



PROCEEDINGS OF THE GIBRALTAR PARLIAMENT

MORNING SESSION: 11 a.m. – 12.36 p.m.

Gibraltar, Tuesday, 2nd July 2024

Contents

Appropriation Bill 2024 — Second Reading — Debate continued	2
<i>The House recessed at 12.36 p.m.</i>	22

The Gibraltar Parliament

The Parliament met at 11 a.m.

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

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

Appropriation Bill 2024 — Second Reading — Debate continued

Clerk: Meeting of Parliament, Tuesday, 2nd July 2024. Second Reading of the Appropriation Bill 2024 continued.

5 **Madam Speaker:** The Hon. Prof. Cortes.

Minister for the Environment, Sustainability, Climate Change and Education (Hon. Prof. J E Cortes): Good morning, Madam Speaker. I was so pleased that the Deputy Chief Minister yesterday reset the tone after the rather vitriolic contribution from the Leader of the Opposition. For my part, to quote the Hon. Mr Azopardi, I intend to provide some glorious positivity – responsible, but glorious nevertheless, because there are lots of things happening out there, good things, and people need to know.

10 This is my 13th Budget, which is not bad going for somebody who intended to be in this House for just four years. Billy Connolly once said, ‘The desire to be a politician should bar you for life from ever becoming one.’ I never desired it, so I guess that is why I am still here and why, I guess, I am here for life.

15 There have been many changes since my last Budget speech, approximately 12 months ago. We have seen the departure of a Governor, Sir David Steel – who was so close to the community and whom I, personally, will greatly miss – while we have welcomed the new Governor, Sir Ben Bathurst, with whom I have already had positive engagement. We have seen the departure of five Ministers, my friends Steven Linares, Samantha Sacramento, Paul Balban, Albert Isola and Vijay Daryanani, as well as some long-serving Members of the Opposition. We have welcomed four new Ministers who bring their own excellent skills and experience to the team, and new Members of the Opposition. To the new Members, I offer the support my experience in this House brings, an experience that I never thought I would gather but the years have passed fast. Looking across at the Opposition benches, I see that, perhaps surprisingly, the new Members make a lot more sense and look and sound a lot more genuine than some of the old. Sometimes, I think that one or two of them are actually sitting on the wrong side and have values and ideas much more akin to ours than to the politics of some of their colleagues. Whether or not this is the case, I urge all to be true to their principles and beliefs, to be professional and respectful and to learn from those who are, and not from those who repeatedly and rather unashamedly cross unacceptable boundaries of fairness and justice.

25 This year’s Budget must reflect current circumstances, very different to those that reigned prior to Brexit and the pandemic – the rise in the cost of living, the need to continue our post-COVID economic recovery and the overshadowing uncertainty of ‘the deal’ – so, my speech will largely refer to what will be advanced at less financial cost by way of changes in policies and

processes to improve delivery and services, imaginatively attracting alternative sources of funding or generating income: sustainable savings, to coin a phrase.

40 Most of us in this House have political aspirations and we all want to deliver on our manifesto commitments. Doing this without due consideration to reality would be irresponsible, and I, for one, am very alive to my obligations to the community not just today but tomorrow, next year and in 10 years' time when, together with the Father of the House, I may well still be here. As responsible custodians of the public purse we must accept that at this moment in time we need to spend only in the most responsible way.

45 Madam Speaker, the recent General Election was very close; closer, I believe, than it should have been given our record of delivering for the community and the legacy that we have created. Let us, just for one moment, travel back in time to 2011, but first let us examine an important concept in ecology: that of reverse shifting baseline syndrome. Shifting baseline syndrome occurs when conditions of the natural environment gradually change over time yet people falsely
50 perceive less change because they do not know, or fail to recall accurately, how the natural environment looked in the past. C S Lewis captured the same concept when he wrote: 'It is funny how day by day nothing changes, but when you look back everything is different.'

Let me just list a few examples to take us back to the baseline of 2011: the KGV psychiatric unit; no dementia daycare centre; a dilapidated PCC; no university; no city centre parks; grimy,
55 slimy diesel power generation; no new schools. I could go on: no equality in marriage, no progress on women's reproductive rights, etc. Anyone who fails to recognise the achievement of this Government, as I suspect the Opposition will do during this session, is clearly plagued with the most severe case of this deadly syndrome, but we will keep on reminding them of where we were just over a decade ago, because the Government that I have been proud to be part of for close on
60 13 years has vision. The party opposite has none, and to paraphrase the Book of Proverbs, without a vision the parties perish. They have no vision, which is why some of their most senior Members choose to rant in fake anger. As the late Desmond Tutu once said, 'Don't raise your voice, improve your argument.' Indeed, often when I listen to some of the Opposition I am reminded of the words of the 19th-century American politician Davis F Houston, who said, 'One could drive a prairie
65 schooner through any part of the arguments and never scrape against the facts.' I am hopeful that the new Opposition Members will raise the standards of behaviour and of sound and fair argument on that side of the House.

I can boast, under my ministerial portfolios alone, over the past three terms, eight new schools, two parks, new tourist sites, field centres, a dementia day centre, a mental health facility, a day
70 surgery, chemotherapy and more. My political ideology is socialist and clearly centred on fairness, equality, the embracing of diversity, legacy, innovation and sustainability.

We will lead within the public sector and assist the private sector in reducing material costs and improving processes, thereby increasing revenue while improving the environment. We will strive to come up with new and imaginative ways of creating revenue, of building new pillars for
75 our economy and attracting inward investment, not only to allow us to continue investing in our children and their future, but to ensure Gibraltar continues to thrive in the face of whatever adversity may await. I will pour every ounce of energy into helping keep Gibraltar running safe today, tomorrow and always. There is more to El Jardinero than some may realise, and thanks to the Chief Minister, everybody knows that El Jardinero's email is john.cortes@gibraltar.gov.gi.

80 If I may now delve into my departmental responsibilities, I will commence by making very brief reference to two portfolios that I proudly held for seven months of the financial year under review: Public Health and Culture. I want to thank the Director of Public Health, Dr Helen Carter, and her team for their work during that time. We covered important ground, not just through COVID but subsequently, too, with much work on public awareness and a great deal of advice provided to
85 both medical and environmental professionals. I greatly enjoyed my 12 years as Public Health Minister.

During my last seven months in Culture, we continued the work to promote Gibraltarian culture at home and abroad after having ensured it flourished during the years of COVID, when

some questioned its relevance. Indeed, we saw a cultural renaissance then that continues still. Initiatives such as Rock Retreat residencies, cultural exchanges in the UK, Morocco and in Gibraltar flourished. Notably, I was proud to attend two drama festivals in the United Kingdom, including the National Drama Festival in Coventry, where Gibraltar plays won awards, one of them going to my friend and successor Christian Santos and his extraordinary original play *Signed, Me*.

