is a sufficiently clear commitment that it garnered the majority of support during the course of the last general election  
115 campaign and produced the result that it produced.

**Madam Speaker:** Next question.

**Q494/2024**

**Payments to construction companies –  
Details of payments made since 2018**

**Clerk:** Question 494. The Hon. the Leader of the Opposition.

120 **Hon. Dr K Azopardi:** Madam Speaker, can the Government provide a list of total payments  
made by the Government, any government-owned entity, or the Savings Bank to construction  
companies, broken down by company, identifying the specific entity and by particular contract or  
works for each of the following financial years: (1) 2018-19; (2) 2019-21; (3) 2021-22; (4) 2022-23;  
(5) 2023-24?

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**Clerk:** Answer, the Hon. the Chief Minister.

**Chief Minister (Hon. F R Picardo):** Madam Speaker, the information requested is too  
voluminous to provide in the timeframe available.

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**Hon. Dr K Azopardi:** I see. This question was filed last month and it was carried over, at my  
request, for this month. How much longer does the Government need to provide this information?

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**Hon. Chief Minister:** Madam Speaker, I think it is relatively impossible to be able to provide  
this information. The hon. Gentleman has asked whether the Government can provide a list of  
total payments made by the Government, any Government-owned entity or the Savings Bank to  
construction companies, broken down by company, identifying each of them and by particular  
contract or works for each of the following financial years, going back, in effect, five financial  
years. That means that if we have bought a box of nails from one particular construction company,  
140 in the Housing Works Agency, or maybe the ERS has bought a box of screws from another  
construction company, or we have entered into a contract for the construction of 800 properties  
with one particular company, each of those would be a payment that would have to be identified  
and provided under the list that the hon. Gentleman is casting. This is the sort of net that John  
Cortes thinks is very bad for the environment when it is deployed at sea, and it requires, in effect,  
145 that every civil servant we have available should trawl through all of the payments that each of  
their Departments have made for five years, to identify any such payment. We do not think that  
it is possible to do this with the sort of degree of accuracy that we are required to ensure that we  
provide for answers in this House, so I would gently ask the hon. Gentleman to consider what it is  
that he really wants, and to see whether he can phrase his question in a way that we might better  
150 be able to comply with.

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**Hon. Dr K Azopardi:** The thing is, Madam Speaker, the answer the hon. Member has just given  
argues against his original answer. His original answer was that the information could not be  
provided in the available time. I pointed out to him that this was last month's question, which is  
replayed this month because they did not answer it last time, so I was asking for time, which would  
have been in keeping with his original answer. What he is now suggesting is that it cannot be done  
at all. Can I ask him whether it is the original answer? Is the situation the original answer, which is  
that the Government requires time, which is what he originally said? And if so, how much time do  
they need? I understand the example he has given about the nails, of course, but I do struggle to  
160 think that in the same way as there would be overall control of the Budget by Treasury, I assume,  
in terms of spending and so on, it must be possible in today's day and age, where everything is  
computerised – we are not going back to written ledgers – someone can ask for a printout of  
payments made to company X. It should not be as problematic as the Chief Minister suggesting;  
nor did his original answer suggest it was problematic other than in relation to time.

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**Hon. Chief Minister:** Madam Speaker, the hon. Gentleman knows that the answer that the information requested is too voluminous to provide in the timeframe available is the standard answer that is provided in Parliament – in Westminster or here – when the further follow-up answer is of the sort that I am going to provide.

170 What I am trying to indicate to the hon. Gentleman is that things do not work, even in the digital age, in the press-a-button-and-printout-appears manner in which he seems to think it does. It might work like that in a small organisation, but the Government, and indeed the Government-owned companies and the Savings Bank are many organisations, and bringing all that together in the way that the hon. Gentleman has suggested is simply not possible. It perhaps is possible if we  
175 were to spend a year devoting resources to simply provide him the answer to this question.

I cannot imagine that there is any reason why the Opposition really want this much information and want to know whether a box of nails has been bought from a construction company by one part of the Government. I imagine the Opposition legitimately wish the information in the context of payments to construction companies over a particular amount, or in respect of particular  
180 things, and I am very happy to go back, if the hon. Gentleman wishes to rephrase in some way, to try to obtain that information and then come back and be able to provide the information across the floor of the House, knowing that we are providing information with the sort of accuracy that people expect that the Government provides information in this House, and hon. Members are entitled to require us to comply with that level of accuracy. But like this, this is not a question that  
185 is possible for us to answer.

**Hon. Dr K Azopardi:** With all due respect, I think the original answer was different to the supplementary answer, despite the Chief Minister's explanation. May I just seek your guidance, Madam Speaker? It is clear we are not going to get more than what we are getting today. I am  
190 happy to go back and reframe a question. I would prefer not to be met with the answer then that it is presented within a period of six months. I would rather do it at the next available opportunity given that this is a May question. I would seek your guidance. I think the hon. Member is saying, given the tenor of his answer just now, that they would not object to a question being filed.

195 **Hon. Chief Minister:** Madam Speaker, if it is helpful, that would be my view. I am very happy, if the hon. Gentleman wants to rephrase the question – which would make it a different question in any event – to, not for one moment, raise that sort of objection were it to be filed in a way that is better able to be answered.

200 **Madam Speaker:** Yes. My view is that following this exchange, if a question is going to be refiled that is going to be more specific, then it would differ from this question and I would not see, in any event, regardless of this exchange, that there would be a problem with infringing Rule 17.

Next question.

**Q624/2024**  
**New Care Agency offices –**  
**Details of rental arrangements**

205 **Clerk:** Question 624. The Hon. the Leader of the Opposition, on behalf of the Hon. A Sanchez.

**Hon. Dr K Azopardi:** Madam Speaker, can the Government confirm whether it is paying rent for the offices building in the dockyard area where it intends to move the staff of the Care Agency? If so, can the Government confirm the commencement date of this rent agreement, the monthly  
210 rent cost and the duration of the contract?

**Clerk:** Answer, the Hon. the Chief Minister.

**Chief Minister (Hon. F R Picardo):** Madam Speaker, the Government can confirm it is paying rent for the office in the dockyard area where it intends to move the staff of the Care Agency. The commencement date was 1st July 2023. The monthly rental cost is £25,307.33, paid from 1st April 2024. The duration of the contract will be 21 years.

**Hon. Dr K Azopardi:** Just to confirm, if the hon. Member has that information in front of him, the specific landlord with whom the rental agreement was entered into is who?

**Hon. Chief Minister:** I do not have that information, Madam Speaker. I do not have the actual rent agreement.

**Madam Speaker:** Next question.

#### Q625-26/2024

#### Civil servants representing Gibraltar at international events – Special leave conditions

**Clerk:** Question 625. The Hon. G Origo.

**Hon. G Origo:** Madam Speaker, can the hon. Member confirm whether the Government has changed its policy with respect to special leave conditions applied to civil servants who are representing Gibraltar in international capacities at international events?

**Clerk:** Answer, the Hon. the Chief Minister.

**Chief Minister (Hon. F R Picardo):** Madam Speaker, I will answer with Question 626.

**Clerk:** Question 626. The Hon. G Origo.

**Hon. G Origo:** Can the hon. Member confirm whether special leave is being granted to civil servants involved in music or the arts who are representing Gibraltar at international events?

**Clerk:** Answer, the Hon. the Chief Minister.

**Hon. Chief Minister:** Madam Speaker, government policy on special leave remains unchanged. The Principal Auditor's Report identified areas where adherence to the established guidelines had not been consistent across the public service. As a result, Government has been strictly applying the existing criteria. Requests for which no specific provision for special paid leave is in place are, therefore, not being granted. Special leave may be granted for public servants who are selected as contestants to participate in sports or other international events such as music or the arts.

**Hon. G Origo:** Madam Speaker, I am grateful to the Chief Minister for his answer. If I may add a bit of background to the reason I have been asking this question, we have been of the understanding that in the past, officials who are representing Gibraltar – which would include the athletes, referees, coaches, technical directors – would all be granted special leave to be able to attend these events in which they are representing Gibraltar. But it is our understanding that recently this has been narrowed down to just the athletes or, as the Chief Minister referred to them, the contestants. I just wanted to get a bit of clarity on that, because in the same way that



my hon. Friend mentioned that next year we are going to be hosting the Netball World Youth Cup locally, I think it would be reasonable to suggest that we need all the officials to be allowed to take special leave, to be able to host and service this event properly. I would just like his thoughts on that.

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**Hon. Chief Minister:** Madam Speaker, special unpaid leave would be granted to officials etc., the category of individual who are not the contestants. Hon. Members were, I remind them, delighted with the Principal Auditor's Report and felt that it had identified all the areas where we were failing – they said at the time, I seem to recall – to properly enforce rules etc., so I am surprised that they would not wish us to be now ensuring compliance with those areas where the Principal Auditor's Report highlighted that there was a failure to enforce rules. The process, therefore, is one which goes through special leave for those who are contestants etc. Those who are support will be able to take special unpaid leave, but they will not have special leave.

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**Madam Speaker:** Next question.