Two of what I think are the most significant achievements were consolidated last year. The first is the recognition of growing Gibraltarian literature: the creation of the Book Council. *El otro*, relevant across Culture, Education and Heritage, is what we have done to save Llanito for the recognition of our multiple languages in our community, but more about this later. I give my sincere thanks here to my former team at the Ministry of Culture and to Seamus Byrne and all at Cultural Services, as well as to the vast cultural community that enriches our land. I must say that my granddaughter, Lea, keeps me well up to date with the performing arts, and I have been on the dramatic stage a couple of times in the past year, too.

I move on to my current responsibilities, and I will start with Environment. There is one thing that we can be proud of across this House, and on which there is unanimity. That is climate change. It is of great significance and shows the maturity of our community that in this House we do not have representatives who deny the reality and dangers of climate change, nor indeed who expound the ultra-right-wing denial postures that plague politics and parliaments elsewhere. Indeed, as we have seen in the recently activated Select Committee on the Environment, we are as one in seeking to improve our environmental performance.

Work on mitigating our effect on the climate, as well as adapting to the impacts that are now inevitable, continues. While our efforts in Gibraltar will not halt the climate crisis, *como decía mi madre, un grano no hace un granero, pero ayuda a su compañero*. Moreover, climate action has other, more immediate benefits, such as cost savings and improved air quality.

The Near Zero Energy Building legislation that came into force in 2021 is now starting to have an effect, as major developments are being reviewed and refined to ensure that they deliver the most efficient and sustainable designs possible. It is generally accepted that the operating phase of a building can account for up to 80% of its lifetime costs. Building owners and facility managers are looking for ways to reduce operating costs without compromising performance. Building green offers a sustainable, cost-effective solution to reducing energy, water consumption and maintenance costs. We are currently working with industry to ensure that the tools that are available to them for the assessment of a building's energy performance are able to accurately model these passive elements. A number of events related to sustainability in building and planning will be taking place over the next year and we hope to build up to a second Sustainability Conference in 2025.

The independent Climate Change Committee continues to provide advice and support to Government in respect of its progress towards net zero. The Committee recently had the chance to present to the Select Committee and will continue to liaise with the Net Zero Delivery Body as well as the Select Committee, and I will shortly be laying their first report on the table in this House.

The 2021 emissions inventory showed that emissions had increased by 11% from 2020, the expected bounce-back after COVID. Nevertheless, emissions overall have decreased by 10% since 2015. Having removed the biggest problem of the past – the diesel generators – transport remains the biggest challenge to our carbon agenda and to air quality, but we are tackling the issue in various ways and we will be seeing improvements as we progress with electric vehicle charging and alternative fuels, all of which are being actively discussed with stakeholders.

The Net Zero Delivery Body, with the Deputy Chief Minister as chair, has met three times since the end of the last financial year. Its aim is to accelerate climate action across the public sector and facilitate collaboration and information sharing. This approach has already delivered the EV Charging Infrastructure Strategy as well as the Renewable Energy Strategy. One of the areas in which work has accelerated over the last few years is the delivery of environmental education. Members of the body were able to visit schools during World Environment Day to get a flavour of

what goes on there in creating understanding and preparing our young people to be active environmental citizens. This work has been further complemented by the rollout of carbon literacy training to teachers and support staff across the schools. Carbon literacy is an understanding of the carbon costs and impacts of everyday activities and, critically, the ability and motivation to reduce emissions on an individual, community and organisational basis.

145

On renewables, efforts to increase the percentage of energy produced from renewable sources continue as new solar projects such as Engineer Lane Car Park, Mid-Harbours and St Joseph's School have come online in the last year. My colleague the Minister for Utilities will provide more information on renewable energy in her speech. Solar remains the most realistic option in Gibraltar. New sites for installations have been identified and the call to industry to arrive at a list of approved suppliers will issue shortly. Separately, the Department is considering the possibility of wind power in limited sites where there will not be a negative environmental impact.

150

The rollout of electric vehicle charging infrastructure is a crucial step toward promoting sustainable transportation and reducing greenhouse emissions. EV points are now installed at sites across Gibraltar and more are in process. We will be seeing significant progress here as the Ministry is working with GEA to install more charging stations. By encouraging the adoption of electric vehicles, we aim to reduce air pollution and direct dependence on fossil fuels.

155

Everyone agrees that we need better air quality in order for us and, in particular, our children and the elderly, to breathe. Poor air quality has been proven to cause long-term health effects, including death. Having cleaned up power generation, we all know that the challenge to tackle air quality in our streets is to reduce emissions from vehicles, and so we are encouraging electrification, alternative and public transport, and will first tackle the heaviest polluters, such as the older heavy goods vehicles. In view of this and its now clear wider social implications, the measure announced yesterday by the Chief Minister, conceived in absolute good faith, will not – I repeat, will not – be implemented. The measure is not coming back. We will find different ways of tackling air quality, pulling together as a community and not letting the real benefits to health be clouded or overshadowed by measures that will prejudice our citizens, especially the less well-off. No way, Madam Speaker.

160

165

The change is here. Hybrid vehicles proved, by far, to be the most popular cars registered last year. There were 29 diesel, 19 electric, 100 petrol and 421 hybrid vehicles registered. That is 74% that were hybrid. Adding electric cars, it becomes over 77%. That is tremendous progress, which also means considerably less air pollution in our streets already. We are currently assessing the Government's own fleet, to determine reduction and electrification wherever possible. I have met with the fuel suppliers and we are working very well together with the aim to provide both charging points and introduce less-polluting fuel alternatives. We have a challenge ahead in achieving electrification and I am certain that we will succeed.

170

175

The 25-year Environment Plan is being published as a consultation document on the government website this month. This live document has been drafted by the Department's committed and forward-thinking technical officers and will serve to further cement the fundamental pillars of environmental protection, green governance and sustainable living into our community, and further establishes the green Gibraltar concept that has been central to government thinking, especially since our 2019 manifesto.

180

The team at the Department's Field Centre at Tovey Cottage, composed of Nature Reserve officials, wildlife wardens, expert bird of prey handlers and volunteers, continues to provide an amazing opportunity for outdoor learning. Twelve schools have visited this year, amounting to over 600 children. The team continues to spearhead wildlife restoration programmes from its unique setting in the Upper Rock. This year they continued to breed Barbary partridges for release and are presently also focusing their efforts on little owls and the majestic Bonelli's eagle, which will hopefully grace our skies again in the not-too-distant future.

185

In December of last year I was honoured to attend the COP28 conference in Dubai as part of the UK delegation, together with representatives of other Overseas Territories. The Gibraltar team attended a number of important sessions, meetings and briefings and signed up to the Waste to

190

195 Zero initiative on the decarbonisation of waste. I was humbled but proud to be selected for a special event as one of 50 so-called global environment leaders. Our lobbying during the event and now post-COP is focused on trying to overcome the challenges we face as small territories in accessing climate finance and ensuring greater engagement with the UK negotiating team ahead of the next COP.

200 Despite ongoing delays in the administration of some trans-frontier shipment licences as a result of Brexit, the export of municipal waste and recycling has continued, but changes in EU legislation and the possibility of an NNO mean that we must develop how we manage and reduce our waste. A call for expressions of interest to provide a waste management facility with the option of full self-sufficiency and resilience will be published this week. This will be designed to ensure maximum separation of recyclates and will also have to provide a waste treatment option to increase our resilience in this area. Organic waste will soon have to be collected separately from
205 other municipal waste, as is occurring throughout Europe, and we will see the rollout of additional brown bins for this. The biggest difficulty at the moment is dealing with construction rubble as administrative problems with exportation remain unresolved. However, the situation is under control as the Coaling Island reclamation site has capacity for the near future. New legislation to regulate recycling has also now been enacted, which will hopefully result in an increase in our
210 overall recycling levels. The Department is supporting the eco park with its appeal, through which they are collecting clothing, houseware, linen and toys and exporting to Senegal, where it is distributed to those in extreme poverty.

In relation to cleansing, extra services have been rolled out by way of cleaning of internal communal areas and *el turno* has now been applied to 10 more residential areas. Some of the
215 many initiatives include extra power hosing and rotor washing of public areas, including housing estates, through the summer months, and the new purpose-built refuse cubicle in Governor's Parade, one of several measures to help reduce the impact of refuse on Main Street.

A new dog park was opened in October at the end of Eastern Beach Road, bringing much joy to our four-legged friends and their owners.

220 Our litter wardens continue in their determination to keep Gibraltar clean, and two wardens regularly patrol our streets and review camera footage. Since 1st January 2024, they have issued 52 fines totalling £18,250.

The Environmental Agency continues to advise me in their various areas of expertise. The Agency responded to 1,908 complaints in 2023 and 528 this year so far. They operate an after-
225 hours service, which saw their officers and the pest control team engage in 225 calls out in 2023 and, at the time of writing, 99 so far this year. Most complaints received by the Agency are regarding nuisances, food safety, pests and housing conditions. They served 47 abatement notices in 2023; thus far, 4 this year. Some of these cases have led to court summonses leading to successful prosecutions with fines totalling £10,060 last year and £15,760 so far this year.

230 The most recent fully ratified year of data from the Gibraltar Air Quality Monitoring Network for 2023 shows continued compliance with the current limit values, something that was simply unachievable before 2012. There has been significant long-term improvement in key pollutants nitrogen dioxide and particulate matter, and the trend continues. This was one of our biggest challenges on coming into government, and we have achieved what seemed impossible. We will
235 continue to focus on understanding and reducing emissions from traffic and shipping, to further improve our performance.

With continuous improvements, Gibraltar's network now reports measurements for PM10 and PM2.5, the particulates, at both Rosia Road and Bleak House, which represents an increase in PM
240 monitoring, so we have more than ever before. Over the last few years, the fixed network has been supplemented with other monitoring installations in potential hotspots, and we now have five operational air quality mesh pods in addition. The Witham's air monitoring station served this purpose once power generating operations in the South District ceased, and has now been relocated to Devil's Tower Road, where it began recording data in 2023.

245 The Agency continues to work closely with the Department of the Environment and the Office of Civil Contingency on issues such as contingency planning on food imports and exports in the event of NNO.

250 The Agency, together with the Department's Environmental Protection Research Unit, has been increasing efforts to tackle dog fouling and targeting dog owners who do not have their dogs licensed or registered. In 2023, they collected 171 DNA samples with 13 fixed penalty notices issued, and so far this year 106 samples with 12 notices issued. In 2023, 64 registration patrols were carried out – that is more than one a week – which resulted in 32 notices being issued for no registration or licence, and so far this year checks on dogs have resulted in eight such FPNs. These patrols give the officers the opportunity to catch owners who are not complying and oblige them to regularise their position, thus ensuring that their DNA profile is registered and improving the effectiveness of DNA sample. On occasion, the Agency has to issue summonses to the Magistrates' Court for non-payment of an FPN, and so far this has resulted in £1,700 in fines this year.

260 The Agency is the competent authority for the Control of Major Accident Hazard (COMAH), and recently hosted two Health and Safety Executive (HSE) inspectors from the UK to carry out an electrical control and cyber-security inspection as part of the inspection regime of the LNG plant. In November 2023, the Agency, in conjunction with the Office of Civil Contingencies and with the HSE, held a second LNG live exercise with all emergency responders and stakeholders taking part.

265 They continue to monitor the quality of our bathing waters, where standards have been consistent since improving markedly after 2011. Five of our bathing waters continue to be classed as 'excellent', with Western Beach maintaining the 'good' classification.

270 Madam Speaker, my Ministry continues to work closely with the Office of Civil Contingencies, the MoD and other key partners in the emergency preparedness, resilience and response of a radiation emergency involving nuclear-powered warships. As the Minister responsible for the Radiation Regulations 2004, I chair the Radiation Response Committee as well as the Strategic Co-ordination Group during the MoD's Defence Nuclear Safety Regulator's live exercise, which aims to demonstrate the MoD Operators Emergency Plan and the Gibraltar Radiation Emergency Response Plan for dealing with an off-site emergency. Exercise Rocky Pigeon, as it is called, the triennial exercise, was last conducted in late 2022, and the regulators confirmed Gibraltar's robust emergency arrangements and very effective response overall. Work now continues for the next test live exercise, which is scheduled to take place next year.

275 Going, now, to our beaches, winter and spring storms once again caused damage around the Rock's coastline, but our beaches were ready for the summer thanks to the great effort of the Department of Environment, Technical Services and contractors. There are still some issues with accumulation of *Rugulopteryx*, the invasive Japanese seaweed being washed ashore at Western Beach, from where hundreds of tonnes of seaweed have been removed. This is a problem that is being experienced around the whole region, with the species now having been detected in Italian waters and so continuing its spread across the Mediterranean.

285 A comprehensive refurbishment programme was carried out at Little Bay. The concrete tables have been replaced with eight new ones, making 90 in total, and the entire seating area along all the different tiers of the Lido Beach has also been refurbished. Camp Bay Keys Promenade pier, which had been undermined by wave action and storm damage, has been restored by Technical Services, with a new rock revetment constructed around it. New marine-grade stainless steel stairs have been placed, providing access to the sea, and the main Camp Bay pier has been totally resurfaced. At Catalan Bay the wooden walkway giving access from the car park to the beach and the village has seen a complete overhaul. At Sandy Bay, the railings along the stairs leading down to the beach from the road at the northern end of the beach have been replaced. Further details of the preparatory work at our beaches will be included in the published version of this speech, which will be issued by the Press Office.

295 Improvements to the lifeguard service have been noticeable, thanks to an increased and rigorous training programme and improved supervision. The comprehensive year-round training

programme now starts in September, immediately after the closure of the official bathing season, so as to encourage and prepare potential candidates better.