**Q627-29 and 647/2024**  
**Boarders and Coastguard Agency –**  
**Individuals failing training requirements; health and safety; working conditions;**  
**resolution of issues leading to industrial action**

**Clerk:** Question 627. The Hon. J Ladislaus.

**Hon. J Ladislaus:** Madam Speaker, what policies and procedures are in place to deal with individuals who fail ongoing training requirements within the Borders and Coastguard Agency?

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**Clerk:** Answer, the Hon. the Chief Minister.

**Chief Minister (Hon. F R Picardo):** Madam Speaker, I will answer with Questions 628, 629 and 647.

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**Clerk:** Question 628. The Hon. J Ladislaus.

**Hon. J Ladislaus:** Madam Speaker, specifically what health and safety concerns have been expressed by Unite the Union in respect of the working conditions of Borders and Coastguard Agency officers; how far back do these concerns date and have these issues now been addressed satisfactorily?

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**Clerk:** Question 629. The Hon. J Ladislaus.

**Hon. J Ladislaus:** What measures have been put in place at the airport terminal to ensure that Borders and Coastguard Agency officers have access to rest facilities pending certainty on a UK-EU deal concerning Gibraltar?

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**Clerk:** Question 647. The Hon. the Leader of the Opposition.

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**Hon. Dr K Azopardi:** Have agreements been reached to resolve the issues that led to industrial action by Borders and Coastguard officers last month; and, if so, what measures are being taken?

**Clerk:** Answer, the Hon. the Chief Minister.

300 **Hon. Chief Minister:** Madam Speaker, the Borders and Coastguard Agency provides a comprehensive training programme to ensure that its officers achieve the standards set and required by the pertinent external agencies. This programme is constantly reviewed to ensure that officers remain competent to carry out their obligations. Any officer who may fail to achieve these standards is provided guidance, mentored and retrained to assist them in reaching the  
305 required standard. The Borders and Coastguard Agency carries out various roles relating to immigration and security. This allows management to deploy its officers until the required standards are achieved in relation to each role.

No health and safety concerns were reported by Unite the Union to the Borders and Coastguard Agency. Nevertheless, following from recent meetings held between the Government and Unite the Union representatives, an independent health and safety consultant has been  
310 engaged to review and identify possible health and safety hazards at the air terminal. These facilities are also used by other employees who are not Borders and Coastguard Agency officers.

I can confirm that Borders and Coastguard Agency officers have always enjoyed access to rest facilities at the air terminal building since it was opened in 2012. Furthermore, officers also have  
315 access to enjoy rest facilities at the Borders and Coastguard Agency headquarters, which is located adjacent to the perimeter of the airport terminal.

Following on from meetings held with Unite the Union, an agreement has been reached to address, over a 90-day period, several issues raised, including the carrying out of minor works and the procurement of items which were not considered to be adequate  
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**Hon. J Ladislaus:** I am grateful. Madam Speaker, I am on Question 627. Are all BCA officers who fail ongoing training requirements disciplined in an equal manner?

**Hon. Chief Minister:** Madam Speaker, I have no indication that they are not.  
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**Hon. J Ladislaus:** Madam Speaker, I am at Question 628. May I ask, if no health and safety concerns were reported, for what reason was an independent health and safety consultant employed to review?

**Hon. Chief Minister:** Madam Speaker, for the simple reason that the Government believed and believes that there were no serious health and safety issues at all, but Unite the Union had, through its members, raised this issue but were unable to point to any in particular. And so, in order to try to determine whether there were in fact any health and safety issues, it was agreed that if we simply appointed somebody independent, they would be able to tell us whether there  
330 were any such issues. The Government, as an employer, will not stand idly by and tolerate a workplace having health and safety issues, so we had no difficulty in agreeing to bring somebody independent to make a determination. Given that Unite and its members might have raised the  
335 issue but were not able to point to anything, we might very easily simply have said, 'Well, look, if you cannot actually point to anything, there is nothing here to do,' but because it is a health and safety issue, we had no difficulty in resolving the dispute between us and the union on the basis  
340 of bringing an external third party to check.

**Hon. J Ladislaus:** Just pulling on the thread of that review, by when does the Hon. the Chief Minister expect the review to conclude, and will the results be available to the public?  
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**Hon. Chief Minister:** Madam Speaker, I do not know about things being available to the public. When the Government carries out, working with the union, a health and safety review of a workplace, it does not tend to publish it. Certainly, it will be available to the union and to the Government, and if there were to be a dispute between us, I am sure that one of the parties may  
350 resolve it by publishing.

I do not know that I have any statement here about the time in which the review will be finished. I think we have already commissioned it. The 90 days that are relevant relate to addressing particular issues – seriously, not issues which I believe in any way relate to health and safety, so there is no separate health and safety review check period that I have here.

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**Hon. Dr K Azopardi:** Madam Speaker, may I ask, on my Question 647, if agreements have been reached? The Chief Minister says agreements were reached to do works over a 90-day period, I think he said. Can he give us a bit more information about the works that would be conducted in that period of 90 days specifically? Does that include, for example, a mess room? Are there other things? Does he have a list of those works?

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**Hon. Chief Minister:** I do have a list, and it does not include a mess room, for the reason I have already given: that there were already rest facilities, Madam Speaker, at the Airport and elsewhere. The list says this: 'Move the BCA lockers in the level 4 search area to the alternative locker room; provide an additional fridge and microwave in the existing mess room at the Gibraltar Airport; provide adequate monitor raisers at the OCC; provide blinds at the OCC to limit glare; provide the means for additional ventilation at the OCC through the provision of freestanding fans; provide a microwave at the OCC; generally remodel the OCC to meet BCA's operational needs and in keeping with health and safety guidelines, but this is likely to take longer than the 90-day period; repair the damaged glass door on the first level; change all ill-suited seating in the areas that were visited where visual display equipment is frequently used; repair the broken door immediately on exiting the large lift at the ground floor; provision of three new trolleys, if these are suitable and meet the BCA's needs in the exercise of their duties; address general cleanliness of the airport infrastructure; provide car charging points in areas of relevance determined jointly by the BCA and GATL; the relocation of the desk, arising from health and safety concerns, that is placed directly under the roller belt in level 3; clear the pedestrian area of debris and old equipment and provide additional waste bins of 100-litre capacity.'

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**Hon. Dr K Azopardi:** I am grateful for that. The 90-day period presumably will run till the end August, because I think the meetings held with the Government were at the end May. Is there an agreed review period once all these things happen? And subject to those things happening which the Chief Minister has listed in his supplementary answer just now, does that mean that all matters which were raised are resolved satisfactorily?

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**Hon. Chief Minister:** Madam Speaker, the date of the letter between the Government and the union is 7th June 2024, so 90 days will be 90 days after that.

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I believe that most issues have been resolved. I do not know whether there are other issues that might arise in the context of the ongoing discussions, but there is a good exchange of communications. I do not know whether Unite the Union continue to enjoy the negotiating rights in respect of the BCA. I understand that there have been some changes there also, and that the relationship with the other union representing BCA officers is equally good, if not better.

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I am not able to say more at this stage, but I am very pleased that we did not get to a stage where Gibraltar was the one causing a difficulty in access to Gibraltar through the land Frontier at the Airport or at the Port, because frankly I think it would have been unconscionable to see industrial action affect those that need to come into Gibraltar and those that want to come into Gibraltar. I am very pleased that we were able to resolve this matter, and I commend those who resolved it.

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**Madam Speaker:** Next question.

**Q631 and 648-51/2024**

**Treaty for a new relationship for Gibraltar with the European Union –  
Impact re importing goods from the UK; number of companies awaiting outcome before  
investing in Gibraltar; impact of recent European elections on timing; whether new round of  
negotiations to be held before UK general election; timespan of new treaty; whether  
discussions held with Spanish government on role of Spanish police**

400 **Clerk:** Question 630. The Hon. C Sacarello.

**Hon. C Sacarello:** Good morning, Madam Speaker.

In the event of a negotiated outcome, what is the likelihood of there being a negative impact on the ability to import certain goods from the UK?

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**Clerk:** Answer, the Hon. the Chief Minister.

**Chief Minister (Hon. F R Picardo):** Madam Speaker, I will answer with Questions 631 and 648 to 651.

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**Clerk:** Question 631. The Hon. C Sacarello.

**Hon. C Sacarello:** Does the Government have any idea of the number of companies not investing in Gibraltar while they await the outcome of the treaty negotiations?

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**Clerk:** Question 648. The Hon. the Leader of the Opposition.

**Hon. Dr K Azopardi:** Madam Speaker, what impact will the recent European parliamentary elections have on the timing of the negotiations on a treaty for a new relationship for Gibraltar with the European Union?

420

**Clerk:** Question 649. The Hon. the Leader of the Opposition.

**Hon. Dr K Azopardi:** Will there be any new formal round of negotiations on a treaty for a new relationship for Gibraltar with the European Union ahead of the UK general elections at the end of July?

425

**Clerk:** Question 650. The Hon. the Leader of the Opposition.

**Hon. Dr K Azopardi:** Is the Government seeking to negotiate an enduring treaty for a new relationship for Gibraltar with the EU, or one that will have a four-year time span?

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**Clerk:** Question 651. The Hon. the Leader of the Opposition.