Improvements at the North Front Cemetery continue. Last year saw some critical infrastructure improvements, including the refurbishment of the public toilets. The digitisation of records, including vaults and graves, is one area on which my team, together with Digital Services, is currently working. Beautifying the North Front Cemetery is also on the agenda. This year will see the commencement of beautification works on the forecourt and there are planned changes to the management of green spaces within the cemetery, including the planting of more trees and hedges to help ensure that this sacred place maintains its air of serenity. Improvements to our other cemeteries are also on the cards with improved support and maintenance to both Witham's and Trafalgar.

Commonwealth and Champion Parks remain a delight. As always, talking about green areas, I remain committed to planting trees and creating more green open spaces for the public. This is surprisingly difficult given the location of underground services in many areas where we would like to plant trees. Despite this, there were 204 trees planted in 2023, and we will soon see new greenery popping up in the most unexpected of places. Green initiatives incentivising tree planting and the greening of urban areas are being reviewed and proposed. These help filter air pollutants, absorb carbon dioxide and provide natural shade and respite. We all know the benefits to physical and mental health and how urban biodiversity improves by providing food and habitat for pollinators. We are working together with a revitalised Gibraltar Horticultural Society and other NGOs on these projects.

The removal of invasive plant species to provide habitat for native plants will continue. Rewilded areas, such as at Nun's Well, are proving the success of returning sites to nature. My friend and fellow botanist Lesley Linares of GOHNS Botanical Section tells me that the site, formerly waste ground used by lorries, now holds over 50 species of plants, many of them rare.

The work that we do in protecting urban wildlife has not gone unnoticed. UK environmental campaigner Hannah Bourne-Taylor has used Gibraltar as an example of how protection can work and go hand in hand with construction. Gibraltar's decades-old policy of providing nest sites for swifts, which dates from the time of the first GSLP Government, has ensured a healthy population of both of our urban swift species despite extensive refurbishment and construction. Hannah's efforts to introduce similar policies in England, where the swift is threatened with extinction, have so far failed, and I have been working with her, and will continue to work with her, in explaining the success of our world-leading policy to UK Ministers.

The Botanic Gardens continue with a core objective of maintaining and beautifying the grounds, educating the public and researching the ecology, evolution and conservation of plants and animals, including Gibraltar's endemic plants. Improvements to the Gardens' aesthetics are ongoing and the very hard and enthusiastic work of the ground staff is clear to see. Most importantly, the Alameda's new bespoke education area, the Alameda Kusuma Education Zone, will be inaugurated this month. This has been fully funded with the contributions of many generous donors and without any government funds whatsoever. It is a large and exciting new facility at which to educate the public, especially children. It is already being used by visiting groups including schools.

Madam Speaker, the presence of our environmental protection officers at sea matters. It improves the protection of our marine resources and challenges those who do not respect our laws. I am pleased to say that in the last year we have managed to secure a new vessel for the Department's Protection and Research Unit, aptly named *Osprey*, a species of fish eagle that once nested on our eastern cliffs and still occurs on migration and in winter. This has made a significant difference to our deployment capabilities to how we are viewed at sea. From pollution monitoring to wildlife rescue and marine enforcement, the section is now better equipped to deal with the varied environmental scenarios that can quickly develop at sea and also on land.

Gibraltar is now part of the UK's Global Ocean Wildlife Analysis Network for improving our understanding of the marine environment. This is a UK-funded blue belt project, which has

provided a full set of baited remote underwater video systems for a number of UK Overseas Territories, including Gibraltar.

350 The Department of Environment continues to be a project partner with the University of Gibraltar. The Department has assisted the University in carrying out a UK Darwin-funded project – again UK Darwin funds, no local funds – which is a feasibility study for the restoration of oyster beds in our waters; a project that we kickstarted in 2016.

355 Another worthwhile project in which the Department has been involved is an ecological assessment of Windmill Hill flats. This area is a vital component of the Gibraltar Nature Reserve and the project aims to assess the state of key biodiversity elements, pressures affecting them and the valuation of the prospect of bringing back lost species. The project is led by my old friend Dr Julia Fa, and it has been wonderful to once again work with this extremely well-regarded Gibraltarian scientist.

360 The Nautilus project has also been successful in obtaining funding from the Darwin Programme for a seagrass restoration project, another restoration initiative that the Department has been promulgating for some time, with initial trials carried out some years ago with the University of the Algarve. Once again, I am certain that the collaboration between the Department and the Nautilus project will ensure that this new project is a success for the benefit of Gibraltar's coastal biodiversity. The highly exemplary marine monitoring, research and education work carried out
365 by Nautilus must be highlighted and praised. Their tentacles continue to grab the attention of many within Gibraltar, especially the young, and the research work is gaining increased recognition internationally.

I will, at this juncture, also thank the two other environmental NGOs for their excellent work.
370 GONHS continues to monitor migration and survey habitats, performing high-quality scientific work as well as promoting awareness. The Environmental Safety Group continues its valuable contribution to awareness and environmental governance, not least in its annual Clean Up the World event.

The innovative concept of the Gibraltar National Park goes from strength to strength, and many
375 will have seen the new branding displayed on our electric fleet and the staff uniforms of the constituent bodies. The National Park Co-ordinating Board has continued to meet, with ideas shared on how all the different entities and sites that make up the National Park can unite and improve. This will not only give a different dimension to our sites but also improve what Gibraltar has to offer to the modern traveller.

380 Madam Speaker, visitors continue to marvel at the natural beauty of our Rock and its offerings, so it should come as no surprise to this House that visitor numbers for the Upper Rock component of the Gibraltar Nature Reserve have increased by 27% from the last financial year. I predicted last year that further system enhancements would be able to increase revenue by a further £1 million in the 2023-24 financial year. I can now confirm that the actual increase has been a staggering
385 £3.06 million. This equates to an almost 45% increase in revenue from the previous financial year. Figures for the months of April and May suggest that we will see a further increase of £1.5 million in the 2024-25 financial year, and I am aiming to achieve at least double that, but we must remember that with increased tourism comes a greater need to become more environmentally conscious, or we risk losing the essence of what visitors come to enjoy.

390 Diversifying the experience we have to offer within the Upper Rock, and indeed around Gibraltar, forms one of the cornerstones of our sustainability strategy for the future. In achieving this, my Ministry is working extremely closely with that of my friend the Minister for Tourism, and great progress is being made. We remain hopeful that working together with industry we will be able to ensure that the Upper Rock, indeed the whole Gibraltar experience, continues to improve
395 and is not choked by its own success. To this end we have, for example, recently introduced the alternative tour, promoting the many sites in Gibraltar outside the Upper Rock. We need to provide more and better options, and one of those is Gibraltar's World War II Tunnels. A testament to the Rock's strategic significance during the conflict, this site is undergoing a remarkable transformation to offer an immersive and enlightening world-class experience for

400 visitors, totally done through private investment. Plans are also underway to create a new
breathtaking artery into the Reserve via the lower Charles V Wall steps and Devil's Gap Battery.
This site will also see a transformation with the creation of a new ticket office and interpretation
centre. Additional facilities will also be available that will favour the more adventurous traveller
405 in sustainable savings once again. We will shortly be able to announce another major initiative
that will at long last see our Moorish Castle restored.