**Hon. Dr K Azopardi:** Following the answer given by the Spanish government in the Spanish Senate, dated 22nd May 2024, to the question submitted by Sr José Landaluce Calleja and others, number 14453 on file 684/5129, in relation to its view of the proposed role that Spanish police would have in the event of an agreement for a treaty, has the Government discussed that answer or the subject matter with the Government of Spain?

440

**Clerk:** Answer, the Hon. the Chief Minister.

**Hon. Chief Minister:** Madam Speaker, all of the matters raised by these questions from hon. Members have been addressed in public by the Government in various statements and interviews, except in respect of Question 631, which is not a question that it is possible to answer.

I expect to provide a fuller update to the House on Monday during the course of my Budget address.

**Hon. Dr K Azopardi:** Madam Speaker, I will ask him for an update in relation to the treaty questions which are mine, which are Questions 648 to 651, if I may, and I will try to specify, as I do, which question I am asking in relation to, but my first question is general in relation to the talks themselves and issues being raised in the talks.

Yesterday there was an incident in relation to attempted boarding of fishing vessels in Gibraltar waters. I am sure the Chief Minister will agree with me that it is unacceptable that Spanish Guardia Civil vessels should attempt to board people who are conducting marine leisure activities within Gibraltar waters peaceably. Will he be raising those issues in the context of the talks that are ongoing with Spain, to try to find resolution so that these things do not happen again?

**Hon. Chief Minister:** Madam Speaker, it is very important that we do not mix unacceptable actions of the sort that we saw yesterday with the negotiation that we have on foot between the United Kingdom and the European Union. What we saw yesterday was a further unacceptable incursion into the undoubtedly British waters around Gibraltar, which are set out clearly under the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea. It is absolutely the Government's view that any action that is taken, whether executive or otherwise, in those waters by any law enforcement agency which is not a Gibraltar law enforcement agency is contrary to law. I have to commend those of HM Customs who attended with such alacrity and diligence to assist those who were peaceably enjoying our waters, fishing in keeping with our laws, which are strictly enforced and controlled to ensure that there is a short period for tuna fishing which has to be complied with.

Separately, the United Kingdom and the European Union are negotiating for a future relationship between Gibraltar and the EU. That is not the forum for these issues, although around that forum there are opportunities to discuss these issues and the hon. Gentleman can rest assured that the vehemence with which I express our views in this place is nothing compared to the vehemence with which I express my views in those ancillary discussions around the negotiation.

**Hon. Dr K Azopardi:** The Hon. Chief Minister knows he has our support on that issue in communicating a united view of this House in relation to those unacceptable matters. The reason that I raise it here now is because while I understand the broader picture of the negotiations with the EU/UK on the future relationship, in tandem with that and as threads that are under that umbrella, there have been MoUs in the past in relation to environmental issues and so on, and I would have thought that there would have been opportunities to address those issues within that.

In relation to the talks themselves, he says in his principal answer that matters have been addressed in public before, but I am giving him the opportunity at today's date to give us a bit more information about whether there are going to be any formal rounds of talks in the course of July, given that we do have a pending UK election next Thursday.

**Hon. Chief Minister:** Madam Speaker, it is impossible to say what is going to happen in the rest of July until the result of the UK general election is known and Ministers are appointed and diaries are provided for. There are opportunities for formal rounds, but it will not be possible to confirm formal rounds until the post-election period in the UK.

**Hon. Dr K Azopardi:** Equally, is that the position in relation to Question 648? Obviously we have had the European parliamentary elections, but is it also the position that because we are, at the moment, in a state of flux as to the visibility of the composition and appointment of posts

495 subsequent to the European election, is that the same, or is the Chief Minister's view that the  
European parliamentary election results have no impact on the treaty talks themselves?

**Hon. Chief Minister:** Madam Speaker, I believe they have less impact. Mrs von der Leyen was  
yesterday confirmed as the President of the European Commission, and so, although there is a  
500 ratification process involving the European Parliament, it is a fairly seamless continuation of her  
role and, therefore, likely her team. Ms Kaja Kallas will be taking over from Sr Josep Borrell as the  
High Representative of the European Union, that is to say its de facto Foreign Minister, and  
Antonio Costa is likely to become the President of the European Council, so I think that is a more  
settled process. In Europe, because we deal with officials, I think that is likely to be less of a  
505 problem, but there has to be the UK side also, and that is why I was referring to the settling down  
of the process in the UK as being more relevant.

**Hon. Dr K Azopardi:** In relation to Question 650, which is whether it is the Government's  
objective to negotiate an enduring treaty for a new relationship for Gibraltar, or one that will have  
510 a four-year lifespan, we have heard different views from the Government. It seems to us that the  
view expressed by the Chief Minister is that he is seeking to negotiate an enduring treaty, whereas  
the view expressed by the Father of the House is that that is not possible, and that only a four-  
year deal is possible. What is the position?

**Hon. Chief Minister:** The position is that those are not the positions, and that the Hon. Sir Joe  
Bossano and I are entirely in agreement, as are all other hon. Members of this Government and  
Cabinet. The hon. Gentleman is representing a caricature of the views that we have expressed. If  
he cares to delve more carefully into the words that I have used and the words that Sir Joe Bossano  
has used, they are carefully calibrated to send signals not to him, but beyond.

520  
**Hon. C Sacarello:** Thank you, Madam Speaker. Would the Hon. Chief Minister be able to answer  
whether or not businesses would be required to pay tariffs for goods imported from the UK where  
they were originally manufactured outside of the EU?

525  
**Hon. Chief Minister:** Yes, Madam Speaker, as soon as we have a treaty, I will be able to go into  
the details of what it provides.

**Hon. C Sacarello:** Thank you for the abrupt answer, but given the proximity to a negotiated  
outcome, 0.1% in kissing distance, something as basic as this ... I understand that nothing is across  
530 the line until it is across the line, but surely something like this should be set in stone. Would the  
Chief Minister be able to provide details on this and give businesses confidence in that regard?

**Hon. Chief Minister:** Madam Speaker, I do not know whether I would give them confidence or  
less confidence. I do not know whether the hon. Gentleman wants me to go just into this detail or  
535 other details. I do not know whether he thinks this is the thing that has been resolved, or he thinks  
that other things have been resolved. I do not know whether he wants me to give him long  
answers, which he and his colleagues then say are party political broadcasts, or whether he wants  
me to give him short answers, which he will describe as abrupt. I will just refer him to my original  
answer and tell him that that remains our position.

540  
**Hon. C Sacarello:** Well, Madam Speaker, it would it be useful if he could just answer the  
question; but never mind, I will go to the next one. Will there be any issues with importing  
medicines or any medical products from the UK?

545  
**Hon. Chief Minister:** Madam Speaker, I am sure that he would like me to answer the question  
in the way that in his mind he would think I am going to answer the question, but I am going to

550 tell him the answer that is, first of all, true, and second, the answer that is in keeping with the best interests of Gibraltar in the context of this negotiation. The hon. Gentleman should know that I am not going to get into the detail of any of the aspects of the negotiation that we have had to date, because to do so is not in Gibraltar's interest. If he wants to continue to advocate for things that might be being put to us by others and which we are resisting, he should feel free to do so, but he would not be acting in the best interests of Gibraltar.

555 **Hon. C Sacarello:** Madam Speaker, I beg to differ. I think whether it is in the public interest or not is a question of opinion. I know that in the discussions on the Northern Ireland Protocol there was widespread negotiation and involvement of many stakeholders within society, in stark contrast to how things have been run in Gibraltar. I raise very serious questions on the medical issue. For example, the Northern Ireland Protocol raised issues on test batches of medicines, whether they were to be accepted in Great Britain but not in Northern Ireland; also to do with access to medicines approved by the UK regulator, the MHRA, but not yet by the EU. Will that be 560 the case for Gibraltar? Will medicines in that interim phase be able to be imported locally?

565 **Hon. Chief Minister:** Madam Speaker, we are consulting, very widely in fact, with the stakeholders who are relevant and the stakeholders who know something about what they are talking about, in particular in relation to medicines. He need have no concerns about that whatsoever.

The last time I checked, Northern Ireland is in the region of 1,500 miles north of Gibraltar. He should remember that the Government of Gibraltar is negotiating for Gibraltar. The Northern Ireland Protocol is completely different to the issues that we are discussing in relation to Gibraltar. 570 It may have some political similarities, but we have often remarked how different it is.

I am not going to get into the detail of the negotiation, and I am surprised that he is asking me with such granularity about particular aspects of the deal, because it would appear to me that the rest of the Members opposite have understood that it is not in the interest of Gibraltar for us to be going into aspects of the detail of one particular subject area or another, and yet he seems to have been briefed by someone to come here to ask, with great granularity, about a subject that is not the subject on which he is well known to hold any expertise. I would simply advise him to go back to whoever has prompted him to come here to ask these questions and to say that whether it is in relation to that or absolutely anything else, the Government considers, and I think most people in Gibraltar would agree, that we are unable at this stage safely to go into any detail about 575 any aspect of the negotiation. We have held that discipline now for almost three years. We are not about to break it.

580 **Hon. C Sacarello:** Madam Speaker, I would like to thank the Chief Minister for his answer. I can certainly confirm that I have not been briefed by any third party whatsoever.

585 I shall move on to Question 631 now with my supplementaries, if I may. I am hearing time and again of companies holding off, awaiting a deal, companies that are not investing. That is anecdotal, of course, but there is actually empirical evidence as well, as new registrations are down. What are the Government's plans to attract investments in the event of a non negotiated outcome?

590 **Hon. Chief Minister:** Madam Speaker, perhaps I should have realised that he had not been briefed by any third party given the tenor of his contribution before.

It is impossible to put any empirical evidence behind the question that the hon. Gentleman has asked, which is whether or not we can confirm that people are not investing in Gibraltar pending the outcome of the treaty, but I can certainly tell him that our analysis tells us that there are people who are staying in Gibraltar because there is a chance that we are going to have a treaty. 595

In the context of our plans in the event of a non negotiated outcome, I refer him to the documentation that has been distributed and the technical notices that have been distributed by

600 the Deputy Chief Minister. And in relation to our plans for the economy in the event of there being  
non negotiated outcome, I refer him to the fact that only one party has a plan for what happens  
in the event of no negotiated outcome. That is the parties that I lead together with the Deputy  
Chief Minister. That plan is called the National Economic Plan and he can see it in our respective  
manifestos.

605 **Madam Speaker:** Next question.

**Q632/2024**

**£9 million state aid recovery transfer –  
Identification of Consolidated Fund subhead and whether considered exceptional**

**Clerk:** Question 632. The Hon. R M Clinton.

**Hon. R M Clinton:** Madam Speaker, further to Question 481/2024, can the Government advise  
to what precise head and subhead of the Consolidated Fund revenue was the £9 million state aid  
610 recovery transfer recorded; and would the Government agree that this recovery is of an  
exceptional nature?

**Clerk:** Answer, the Hon. the Chief Minister.

615 **Hon. Chief Minister:** Madam Speaker, the funds were transferred from the Deposit Account  
EU Judgment 3010427 to the Consolidated Fund Revenue Head 1 Subhead 2 Income Taxes,  
Company Tax. The nature of the ruling, in effect, requires it should be booked there. Additionally,  
given the ruling, in effect, finds this is taxation that was due, it cannot be considered exceptional  
in nature. This is, in effect, arrears of tax and must be accounted for in that way.

620 **Hon. R M Clinton:** I am grateful to the Chief Minister for his answer. He will be aware that in  
the past there have been occasions for exceptional revenue which have been recorded separately  
within the Consolidated Fund, so there is provision for that, but as regards the recurring nature of  
this, would the Chief Minister agree that this is not by way of recurring revenue into the  
625 Consolidated Fund?

**Hon. Chief Minister:** No, Madam Speaker, I do not agree. The reason I do not agree is, first of  
all, that the hon. Gentleman knows that there is likely to be another slither, at least, if not another  
almost larger amount that will come in another year, and the effect of the judgement was that, in  
630 fact, we could see more of this revenue in the future. So, this is not in any way potentially just  
exceptional. The other case that he is referring to related to a settlement between parties. This is  
not a settlement; this was a judgment that found that tax had been due.

**Hon. R M Clinton:** Madam Speaker, I may agree to disagree. Would the Chief Minister happen  
635 to have in front of him the date on which the transfer occurred?

**Hon. Chief Minister:** No, I do not, Madam.

**Madam Speaker:** Next question.



**Q633/2024**  
**Import Duty –**  
**Amount collected in May 2024**

640 **Clerk:** Question 633. The Hon. R M Clinton.

**Hon. R M Clinton:** Can the Government advise the amount of Import Duty collected in May 2024?

645 **Clerk:** Answer, the Hon. the Chief Minister.

**Chief Minister (Hon. F R Picardo):** Madam Speaker, the Import Duty collected for May 2024 is £7,582,614.96.

650 **Madam Speaker:** Next question.

**Q634-36/2024**  
**Gibraltar Development Corporation –**  
**Companies owned and controlled by GDC and publication of list with Estimates Book;**  
**details of GDC borrowing**

**Clerk:** Question 634. The Hon. R M Clinton.

655 **Hon. R M Clinton:** Madam Speaker, can the Government please provide a list of companies that the Gibraltar Development Corporation owns or controls as at 31st March 2024, including any subsidiaries?

**Clerk:** Answer, the Hon. the Chief Minister.

660 **Chief Minister (Hon. F R Picardo):** Madam Speaker, I will answer with Questions 635 and 636.

**Clerk:** Question 635. The Hon. R M Clinton.

665 **Hon. R M Clinton:** Will the Government undertake to provide a chart of Gibraltar Development Corporation-owned companies with the published Estimates Book, in the same way as is presently done for government wholly owned companies?

**Clerk:** Question 636. The Hon. R M Clinton.

670 **Hon. R M Clinton:** Can the Government advise the amount of borrowing by the Gibraltar Development Corporation as at 31st March 2024, including details as to lender, terms and interest rate?

**Clerk:** Answer, the Hon. the Chief Minister.

675 **Hon. Chief Minister:** Madam Speaker, the Government will consider the request to extend the listing and charting of GDC-owned companies but will not undertake to do so. Further, the Government will continue the policy of the GSD in respect of disclosing the amount of borrowing of the GDC.

680 **Hon. R M Clinton:** Madam Speaker, if I go back to Question 634, I do not think I have had an answer to that question in terms of providing a list of companies.

**Hon. Chief Minister:** Madam Speaker, we will consider it, because when we provide the chart, we are, in effect, providing the list.

685 **Hon. R M Clinton:** Madam Speaker, the first question is in relation to questions asked in this House, to which I see no reason why the Government cannot provide an answer now. And the second question to which Chief Minister alludes was by way of publication to the general public as and when the Estimates Book is published. Two separate issues. I cannot see why the  
690 Government cannot provide the information I have requested in Question 634.

**Hon. Chief Minister:** Madam Speaker, I have told him I am considering it. If he wants an answer now, the answer will be no. I think he is better off with the answer saying I am considering it, and if I consider it and come to the conclusion that I should do it, then he will have the list.

695 **Hon. R M Clinton:** Madam Speaker, I must confess I find that a rather unusual position for the Chief Minister to take. Can I ask him why he refuses to provide that information to the House?

**Hon. Chief Minister:** Because it is publicly available information, Madam Speaker, and he is asking me, in effect, to go and do it for him.

**Hon. R M Clinton:** I am sorry, Madam Speaker, I would not be asking for that information if it were publicly available. It is not publicly available, so could the Chief Minister please provide an answer as to why he cannot provide this House with that information as at 31st March 2024?

705 **Hon. Chief Minister:** Madam Speaker, the Register of Companies in Gibraltar shows where a company is controlled by the Gibraltar Development Corporation, and therefore it is publicly available information. If the hon. Gentleman wants me to provide a list, he can ask me. He has asked me to do it for him. I have told him that I am considering providing the list and the chart. I have  
710 not yet been able to take all the advice I need in order to determine whether or not I am able to do it, but if he wants the answer today, it is no, because I am taking advice on whether it is the proper thing to do. He cannot point, as far as I know, to a list being published at any time between 1996 and 2011 in respect of these companies. So, it is not as if it is something that they used to do and we are not doing.

715 **Hon. R M Clinton:** Madam Speaker, I am going to have to go back through *Hansard* because I vaguely recollect I have asked a similar question in the past and the Father of the House has quite happily given me the information, so I do not see what the reticence is of the Chief Minister to provide this. He knows full well that doing a search on 60,000 companies, or however many there are, at Companies House is not what I would call publicly available information. So, I just take it that this is the Government's view and Chief Minister accepts, no doubt, that this is what he calls  
720 transparency.

**Hon. Chief Minister:** Madam Speaker, the hon. Gentleman has linked this to a chart. He said, 'Can I have the list and can I have a chart?' so I have said I am considering whether to provide the list and the chart. If he says that we have provided the list in the past, then what he is saying is that we are very transparent. If all that is happening is that I am not updating the list, that is why I am saying I am taking advice on it. I have not said no; I have said I am taking advice on providing this list and this chart. If the hon. Gentleman wants to persist and ask me again, he can do so, but  
730 if he wants to talk about transparency, I will remind him that on our website there is more statistical information in relation to the spending of the Government of Gibraltar and what the

Government of Gibraltar does than has ever been published before; that our Estimates Book contains more information than has ever been published before, that it is almost double the size of the Estimates Book that hon. Members used to publish; that we give them more information in relation to government companies than has ever been published before; that on 1st April this year we have published every single company's balance sheet or accounts online, something which they never did. So, yes, I believe this is one of the most transparent governments in the world and the most transparent Government in the history of Gibraltar. They have spent 12 years trying to persuade the public of the opposite and having deployed a panoply of measures to try to defeat us at the last election, they did not, because people did not believe them. So, yes, this is our attitude to transparency: more transparent than ever, and continuing our commitment to transparency, and considering providing him the list and the chart – just considering. There are a few other things going on in Gibraltar, not just Mr Clinton's questions.