The Upper Rock is a tourist destination, an area for our recreation, and also, we must not
forget, a nature reserve. It is thanks to our intimate knowledge of habitats and the requirements
of species that allows the Department of Environment to provide both a tourist product for our
410 colleagues in the Tourist Ministry to promote and market, and a refuge for wildlife. This tight
partnership between our Departments is unique and most effective, and so we have seen the
population of Barbary partridges, rabbits and red foxes flourish, ravens recolonise, sparrowhawks
winter and booted eagles summer at the same time that human visitor numbers increase. This is
no mean feat and not everyone can do it. We can, because we know exactly what we are doing
415 and how to do it.

Work on simpler things that make a difference, such as improving the condition of trails and
signage in the Upper Rock along with other parts of the Nature Reserve, have continued.
Mediterranean Steps stand out, as usual, with works carried out in the spring making a difference
and completed just in time for the annual Med Steps Challenge. I must thank the contractors and
420 the Reserve management team for their work. In addition, we have recently installed signs to
mark our National Trails Network. This project is ongoing and we expect to open up additional
trails soon, such as Devil's Tooth.

Madam Speaker, the population of yellow-legged gulls in Gibraltar needs to be controlled
because the birds have an ecological impact on habitats and other species, cause nuisance to the
425 public when nesting in town, can be a public health problem and, most importantly, they
constitute a risk for aircraft. The trend of yellow-legged gulls in Gibraltar continues to be one of
significant decline, as evidenced by scientific surveys. The Avian Control Unit thus continues to do
excellent work providing an excellent service to the public. The Bird of Prey Unit, manned jointly
430 by the Department and GONHS, continues its excellent work in rescue, rehabilitation, release and
tracking of injured birds. They do excellent conservation work and are also very involved in
education, which includes a good social media presence, which helps to highlight Gibraltar's
conservation efforts both locally and internationally.

Barbary macaque management continues to maintain a stable population size of around 200
animals. Laparoscopic sterilisation has kept births down sufficiently to maintain social structure
435 and yet stop a population explosion like we had in the 1990s. Our continued investment in ponds
and supplementary feeding, coupled with a macaque team that responds rapidly to any
incursions, has resulted in the macaques staying within the boundaries of the Nature Reserve –
except when one particular individual decided to travel north. Once again, the expertise of our
team, led by vet Mark Pizarro, proved its worth, and Gibraltar continues to be proud to have the
440 only wild, free-ranging, non-human primates in Europe, now well managed, and the tourism that
it attracts.

Madam Speaker, when I became Minister for the Environment in 2011, the gulls and macaques
were rampant and the Barbary partridge on the verge of extinction. All three of these situations
have been completely reversed. I can also report, thanks to the observations of volunteers from
445 GONHS, that this year we have had seven pairs of peregrine falcon holding territory which have
raised a total of 10 young, six pairs of kestrels raising a minimum of 13 young, as well as four pairs
of little owl, a pair of eagle owls and a pair of ravens raising 4 young, ravens having recolonised
the Rock last year following an absence of four decades.

Sadly, all is not rosy and we have had an unacceptable number of road kills this year. This has
450 included cats, foxes and an otter. The latter is quite incredible. We were aware of an otter in the
Port area for over a year but the one killed was a different young one, possibly a sign of attempted

colonisation of our waters. As a result of these events, I brought a Bill to Parliament in relation to the need to report roadkill of these species. Drivers have to be vigilant. As our wildlife flourishes, thanks largely to our environmental policies, we have to be aware that we are not the only species using our roads.

455

Madam Speaker, the Department of Environment supports my work as Chair of the Environment Ministers Council of the UK Overseas Territories and Crown Dependencies. The Council meets virtually, at least once a year. It serves to exchange experience and expertise as well as to co-ordinate the territories' positions on matters to be taken up with the Government of the United Kingdom. While on the subject of international representation, it might interest this House to know that as a founder member of the Global Council for Political Renewal, I was named the first Vice-Chair of its Council for Environment and Equitable Development and I recently chaired a meeting of that Council. I was also honoured to represent the Chief Minister at Gibraltar Day in London just days after the General Election and address the dignitaries there on behalf of Gibraltar.

460

465

Moving away from Environment, for the first time ever, Gibraltar has a Minister with specific responsibility for developing relations with the Kingdom of Morocco – and how proud I am to have this opportunity. Morocco has always held a special place in my heart, having regularly visited in my childhood and having enjoyed many hours in environmental research there. Those of us who are old enough to remember will recall gratefully the invaluable support that Morocco provided during the closed-frontier years, particularly the workforce that assisted and filled the void in craftsmanship in Gibraltar on the closure of the Frontier and the withdrawal of the Spanish workforce. I have been establishing links with entities in Morocco, directly and through other players such as the Gibraltar-Morocco Business Association, RifCom, Taourarte Association and Maroc Atlas. Her Worship the Mayor has signed a memorandum of understanding and co-operation with the Mayor of Tangier, and we have had a visit from Moroccan NGOs. I will be travelling to Morocco in the autumn to further contacts and discussions with a view to promoting our links and developing new ones. At the same time, I have made it a point to engage closely with my friends in the Gibraltarian Moroccan community. I have held several clinics in recent months and will continue to do so, acting as a conduit to other colleagues, and I will assist members of the community in any way that I can.

470

475

480

Closer to home, I have the privilege of being the constituent MP for the South District, which offers me an opportunity for on-the-ground engagement, listening to concerns, suggestions and solutions from residents in the area and to discuss matters of interest to them. I have held two town hall-type meetings, where some important issues have been raised. These provide an open forum where the voice of the citizen is heard and they can freely contribute to decisions that may have an impact on their lives. It offers a link between the citizen and government bodies, working together for the benefit of the area and proving a very effective way for all of us in government to keep in touch with the people and channel ideas and issues of concern to the appropriate colleague, and it is making a real difference.

485

490

Madam Speaker, I would now like to turn to Heritage. Archaeological monitoring, restoration, heritage assessments and technical advice are consistently being done and further improved. The Heritage and Antiquities Advisory Council continues to thrive, providing me with valuable guidance on all heritage-related matters. Enhancements to the Heritage and Antiquities Act are evident in the recent addition of our first private property to schedule 2, the main and northern façade of the former Central Police Station at Irish Town. This showcases our continuous efforts in bolstering protection, sensitive urban renewal, legislation and policy. Our strong collaboration with private property owners has played a crucial role in achieving this milestone.