**Hon. Dr K Azopardi:** Madam Speaker, the Opposition has not linked the question of the list with the question of the chart. They are separate questions, Questions 634 and 635. It is the hon. Member who has chosen to answer them together, but by answering together they still are not linked. They may be linked in his answer, but they are separate questions. Question 634, which does not mention a chart at all, simply asks the Government to provide a list of companies at 31st March 2024 that are owned or controlled by the GDC. As the hon. Member to my left says, we have asked for this information before at different dates, and the Hon. Father of the House has provided that information. We do not understand the difficulty. The alleged linkage to the chart under Question 635 is the hon. Member's own particular life jacket. The reality is there is no linkage and we do not understand who he is taking advice from. Why is it that he cannot come to this House and provide a specific list? And who is he taking advice from? Or is it simply that that is a mirage to reveal the lack of transparency that he shows this House?

**Hon. Chief Minister:** Madam Speaker, often Question Time in this House descends into exchanges which are unnecessary, in my view, because all that is going to happen is that I am going to refer the hon. Gentleman to the answer I gave a few moments ago. I have told him I am considering the issue. I am seeking advice, in part, from Sir Joe, who I was not able to speak to in the preparation of answers for this particular Question Time because of other government business. I will not be drawn into what is a mirage, because if I am drawn into that, he might not like the things that I regard as a mirage. I will have much more to say about that during the course of the Budget debate and, no doubt, my reply, which will not be an attack on the Opposition; it will be an attack on the Opposition's ideas and their ideology, but not on them as individuals. *(Interjection)*

**Madam Speaker:** I am moving on to the next question. The Hon. Mr Clinton.

**Hon. R M Clinton:** Thank you, Madam Speaker. Just moving on to a supplementary on Question 636, the Chief Minister referred to GDC policy; however, I fail to understand how that relates to advising the amount of borrowing by the GSLP at 31st March 2024. He is the Government at present. We are asking the question. Can he not give us an answer?

**Hon. Chief Minister:** Madam Speaker, I completely disagree with that. I am not the Government. I am the Chief Minister of His Majesty's Government of Gibraltar. *L'Etat, ce n'est pas moi*, let's be very clear, even if hon. Members might see themselves in that way had they been elected.

As far as I understand it, this information has never been published before. That is why I am saying that as far as I can see, we are sticking to the position that was set out in that respect. So, again, I do not think that we are doing anything different.

**Hon. R M Clinton:** Madam Speaker, this is something which I find troublesome in this House, that the Government refers to matters which pre-date most of the Members of this House and it is very hard for us in Parliament to actually check that, but I can recall, when he says it has never been published before, that I have asked this question of the Father of the House in the past, and I believe he has given me an answer.

The Chief Minister hides behind these suggestions that it has never been done before: 'It is unprecedented. I need to take advice.' He is the Government today. What is the secrecy of explaining what the GDC borrowing is today? As far as I am concerned, it is a publicly owned corporation. This is the Parliament. We are entitled to scrutinise the Government on any matters in respect of government-owned and controlled entities. Why cannot he give us a simple answer?

**Hon. Chief Minister:** Madam Speaker, again, if he says that Sir Joe Bossano has provided this information before, and he says that we are not being transparent by not providing it, then he would at least accept that in the past, when he said that Sir Joe Bossano has not been transparent, he was wrong. I do not have any detail to suggest that this information has been provided before. If it has been provided before, it will be provided again. I have no difficulty with that, but if it has not been provided before, it will not have been provided for a reason. As I have told him, it has not been possible for me to check the answer to this question with Sir Joe, or indeed with others who I am taking advice from in respect of these matters. So, the hon. Member will understand that I am not going to shift from my position. It is the answer I have given.

Again, he has said that I am the Government. I am not the Government; I am the Chief Minister of the Government of Gibraltar, and these are the Ministers of the Government of Gibraltar. The Government is a separate thing, and hon. Members might do well to try to understand that theory.

**Hon. Dr K Azopardi:** I am not sure we completely understand his position, though, because the hon. Member to my left says it has been provided before by the Father of the House. He seems very reluctant. It is a very basic question. He is the Chief Minister of the Government today. We are asking what borrowing a government-owned company has made. My hon. colleague says it has been provided before. Is he suggesting, as the Chief Minister of the day, that he needs to seek permission of the Father of the House to give us an answer?

**Hon. Chief Minister:** No, Madam Speaker, that is not what I am suggesting, but you can see that, of course, that is where he would like to take the politics. I did not say I was just awaiting the views of Sir Joe Bossano; I told him that I was expecting the views of others, too. I am not going to disclose who I take advice on when I am preparing answers to questions. I have said it has been a particularly difficult period for the Government and our ability to prepare for questions. Hon. Members know what else is going on. The sport of them asking questions is not the only thing that is going on in Gibraltar, and so I refer hon. Members to the answer I gave them a few moments ago.

We are going to have a full debate next week on the finances of Gibraltar. No doubt they will make, unfortunately, the same points that we have heard them make before, but at least, Madam Speaker, it will be the first time you hear them, so they might pique someone's interest.

**Hon. Dr K Azopardi:** Madam Speaker, we do not ask questions as a sport. We ask questions to seek information for the people of Gibraltar.

We have had this before, in other Question Times ahead of Budgets, where they say they will answer questions in the Budget and then they do not. This is an opportunity for him to provide a specific answer to a specific question. Why won't he do so today?

**Hon. Chief Minister:** For the reason I have already given him today, Madam Speaker. That is why I refer him today to the answer I gave a few moments ago.

**Madam Speaker:** Next question.

**Q637-40/2024**

**GEP Ltd –**

**Source of £117 million borrowing; reason for, terms of, and source of income for payment of interest re £70 million borrowing from GSB**

**Q641/2024**

**GCP Investments –**

**Reason for £5 million borrowing**

**Clerk:** Question 637. The Hon. R M Clinton.

**Hon. R M Clinton:** Let's see if he can answer this one, Madam Speaker.

840 Can the Government advise from whom GEP Ltd borrowed over £117 million as at 31st December 2022; and what are the borrowing terms?

**Clerk:** Answer, the Hon. the Chief Minister.

**Chief Minister (Hon. F R Picardo):** Madam Speaker, I will answer with Questions 638 to 641.

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**Clerk:** Question 638. The Hon. R M Clinton.

**Hon. R M Clinton:** Can the Government explain why GEP Ltd has borrowed £70 million from the Gibraltar Savings Bank as at 31st March 2024?

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**Clerk:** Question 639. The Hon. R M Clinton.

**Hon. R M Clinton:** Can the Government advise what are the terms of the £70 million monthly income debenture issued by GEP Ltd to the Gibraltar Savings Bank?

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**Clerk:** Question 640. The Hon. R M Clinton.

**Hon. R M Clinton:** Can the Government advise what source of income does GEP Ltd have in order to pay interest on the £70 million of debentures to the Gibraltar Savings Bank?

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**Clerk:** Question 641. The Hon. R M Clinton.

**Hon. R M Clinton:** Can the Government advise why GCP Investments has borrowed £5 million from the Gibraltar Savings Bank as at 31st March 2024, and on what terms?

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**Clerk:** Answer, the Hon. the Chief Minister.

**Hon. Chief Minister:** Madam Speaker, the GSLP Liberal Government that I lead has published more information about government-owned companies than any other Government in the history of our nation. We have published that which the law requires that each company must file, so that, in relation to government companies, members of the public have access to the relevant information without having to pay a fee. It appears that Mr Clinton now wishes to interrogate the reasons why the board of directors of some of the companies have entered into relevant financial arrangements and the detailed terms of each of these arrangements. To enter into such discussion in the House would violate the doctrine of the separate legal personality of each company and would put the Government in breach of Speakers' rulings.

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The Government will provide the same answer in respect of any future questions posed in respect of any other financial arrangement of any other Government company.

**Hon. R M Clinton:** Madam Speaker, obviously I am going to receive the same kind of response from the Chief Minister on anything I ask, but may I remind the Chief Minister that he obviously already violated the sacrosanct legal personality of Gibraltar Properties Ltd when he told us in this House that the £80 million he had borrowed from the Gibraltar Savings Bank was going towards Hassan Centenary Terraces, so the Chief Minister has been inconsistent in his answers. And the very specific questions I have asked have nothing to do with the information that is available publicly. The information is not available publicly, otherwise I would not be asking for it.

I think it is particularly important, Madam Speaker, that he at least answers one question, of which I have several here. Why has GEP borrowed £70 million from the Savings Bank, and what is GEP doing with it? The last time I came across GEP – as the Minister for the Environment will know, as he was Minister for Education then – was when the contracts for the Bayside and Westside Schools were signed. So, what is GEP doing with £70 million?

**Hon. Chief Minister:** Madam Speaker, the Minister for the Environment is still the Minister for Education, and I refer the hon. Gentleman to the answer I gave a few moments ago.

**Hon. R M Clinton:** Madam Speaker, I do not come to this House for sport. I do not come to this House for the amusement of the Chief Minister. I come here, to his House, to ask questions, to hold the Government to account. The Government does not wish to be held to account. Is that what I tell the people of Gibraltar, that the Chief Minister, the Government, does not wish to answer questions, especially in respect of money they are using from their savings: £70 million for GEP; £5 million for GCP? Does the Government not think they have a duty to tell the people of Gibraltar what they are doing with their money, especially the Savings Bank money?

**Hon. Chief Minister:** Madam Speaker, when we tell the people of Gibraltar what we are doing with Savings Bank money, hon. Members issue press releases saying that we are being partisan by telling people what we are doing with Savings Bank money. When we say that we will not talk about what a government company is doing, they say that we will not talk about what Government is doing with their money. Well, that is different, because a government company is not the Government, and the Estimates Book sets out exactly what the Government is doing. When a government company takes the loan, what a government company does with the money is not something that the Government is answerable for in this House. That is what I have referred to various Speakers' rulings about.

Let's be very clear: it is not as if there are nefarious things going on, as hon. Members would like to pretend. There are policies in play here that the people of Gibraltar have elected us to put in place. That is to say, that Savings Bank money, as a result of a law that we changed and, if my memory does not fail me, they voted in favour of, is being used for development projects in Gibraltar. Some of those development projects are development projects being led by the Government of Gibraltar. The returns are paid to the Savings Bank and the Savings Bank depositors have their money secure.

The argument that we consistently have, usually between the Father of the House and Mr Clinton, is that it appears that Mr Clinton is happier if the Savings Bank takes £70 million and invests it in a company on the Stock Exchange in London, or New York, where you then lose the ability to see what is happening with that money, instead of investing it in a company managed by Gibraltar for investment in Gibraltar, which produces returns in Gibraltar and ensures development in Gibraltar. We have roundly disagreed with that – not this morning: we have roundly disagreed with that since 2012. We changed the law in this House; they supported it. We continued to have this debate, in exactly the same terms as Mr Clinton is putting it now, since 2011, at every successive general election. They have not prevailed in their view, so the hon. Gentleman will forgive me for doing that which I believe is fair, proper, honest and correct, which is to continue to discharge the functions of government in keeping with the mandate we have obtained to invest Savings Bank money in this way through government companies, but not then

to come here to give him a breakdown of what each company does, which is what we are told by former Speakers' rulings we do not have to do.

**Hon. R M Clinton:** Madam Speaker, I naturally disagree with everything he just said.

935 If I can move to Question – (*Interjection by Hon. Dr K Azopardi*) Yes, I will give way to the ...

**Hon. Dr K Azopardi:** Sorry, I thought my hon. colleague had a supplementary on this before he moves to another question.

940 Is it really the position of the Chief Minister that he will not tell the people of Gibraltar what these companies are doing with this money, which is either money borrowed for a public purpose or from the Savings Bank? GEP borrows £70 million from the Savings Bank. GEP borrows £117 million at 31st December 2022. GCP borrows £5 million from the Savings Bank. Savers want to know what these public companies owned by the Government are doing with their money for public purposes. Is it really his position that he is going to construct this web and rely on other  
945 things so as not to give people that information? Is it really his position that just because he is elected, he thinks that gives him the blanket of not answering questions on the use of money for public purposes?

**Hon. Chief Minister:** No, Madam Speaker, that is not my position and it would not be. Of course, that is not what is happening, but the hon. Gentleman, no doubt in order to extract his  
950 contribution for social media purposes later, wants to present it in that way. Far from it, what is happening is exactly what I have detailed, and what we are not going to do is to get into the detail of what the government companies are doing.

That has been a perennial area of disagreement between us since 2011. Hon. Members should  
955 not pretend now that this is something new. In fact, if there is something new, it is that we have, quite unlike them, taken the additional step of publishing the accounts of each of the companies. We have given more transparency than ever before. The taxpayer – and I want to set up, here, the important difference between the taxpayer and the depositor in the Savings Bank – now knows exactly what are the government companies and exactly what the accounts of the  
960 government companies show, and they are published on the Government's website. The depositor at the Savings Bank knows what the Savings Bank is investing in. They are told every month, and additionally, they get a letter from the Hon. the Father of the House in respect of what the Savings Bank is doing. In some instances, they can see that the Savings Bank is not just taking the money outside of Gibraltar to an investment in British Telecom on the FTSE 100 or another  
965 company on the Nasdaq, which it does as well. We are not just giving money to a bank in the UK that then invests it as well. If you look at the investments of the Savings Bank, £x million may go to a bank in the UK. That bank in the UK then invests it in whatever it wants to invest it, so long as it gives us back the capital and the interest. Some money is also going to companies in Gibraltar, and some of those companies in Gibraltar are government companies. In that situation – and this is something that we have repeated ad nauseam in this House – one would have thought that the savers ... The Hon. Mr Azopardi says, 'The savers want to know what you are doing with their  
970 money.' Well, they would want to know what Bank X in London – that is not in Gibraltar, that has £100 million of Savings Bank money – is doing with that money. It is £100 million. It is in London. They may be investing it in emerging economies, which may be, therefore, investments in things happening in sub-Saharan Africa, which produce high returns but at high risk, and yet nobody says, 'I want to know what's happening there.'

When the money is put in a government company in Gibraltar, not in the Government – in other words, it is not money that comes from the Savings Bank to the Government; it goes to a government company that is an entity with its own board of directors – they are saying, 'There,  
980 we must know what it is being used for. Although in the hands of X Bank in London, it could be used for any purpose that we are not aware of and be at greater risk, here in Gibraltar, where it is very likely an investment in infrastructure and land which has real underlying value, which has

therefore as close to zero risk as one might imagine, we want to go to town on why you will not tell us exactly what that company is doing with that money.’ In doing so, what hon. Members are demonstrating is that however much more transparency we give, they will want even more; that they will want to squirrel down to every single penny, but not in relation to savers and protecting them, because it has nothing to do with protecting savers, because they are not asking about the huge amount of money that is being invested by the Savings Bank outside of Gibraltar, and which could be, although it is not – this is just how you diversify a portfolio – being invested, in a small measure, in an emerging economy, in an activity that all of us might think is not an activity we might like to see our money invested in. They want to know what is happening with the money that is being invested here by a government company.

Government companies, whether we give more disclosure or less disclosure of what they are doing, are simply pursuing investment in Gibraltar in the things that we all think are the good things to invest in, in Gibraltar. The hon. Gentleman has just referred to investment in the risky, nefarious etc. construction of education facilities. Well, if that is what they were doing, good – no? – because, in the end, let us remind ourselves that investors in the Savings Bank have the copper-bottom guarantee that the taxpayer will ensure that their capital is protected and the Savings Bank will pay their interest. Is it that we prefer, now, as taxpayers, guarantors of the Savings Bank, that the money that we guarantee and have to pay interest on goes principally outside of Gibraltar to a third party bank that could invest it in whatever, and might lose it – not going to happen, because this is how you diversify a portfolio – or that it go here, where it is ultimately also in our control and therefore is not at risk of being lost? I wager, although betting is not something that politicians should be involved in, as we can all see from the newspapers and television screens, that actually most savers would think, ‘Frankly, I am very comfortable that the money is being used by a government company in Gibraltar for infrastructure purposes etc. in keeping with the change in the law that was brought to the House by the Father of the House some years ago, which the GSD supported, which was that Savings Bank money could be invested in development in Gibraltar.’

And so this, Madam Speaker – I am sorry to explain in such detail – is a fault line that there has been between us and the Opposition since 2012-13, and it is unfortunate that because it is a fault line, which I fully respect, we should have to explore it at every session of the House. It is a fault line. We take it to the people. The people decide that they want us to continue to make the investments that we are making, to manage the Savings Bank like we are managing it, producing a Savings Bank reserve which is close on £80 million a year, when we inherited a Savings Bank reserve which was £1,114 from them. You could blame the taxpayer for wanting to continue to make that decision going forward ad infinitum, and always making sure that there is a GSLP Liberal Government looking after Savings Bank money in this way.

**Hon. Dr K Azopardi:** Madam Speaker, the Chief Minister has not explained that in such detail; he has explained it in such waffle, lacking in detail. He is right that there is ... it is not a fault line, it is a chasm between us. The problem is that there are Ministers of the Crown making these decisions all the way down the chain. When the Savings Bank makes the decision to borrow to lend money to a particular government-owned company, a Minister of the Crown has authorised the Savings Bank to do so, as part, presumably of the National Economic Plan. When that money is then used for public purposes for a taxpayers’ project, it is used because a Minister of the Crown has taken the decision for a public purpose. We are asking a simple question as to why £250 million has been used by public companies for public purposes. If there are particular projects, let the Government say so. We are not asking the cost of the box of nails. We are asking what project is being constructed or used or invested in by GEP with £117 million or £70 million, or £5 million by GCP. They are in a position to do so if Ministers of the Crown have taken those decisions all through the chain. Will he not do so one more time?



**Hon. Chief Minister:** Well, Madam Speaker, this is the point that I want to make to the hon. Gentleman: that he does not need to raise his blood pressure to ask the question. The vehemence is not going to change my mind.

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There is a certain logic here. Every time I take time to explain things in detail, I am told I am waffling. When I am asked for questions which have a yes or no answer and I provide a yes or no answer, I am told I am being abrupt. One could think that Government Ministers are, in effect, the only ones who are determined to be guilty until somebody, every four years, determines that actually we were innocent of every offence that hon. Members want to put to us. I am neither waffling nor being abrupt. I am explaining the position of why we have the difference of opinion that we have now.

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The hon. Gentleman insists on his view, we insist on ours. We have successfully defended ours at four successive general elections, and the only thing that he can show for himself is having four general election losses when he has led a party to try to get people's confidence to do this job. So, he will forgive me for referring him to that and saying that we think that there are more people who believe that we are doing the right thing and not them.