495

In April last year we declared Gibraltar's first archaeological site outside Gorham's Complex, in Arengo's Gardens. Our published heritage vision has transformed into a policy document which commits us to carrying out its recommendation during the life of this Parliament. The distribution of interpretation panels across Gibraltar continues to yield positive results and we have planned

500

to instal additional panels that delve into the historical significance of various areas, all of which serve to improve the visitor experience.

505 I am excited to announce a new heritage initiative. This is the placing of informative content about significant individuals from our history, spanning ancient times to the 20th century. Through the installation of these memorials, we aim not only to honour our shared past but also to showcase the valuable contributions made by these individuals.

510 We have partnered with the Naval Museum of Madrid to reproduce the 17th century City of Gibraltar model, which is currently housed in the Spanish capital. This meticulously crafted replica shows the city and its fortifications as they stood prior to the devastating Great Siege, a significant part of our history that remains unseen by many Gibraltarians, and we aspire to exhibit it permanently in Gibraltar.

515 Collaborative efforts are ongoing as the Ministry for Heritage, the Heritage Trust and Alabaré – a UK charity – have once again come together, for the third year running, to enhance our military assets. In May they continued the work on Lord Airey’s Battery. The American War Memorial has also been further improved and restored through another joint project with the American Battle Monuments Commission. The Ministry for Heritage is also collaborating with the former members of the Royal Naval Reserve Unit *HMS Calpe*, to commemorate their valuable contribution to
520 Gibraltar.

The Ministry’s website, which was launched nearly three years ago, continues to be a formidable research tool, constantly being added to. We have introduced a new feature which allows users to take a virtual tour of Nuns’ Well directly from their devices. This includes the whole of the Nun’s Well, including the second chamber and the landscape areas. More virtual tours are
525 planned, further enhancing the experience by offering new, exciting opportunities for those, for example, with mobility issues. By the end of this year, we will have a Register of Historic Buildings, enabling both the public and professionals to access information on our historic properties.

The Southport Gate restoration project was concluded last year, the first instance in over a century that such extensive efforts were undertaken on our city gates. The restoration project at
530 St Mary’s School has also been completed, with its iconic façade now enhancing the overall townscape; a wonderful demonstration of successfully blending traditional and modern elements. Restoration efforts are ongoing at significant locations like the Convent façade and the outer wall of the Moorish Castle complex along Castle Ramp. We are set to undertake significant projects focused on heritage restoration throughout the duration of this parliamentary term, including
535 parts of the Moorish Castle, the Sikorski Memorial, Eastern Beach World War II bunkers and the Southport Gate sentry gun post. The Ministry of Heritage, in collaboration with GJBS has also completed the production of new gun carriages that will be positioned at the Grand Battery Artillery Park.

As I have alluded to already, it is crucial that we prioritise the preservation of more intangible
540 heritage, like our indigenous languages. We are dedicated not only to protecting them but also to actively encouraging their use. This will ensure that both Gibraltarians and visitors can experience the rich multilingual culture of Gibraltar. In coming months, the Ministry has plans to increase the Llanito street name signs across Gibraltar, reminding us of our past. Collaborative efforts with the UK are being made to expand the UNESCO Convention of Intangible Heritage to include Gibraltar.
545 I want to express my appreciation for the efforts of the organisations dedicated to promoting our languages, in particular Gibraltarians for a Multilingual Society, who have forged a strong partnership with the Ministry for Heritage. I trust that the community will rally behind these efforts to safeguard our languages, as it is in the best interests of all individuals to enhance the language proficiency. Anyone who perceives it as a threat is disregarding our history, as well as
550 the rich cultural legacy passed down by our ancestors. How I wish these thoughts would have been in our community when Genoese and Maltese were spoken in our streets, and how wonderfully multilingual we would have been now.

An essential yet often overlooked aspect of the Ministry for Heritage responsibilities involves conducting archaeological supervision via watching briefs, which is done on a wide number of projects.

555

Moving on to the Gibraltar National Museum, it continues to go from strength to strength. Last October, I was pleased to open the Natural History Museum at Parson's Lodge, the first time since the museum opened in Bomb House Lane in 1930 that a new museum had been opened in Gibraltar. A rewilding project to reintroduce Hermann's tortoises is one of the activities of the new museum, in collaboration with Zurich University. This has become the latest component in the strong educational programme that is carried out by the museum, and also includes a facility at Gorham's Cave at Europa Advance. Part of the educational and outreach programme is the annual open day, which this year saw 700 visitors. The annual excavations at the Gorham's Cave Complex start next Sunday and will continue until the end of August. I know that the museum team is excited about returning to the Neanderthals' Grotto, a new site discovered last summer and which had been occupied by Neanderthals 100,000 years ago.

560

565

This year's Calpe Conference takes place later this week on the subject of 'Islands in the Sun'. One intriguing aspect that is emerging from the research being carried out in Gibraltar reveals a connection between Gibraltar and its surrounding hinterland and the offshore Atlantic islands. I have personal knowledge from my own research and I am really looking forward to the event, which opens in a couple of days' time. Looking ahead, I can advance that next year the Calpe Conference will focus on the Second World War, appropriately on the 80th anniversary of the end of the war. I can advance even further, such is the planning that goes into these conferences, that the 2026 conference will be a major event highlighting the Neanderthals, as it will be the 100th anniversary of the discovery of the Gibraltar child's skull at Devil's Tower rock shelter.

570

575

I am also pleased to announce that the museum is now planning to further develop and intensify its publication programme. It is difficult to keep pace with all the new discoveries, so we are to expect many of these chapters of our history, some already published in academic journals, to be made available to a wider audience.

580

The close working relationship with the Gibraltar Heritage Trust continues. As ever, there is mutual support between the Trust and the Ministry on day-to-day work and projects. Witham's Cemetery works are also continuing on the cottage and interpretation centre with government support. We share with the Trust the belief that interest in heritage and concern for the proper care and maintenance of heritage continue to be strong in the community, with high expectations for its conservation.

585

The Gibraltar Garrison Library hit a milestone in 2023 with the commencement of its 230th anniversary, marked with a year-long programme of events starting in August. Not enough is said about the heritage aspects of paper conservation, as attention is often drawn towards bricks and mortar when books and paper are far more vulnerable to the passage of time. A key part of this year, therefore, has been the establishment of a scanning studio for the digitisation of the newsprint archives held at the library, and the creation of a repository; all very generously funded through a grant from the Kusuma Trust. Here we see how digital output will assist in preserving the paper copies, which will be less handled once digitised.

590

The structural and systematic enhancements implemented by this Government have enabled heritage matters to be at the forefront of government policy. The enthusiasm and dedication are evident, as is the fact that we are the sole political assemblage in Gibraltar that listens and has a clear vision and the commitment to safeguard all facets of our heritage, whether tangible or intangible.

595

Madam Speaker, in October I was given responsibility for traffic and transport. I have come to find it both fascinating and challenging, and I am relishing the opportunity to make real improvements on the ground once the House votes the Appropriation Bill through. Among the work being done by the small but dedicated Ministry of Transport team is a review of the Sustainable Traffic Transport and Parking Plan (STTPP) produced by my predecessor, the Hon. Paul Balban, in order to update it, incorporating the principles of the Active Travel Strategy

600

605 and the Climate Change Strategy. This work is well advanced and I expect to publish the update
by the end of the year. Other current initiatives on which we are working include the review of
the Climate Change Strategy transport chapter and a vehicle scrappage scheme which will
incentivise replacement and not penalise retention.

The Ministry has carried out several projects during the year: the new bicycle lane running from
610 the southern airport barrier towards the Sundial Roundabout via Bayside Road, opened by my
predecessor a year ago last month, totalling close on 900,000 trips in the first year. This was
Gibraltar's first dedicated cycle lane, other than Kingsway, and a proud moment for the former
Transport Minister, who called it a transport milestone for Gibraltar, which indeed it was.

Following feedback from bicycle e-cargo bikes and PLET users, in July of last year the
615 Government announced the demarcation of trial e-scooter and bicycle hubs and bays at
approximately 60 locations. These have proved popular with locals and tourists alike. The Ministry
is continuously monitoring the use of these areas in order to carry out improvements where
necessary, and has published a Bill that aims to clarify conditions governing the use of PLETs.

In October last year, phases 2 and 3 of the cycle lane from Ocean Spa Plaza to Watergardens
620 were opened. Further cycle lanes will be provided this coming year to extend the network, some
to be funded privately by developers nearby, and planning is well advanced. We see the
promotion of cycling as key to both our environmental and travel policies, and this must be done
sensibly and taking into account the interests of all road users. Pedestrians will, of course,
continue to take priority, and this year we will see promotion of walking routes around Gibraltar.

625 Madam Speaker, during 2023 the Traffic Commission met a total of six times, reviewing 104
items. So far this year, the Commission has met four times, reviewing 61 items. In November, I
published the Climate Change (Idling of Motor Vehicles) Regulations which make it an offence to
idle within a signposted area. No-idling zones have been introduced around schools and will be
extended to other areas around Gibraltar. Idling significantly increases emissions, with negative
630 effects on the environment and on human health, and around schools these harmful gases are
released close to the height of the children, who will breathe them in directly. I have met with
companies that operate coaches, heavy goods vehicles and private buses and we are working
together, both to establish sites where HGVs can park, and to change their vehicles for lower-
emission vehicles. I hope to develop plans during the coming year and I am very excited about the
635 progress we are making.

Finally on transport, I want to thank the team of professionals at the Ministry for their
knowledge and expertise and for their work. We are bringing modern thinking and dynamism into
the equation to capitalise on a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to deliver the city of the future, and
I am looking forward to the community benefitting from what we are collectively planning.

640 Madam Speaker, this portfolio is a large one and it includes the Driver and Vehicle Licensing
Department, which we all know as DVLD. We are carrying out a full review of the Department as
it continues doing all the necessary amendments to legislation and additional requirements in the
exchange of driving licences, which has proved challenging, and DVLD is working with the Gibraltar
office in Brussels to obtain necessary agreements with EU countries.

645 In line with the manifesto commitment, DVLD will focus on promoting sustainable
transportation and will work towards modernising our approach to vehicle inspection. DVLD is
working to introduce a fully online service, user friendly to all service users as well as to staff. The
user will have access to their profile, by which they will be able to apply for all our services online.
The Department continues to provide an express next-day service to local dealers for new
650 registrations, duplicate certificates etc., and we are gradually introducing this service for the
general public, which will help individuals requiring their vehicle registration urgently.

DVLD managed to secure the reconnection of the European Car and Driving Licence
Information System (EUCARIS), and we are now in the process of signing an agreement with each
EU member state to be able to access and share information on the vehicle, driver registration
and licence exchange. In 2023, DVLD welcomed the introduction of the new penalty points system.
655

It is now endorsing fixed penalty points on drivers' licences and the benefits are noticeable, encouraging safer driving as the threat of penalty points motivates drivers to be more cautious.

660 Madam Speaker, I am working very closely with the Gibraltar Taxi Association in order to improve the taxi service across the board. I want to thank Luis Debono and his committee for their very positive and forward-looking engagement. In particular, thanks to some legislative changes on which we have been working together and with the Transport Commission, the taxi city service is improving its efficiency and reliability and extending its hours into the night with the assistance of our transport inspectors, who monitor and oversee the service. I am very pleased to announce that next week Gibraltar's taxi service will be launching an Uber-type app that will allow booking as well as tracking of taxis, increasing the availability, reliability and efficiency of managing the service. I want to congratulate the Taxi Association for this initiative. Gibraltar has, now, three electric taxis in its fleet and specific charging points are being provided for them.

670 The transport inspector team provides cover on the ground to police transport-related activity throughout Gibraltar. Their duties include overseeing our taxi and bus services and they oversee the provision of the taxi city service throughout the year and ensure that all permits to access pedestrianised areas, particularly those accessed by commercial vehicles, are adhered to. The inspectors, with the approval of the Transport Commission and the support of the Taxi Association, have recently implemented a three-strike warning to any driver or licence holder who fails to comply with the Transport Act. They have also recently implemented a dress code for all drivers to abide by, so as to improve appearance and have uniformity among all taxi drivers. I would like to take the opportunity to thank the entire DVLD for their hard work. They continue to provide a good and efficient service to the public and always seek to improve the services provided.

680 Gibraltar Car Parks continues to provide for the day-to-day management of parking; not an easy task, and one they address diligently. A number of projects have been undertaken this past year which will improve the service. These have included a new top floor at Eastern Beach car park, opening the ground floor of Devil's Tower car park to residents of the North District and provision of a new pay and display area near the Prison.

685 Talking about public buses, new bus stops to cater for changes in demographics are under way as we aim to promote improvements to travel. In March, the Ministry of Transport set up a new bus stop at Hassan Centenary Terraces, heading towards the city centre. School bus S8 had its route revamped and now also serves this bus stop and others along Devil's Tower Road, so more schoolchildren are able to use the school bus while also allowing more space for commuters. We have also improved the South District school bus service. The encouragement and further use of more sustainable transport forms such as public transport is part of the Government's Climate Change Strategy and Active Travel Strategy, and so we will have continuous revision and upgrades to the current bus service.

690 The new Upper Town bus tender was published just a few weeks ago and we will be providing new, cleaner engines to some of the fleet to extend their life. We are also encouraging and assisting private bus operators and transport companies to replace older, polluting vehicles with newer, more environmentally friendly commercial vehicles. We will be acquiring a new ticketing system, which will lead to faster issuing of tickets and better gathering of data, and within a few weeks all our buses will be able to accept card payments.