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**Madam Speaker:** Next question.

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**Hon. R M Clinton:** I have a supplementary, Madam Speaker. Thank you.

**Madam Speaker:** The last supplementary on this. It is time to move on.

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**Hon. R M Clinton:** [*Inaudible*] ... I was going to ask, Madam Speaker. I do not wish to go into preamble, but I would just say one thing, and that is that every penny that a government company borrows from the Savings Bank is, in effect, disguised borrowing, and I will add that to the list of indirect borrowing.

May I ask the Chief Minister: if he thinks these are such wonderful investments and that GEP, having borrowed £70 million, is making a wonderful investment, could he explain to the House how GEP is going to generate money to pay the interest on the debentures it has issued?

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**Hon. Chief Minister:** Madam Speaker, the hon. Gentleman's preamble, properly allowed by you, in my view, relates to his view that this is indirect borrowing. He may take that view. I do not think it is legitimate, but that does not make it illegitimate. I fully accept that that is how he has set out to structure his understanding of public finances in Gibraltar in our time in office. It is not a view that is widely shared, and it is not a view that has led them to any political success.

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In the context of how GEP is going to generate the income necessary to fund this borrowing, that, of course, is a question for the board of GEP.

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**Madam Speaker:** Next question.

**Q642/2024**  
**16 South Walk –**  
**Details of tender**

**Clerk:** Question 642. The Hon. D J Bossino.

**Hon. D J Bossino:** Has the tender for the sale of 16 South Walk, Europa Walks Estate been granted; and, if so, to whom and at what price?

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**Clerk:** Answer, the Hon. the Chief Minister.

1080 **Chief Minister (Hon. F R Picardo):** Madam Speaker, the tender for the sale of 16 South Walk has not been awarded. The highest bidder was not able to complete on the sale. The Government has retained ownership.

**Hon. D J Bossino:** Does the Government intend to put this property back on the market or offer it to tender again? Is that the Government's intention; and, if so, when?

1085 **Hon. Chief Minister:** Madam Speaker, I believe that it is our intention to put it out to tender again, but we cannot yet commit to when.

**Hon. D J Bossino:** Why?

1090 **Hon. Chief Minister:** Madam Speaker, there are a number of different factors. There are a number of properties in that area which are still able to come out to tender. We have a number of them which are rented and have continued in rent. As we rent them, capital value increases and we await the advice of land property agents when they become untenanted as to whether to rent them or to put them out to tender and see whether we get the price that Land Property Services advises us we should be getting, or not.

**Hon. D J Bossino:** Is this one that is being rented?

1100 **Hon. Chief Minister:** It is now, Madam Speaker.

**Hon. D J Bossino:** Without revealing names, can he provide information as to whom?

**Hon. Chief Minister:** Not without revealing names.

1105 **Hon. D J Bossino:** Is it an office holder of the Government?

**Hon. Chief Minister:** As has been the case in the past, and in particular is the case in respect of others in that area, this is a Crown officer.

1110 **Hon. D J Bossino:** Why isn't he able to reveal who it is?

1115 **Hon. Chief Minister:** Madam Speaker, because I do not think we talk about rentals. We do not even talk about tenderers. In other words, if the person had bought it, I would not give him the name of the person who had bought it. And we do still have data protection issues etc., even in relation to officers of the Crown.

**Hon. D J Bossino:** Has he taken advice in relation to that point? As I understand it, when tenders are awarded, they are made public. That has certainly been my experience in the past.

1120 **Hon. Chief Minister:** Yes, Madam Speaker, but we do not tend to share the information across the floor of the House. We tend to publish it.

1125 **Hon. D J Bossino:** If, as the Chief Minister says, he tends to publish it, why can't he, in a public way, share this information across the floor of the House? I simply do not understand the distinction being made.

**Hon. Chief Minister:** Because this one has not been sold, Madam Speaker.

**Hon. D J Bossino:** Why is there a distinction being made between selling and renting?

1130 **Hon. Chief Minister:** Because they are two entirely different concepts.

**Hon. D J Bossino:** In what way does the fact that they are two entirely different matters, as he puts it, influence whether he shares that information across the floor of the House?

1135 **Hon. Chief Minister:** Madam Speaker, because we do not share the rent roll of the Government of Gibraltar. I do not give him the name of the tenant of any government property, whether it is at the Walks or Varyl Begg.

**Hon. D J Bossino:** What is the reason for that?

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**Hon. Chief Minister:** Madam Speaker, first of all, I understand it is parliamentary convention which predates data protection, but I would have thought that today, in particular, data protection.

1145 Let's be very clear – shall we try to cut through the up and down? – he knows exactly what has happened with this property. He is trying to get me to say it across the floor of the House. I am not going to say it across the floor of the House, because parliamentary convention and data protection prevent me from saying so, but I wonder why he is insisting in trying to do that.

1150 **Hon. D J Bossino:** I ask a question, he does not. Is the decision which the Government is making in relation to retendering determined by how long the current occupants will remain in the property? In other words, is there going to be a point in time when the Government may ask the tenant to leave the property so that they can tender it and put it out into the open market?

1155 **Hon. Chief Minister:** Madam Speaker, my question was rhetorical. I have successfully been chosen on four occasions to be the one who answers the questions, not ask them. It may be is the answer to his question.

**Hon. D J Bossino:** I did not catch the answer.

1160 **Madam Speaker:** It may be.  
The Hon. Mr Reyes.

1165 **Hon. E J Reyes:** Thank you, Madam Speaker. If I am not mistaken, I think 16 South Walk is actually a three-bedroom property. Is the Chief Minister able to confirm that whoever is the tenant now has a family composition that entitles them to a three-bedroom property? Or is their family composition slightly smaller, and therefore they have ended up with spare rooms?

**Hon. Chief Minister:** This is not housing stock, Madam Speaker.

1170 **Madam Speaker:** None of us caught the answer.

**Hon. Chief Minister:** I said this is not housing stock.

**Madam Speaker:** This is not housing stock.

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**Hon. E J Reyes:** I plead my total ignorance. Can the Chief Minister explain? If it is not housing stock and it is being rented out as a house, can he enlighten those of us who are not acquainted with the system as to what he means by 'it is not housing stock'?

1180 **Hon. Chief Minister:** That the housing allocation criteria do not apply, Madam Speaker.

**Hon. D J Bossino:** What applies in relation to these properties? In what way is this particular estate differentiated from the criteria which apply, as he puts it, to the housing stock?

1185 **Hon. Chief Minister:** Madam Speaker, in the way that we inherited from them, that they had areas which they received from the MoD where they had permitted tenancies to be created not in keeping with the housing allocation criteria that was not housing, but for other purposes involving senior officers of the Crown, and on that basis we were advised that in certain instances we should permit that in the context of this estate, like they permitted it in other estates which they took from the MoD.

1190 **Hon. D J Bossino:** Is it within the realms of possibility that there is going to be a sitting-tenant purchase by the current occupant?

1195 **Hon. Chief Minister:** Madam Speaker, I understand the tenant is not yet sitting, so I think it is unlikely.

**Madam Speaker:** Next question.

**Q644/2024**  
**Voting rights for over-16s –**  
**Support for change in law**

**Clerk:** Question 644. The Hon. the Leader of the Opposition.

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**Hon. Dr K Azopardi:** Madam Speaker, following the close of the consultation period on 31st December 2023, has Government taken a policy decision as to whether it will support a change in the law to enable persons over the age of 16 the right to vote in general elections and/or whether it will present a parliamentary motion for debate in this House?

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**Clerk:** Answer, the Hon. the Chief Minister.

**Chief Minister (Hon. F R Picardo):** Madam Speaker, no decision has yet been taken. As the hon. Gentleman will know, this is a matter which the Select Committee on Parliamentary Reform, of which he is a part, is considering and will be reporting to Parliament on. Our manifesto commitment was to consult on this issue, and a consultation paper was issued on 22nd November 2023, with all responses presented to the Select Committee.

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**Hon. Dr K Azopardi:** I do recall that responses were given to the Select Committee, but I did not see it on the list of issues that we agreed with the Hon. the Deputy Chief Minister. The Hon. Chief Minister is not a member of that Committee, but if what he is saying is that it is a matter that will now be referred to the Committee for consideration, we will await that consideration by the Select Committee.

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Does he, then, mean that the Government has no position on it? Presumably it would have to communicate a position in the Select Committee? And if so, what is the Government's in-principle position having now closed the consultation period, if there is a position?

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**Hon. Chief Minister:** Madam Speaker, I have expressed a position in this House on the issue of voting at the age of 16 – I do not know whether the hon. Gentleman is just not aware of it, because he did not follow the proceedings of this House as assiduously he does now that he is a Member of it – and our manifesto is, in my view, relatively clear in expressing our views, but it will be

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something for the Select Committee, where we will express our view, where we will give effect to the thing that we say in one sentence of our manifesto:

This proposal aligns us with numerous progressive democracies around the world, where young people aged 16 and above have been granted the right to vote. Lowering the voting age recognises the maturity and political engagement of our youth. It empowers them to actively participate in shaping the future of our nation, ensuring that their voices are heard, and their concerns addressed.

1230 I think it is pretty clear what our views are, but we also believe, because it is about affecting the franchise, that we should listen to the views of others. Too often, we obviously are concerned, rightly so, to hear the views of those in their 60s, 70s and 80s. Why shouldn't we be also listening to the views of those age 16? Those of us in our 50s, 60s, 70s and 80s are heading in one particular direction, and those in their teens are heading in the direction of becoming economically active and making the decisions in the future.

1235 I am very clear. I think 16-year-olds should vote. That is my position. I have expressed it before in this House. The GSLP and Liberal parties went with a manifesto for government which set the position out very clearly. We have consulted and we will be taking the position to the Select Committee. We will see what the Select Committee advises.

1240 **Madam Speaker:** Next question.

**Q645/2024**

**Gibraltarian Status Act section 9 applications –  
Number rejected in last 10 years**

**Clerk:** Question 645. The Hon. the Leader of the Opposition.

1245 **Hon. Dr K Azopardi:** Madam Speaker, how many applications have been received under section 9 of the Gibraltarian Status Act in the last 10 calendar years and been rejected, broken down by calendar year?

**Clerk:** Answer, the Hon. the Chief Minister.

1250 **Chief Minister (Hon. F R Picardo):** Madam Speaker, the number of applications received under section 9 of the Gibraltarian Status Act in the last 10 calendar years which have been rejected, broken down by year, is as follows: 2014, 18; 2015, 27; 2016, 22; 2017, 7; 2018, 8; 2019, 1; 2020, 3; 2021, 15; 2022, 19; 2023, 5; 2024, 3.

**Madam Speaker:** Next question.

**Q646/2024**

**Victoria Keys –  
Agreements re financing arrangements**

1255 **Clerk:** Question 646. The Hon. the Leader of the Opposition.

**Hon. Dr K Azopardi:** Madam Speaker, has the Government entered into any contractual agreement or licence agreement or development licence or development lease or agreement in

1260 relation to the financing arrangements of the reclamation or development of the Victoria Keys site; and, if so, with whom and what are the main terms of each agreement?

**Clerk:** Answer, the Hon. the Chief Minister.

1265 **Chief Minister (Hon. F. R. Picardo):** Madam Speaker, the Government has not yet signed agreements with Victoria Keys developers.

1270 **Hon. Dr K Azopardi:** Can the Hon. Chief Minister give us an update of where things lie? I ask this question periodically and he has answered not yet in relation to a number of possibilities that I posed in my question: contracts or licences or development licences or development leases or financial arrangements. I am assuming, therefore, that no agreements have been reached on any of those issues, but can he please update the House on the negotiations and the issues that are a hurdle to reaching agreement?

1275 **Hon. Chief Minister:** Madam Speaker, I am afraid that there is too much in contention at the moment for me to be able to set out what those issues are. There are too many different options that are live, and I do not want to prejudice the taxpayers' position by setting anything out in public.

1280 **Hon. Dr K Azopardi:** Can I ask this, perhaps: has the size of the plot in any way been changed as was originally envisaged in 2019 when this was announced with some fanfare, because obviously the reclamation continues at pace, and so is it the position that they are seeking still to reclaim, while these negotiations are ongoing, a plot of land which potentially will be of the same size as that envisaged in 2019?

1285 **Hon. Chief Minister:** No, Madam Speaker, I think it is going to be larger.

**Hon. Dr K Azopardi:** Can the Hon. Chief Minister help us with how much larger it will be?

1290 **Hon. Chief Minister:** No, Madam Speaker, because it is not fixed.

**Hon. Dr K Azopardi:** I did not hear that. It is not fixed, I think he said. Is that right?

**Hon. Chief Minister:** Yes.

1295 **Hon. Dr K Azopardi:** And that would be fixed in the negotiations, or by government policy irrespective of whether negotiations come to a conclusion or not?

**Hon. Chief Minister:** Government policy and the DPC.

1300 **Hon. Dr K Azopardi:** And finally, is there a time limit in the Government's mind as to when these negotiations should conclude, or not, or are they still content to continue negotiating with the same parties without considering the possibility of tendering a potential site out?

1305 **Hon. Chief Minister:** Madam Speaker, there is nothing to tender. There is seawater. I do not think that the history of Gibraltar has ever seen a tender of water. We tend to put out tenders of land, not tenders of water.

1310 What we have done – and I explained this at some length before – is look at the possibility of doing a deal for a third party to reclaim land but for the Government, and that then, at the end of that, the deal might involve that they might keep a part of that land, but the land is created for the Government. We do not tender that they should be able to create that further land.

I think in their time there might have been one or two situations where land was created, but it did not arise from tender. As far as I understood, it arose from private treaty between parties and permission being granted by the Government to reclaim, but even then the reclamation creates land which has to be put in a lease. So, no, we do not believe that there is a likelihood of tendering out for this, although we are negotiating to see how we can create that land, more land perhaps than was originally envisaged.

What I have learnt in the context of my professional practice, and indeed my political work in the past 12 years, is that you would be foolish to set up a cliff of time by which you have to do something in the context of a negotiation, unless it is in your interest to do so, to bring about an end to the negotiation or to up a benefit. In this context and in the context of other negotiations that I am involved in, I think setting up a time by which things have to be done is not in our interest. It can be contrary to the interests of the taxpayer. That is why I have not done it. I have said that before to the hon. Gentleman when he has asked this question periodically, and it remains my position, although people can see that a lot of area has already been reclaimed in front of Coaling Island, which is the area where part of the Victoria Keys development will be.

**Hon. Dr K Azopardi:** The reason I asked whether there was a limit on the tender ... I hear what the hon. Member says, but surely the expressions of interest process in relation to the Eastside was in the nature of an invitation to submit bids for things that were partly water at that stage – you have to chuck some of that land, the rubble mountain, into the sea to create the site – so I did not think I was creating some precedent with my question.

I note what he says, but it has been five years already since they announced this project, and it was centre spread in their 2019 manifesto. Does he not think that the moment will come, sooner rather than later, that the Government needs to take a policy decision in relation to that land that is being created, because, as he says, as a matter of government policy, they are creating a plot of potential land – well, actual land when you see the reclamation – that is growing in size, may even be larger than the large plot of land that was announced in 2019? Isn't it in the taxpayers' interest to do something with that land?

**Hon. Chief Minister:** Madam Speaker, I disagree with him as to what has happened on the Eastside. The tender for the Eastside, and indeed the contract that was subsequently done, related to the plot of land that was there and the coastal protection works that were required, not reclamation, although using the rubble mountain, as people call it, to create more land, is part of what was agreed in the negotiation. But the tender, from memory, was for the coastal protection works which were required to protect the reclamation as it was. In the context of that negotiation, we agreed that we would take more premium because we agreed that in the context of the area of coastal protection agreed, we were agnostic as to whether more land was created, so long as we had a formula in respect of premium and we had some marina elements which did what we needed done. So, it is not quite the same. And here is the rub. When you are acting for the Government of Gibraltar and you are acting for the taxpayer, you have to always ensure that you are doing the best in the long-term interest of the taxpayer. Of course, it is in my short-term interest and my colleagues' short-term interest in government that we should quickly do a deal in relation to that land and that people should quickly see it being developed. I can quickly point to the fact that the centre spread in our 2019 manifesto has become what is there, and I can say, 'Another promise fulfilled.' Of course, given the sort of thing that the hon. Gentleman is saying, you would say, 'It is very much in your personal interest that you should do that because you blunt his ability to attack you on that basis.' But that is not what we are interested in doing on this side of the House. On this side of the House, we are interested in ensuring that we grow Gibraltar in the best possible way, that we use the taxpayers' assets in the best possible way, and if that means that things need to take longer and we cannot have a development to point to our manifesto and show that we have completed that project in that time but it means that we get a better deal, long term, for the taxpayer, that is a very good thing – and in any event, every day that passes,

1365 the land is going up in value. It is not as if, if we do not follow the Hon. the Leader of the  
Opposition's advice, we will not have a buyer for the land and they might pay less. Each day that  
passes, that asset is going to be worth more. So, he will forgive me for also disagreeing with the  
second part of his question and telling him that I think actually we are doing the right thing in the  
way that we are managing the negotiations in relation to Victoria Keys, that we have been right  
from the get-go, and we have been right, in particular, not to pay any heed to the approach that  
he was suggesting we should take.

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**Madam Speaker:** Is that the end of the questions, or do you have another one?

## Questions for Written Answer

**Clerk:** Answers to Written Questions.

1375 **Chief Minister (Hon. F R Picardo):** Madam Speaker, I have the honour to table the answers to  
Written Questions W75/2024 to W82/2024 inclusive.

### Adjournment

**Chief Minister (Hon. F R Picardo):** Madam Speaker, I now have the honour to move that the  
House should now adjourn to Monday, 1st July, at 10.30 in the morning, when it is my intention  
to move the First and Second Readings of the Appropriation Bill 2024-25.

1380 **Madam Speaker:** I now propose the question, which is that this House do now adjourn to  
Monday, 1st July at 10.30 a.m.

I now put the question, which is that this House do now adjourn to Monday, 1st July at  
10.30 a.m. Those in favour? (**Members:** Aye.) Those against? Passed.

This House will now adjourn to Monday, 1st July at 10.30 a.m.

*The House adjourned at 12.20 p.m.*

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