700 I want to thank everyone at the Bus Company for making me feel so welcome during my visits and for the work that they do to keep the buses rolling, providing such an important service as an alternative to the use of personal vehicles. We have an excellent bus service to be proud of, thanks to the work of the drivers, support staff and management, and working together we will continue to make significant improvements.

705 Madam Speaker, yet another recently acquired portfolio is Infrastructure and the Technical Services. I have set up regular Infrastructure co-ordination meetings to ensure collaboration between all Departments and Agencies, to maximise efficiency of work and minimise disruption to the public. Areas where I have co-ordinated Infrastructure meetings include Bayside and the

710 Upper Rock. The Department has continued to provide technical support to government
Ministries and Departments on a wide range of construction and traffic matters, as well as
meeting their responsibility to maintain public infrastructure. Projects have included extensive
tunnel repairs in Keightley Way Tunnel, the repair of retaining walls, critical highways
infrastructure, maintenance, as well as general sewer maintenance and improvement works. In
addition, it provides support to the implementation of projects related to the STTPP.

715 On highways maintenance, the works programme has once again been successful with ongoing
repairs to roads, footpaths and retaining walls. The team of highways inspectors carries out
regular inspections of all our roads and footpaths and reacts to reports received from the public.
In addition, with approval from the Traffic Commission, it has installed a number of traffic calming
measures on various roads in an effort to improve vehicle and pedestrian safety.

720 This year will see the continuation of our comprehensive road surfacing scheme. Over the last
few years, a very significant number of roads have been resurfaced and this was progressed
further during the last year with over 13,200 square metres being done. Funding in the order of
£1 million has been included in this year's Estimates, reflecting our commitment to ensure
continuing works to our road network. The replacement and enhancement of pelican crossing
lights and equipment will continue during this year, jointly with the GEA, and the Department will
725 continue to review all existing light-controlled crossings and provide further countdown timers in
areas where these are required.

Regarding coastal engineering, TSD continues to monitor and carry out maintenance and repair
work. The Department also continues to provide advice to developers and the DPC on aspects of
coastal engineering. During this financial year, the TSD will be reviewing the existing defences at
730 Eastern Beach and Sandy Bay. The Department has been involved in schemes including
stabilisation works at Laguna, Sir Herbert Miles Road and the Upper Rock. There is continuous
work carried out to minimise the risk and impact of rockfalls, and this coming year works will be
carried out to repair and upgrade some of our rock catch fences. During the last year, works have
also been done to a number of retaining walls in various parts of Gibraltar.

735 Moving to sewers, the Infrastructure section of the Department continued to maintain the
public sewerage network as part of the major desilting and relining works on the main sewer
commenced several years ago. The section relined a further 100 m of the main sewer along the
north end of Line Wall Road, meaning that to date approximately 70% of the main sewer within
the city walls has been relined. As part of this project, TSD also cleaned and desilted some 400 m
740 of the main sewer. While on the subject, I am hopeful that following the tender the current work
with the preferred bidder, which is progressing well, will progress quickly now and allow us to
finally proceed with our wastewater treatment plant.

745 Finally, funding is once again being allocated for the purchase of equipment for the Sewer
Infrastructure section, and the Garage and Workshop, which continues to provide a service to
maintain the fleet of government vehicles, including the refuse-collection vehicles. I intend, this
year, to complete the review of both the Garage and Workshop and the Technical Services
Department as a whole, to make its operation more focused, efficient and effective.

I would like to take the opportunity to publicly thank the Infrastructure section and on-call
officers and the whole of TSD for their hard work and commitment during those times in the past
750 year when Gibraltar has suffered from storms and very heavy rain. It is thanks to the dedication
of this team, while most of us are at home, that the impact of these storms is not greater on both
our sewerage and road networks. TSD is one of those Departments that is rarely in the limelight
but works tirelessly behind the scenes to deliver on their wide responsibility and also actively
supports other key projects for the Government, including support to the Chief Technical Officer
755 in the delivery of reclamation works at Coaling Island.

I will now move to Education, the last of my responsibilities to report on.
Nicholas Alexander Ferroni is big on 'X'. In his profile, he writes, 'As a kid, I wanted to be a
superhero, psychologist, philanthropist, philosopher, actor and comedian, so I became a teacher.'
How well that statement fits what a teacher is, the profession with which I have the pleasure to

760 work so closely and which I have grown to respect and love even more over the almost eight years
that I have been Minister for Education. Twentieth-century writer Elias Canetti wrote of a child,
‘His head is made of stars, but not yet arranged into constellations.’ It is teachers who will help
the child to arrange those stars into shining constellations and will make stars of our children. It is
765 an absolute privilege to work in Education and a tremendous responsibility. Our policies and our
actions will have a lasting effect on the children of the present and the adults of the future.

This Government has totally transformed education. When I see in the media the deteriorated
state of schools in the UK, the difficulties families there have even in getting their children into
schools nearby – sometimes having to travel eight hours there and back, and we panic when our
children get sent to St Mary’s instead of Governor’s Meadow – I am reminded of just how lucky
770 we are here and what an outstanding education system we have. All this thanks to the vision and
commitment of GSLP and GSLP Liberal Governments.

The Department of Education is a very large Department with 1,519 employees. This, together
with the expanse and complexity of the estate and the large number of pupils under our care –
6,321 at the latest count, plus the 1,133 sponsored students on scholarships – means that we look
775 after nearly 9,000 members of our community. It also means that our budget has to be prudently
managed to ensure the appropriate financial investment is directed towards all the elements of
our complex requirements.

Our core responsibility is to ensure that our 16 schools and educational settings provide
welcoming, safe, nurturing spaces for the children and young people. We strive to make certain
780 that our learning framework across these settings supports children in a holistic manner so that
they develop a wide range of skills that will enable them to contribute positively to society now
and in the future. As never before, we endeavour to personalise learning to meet each child and
young person’s needs, and we work with partner agencies to ensure equitable access to learning
and to direct specific specialist professional support, where that is required. We aspire to facilitate
785 the realisation of each individual child’s potential, so that they complete a broad set of
qualifications at the end of Key Stage 4 and can continue their journey into Key Stage 5 and beyond
into higher education, if so desired. We acknowledge that if we succeed – through our buildings,
staff, practical resources, ethos and procedures – in creating learning environments which are
secure and stimulating, children and young people will have the best chance to achieve happiness
790 and success, whatever their academic abilities may be.

Throughout a pupil’s school journey, we strive to develop self-awareness and promote future
pathways appropriate to each individual’s strengths and attributes, so that we can support their
subsequent entry into the world of work. This includes addressing the needs of individuals who
require a supported employment placement. This has not always been the case, and this
795 educational philosophy, with which I personally associate, has developed and been nurtured over
the past decade by the amazing teaching professionals in our schools. This pupil-centred ethos
was beautifully demonstrated at St Mary’s Lower Primary this term, when, as well as a sports day,
which plays to the skills of some pupils, they had an arts day and a STEM day, giving the chance to
pupils with other skills to showcase. It is just one example that I happened to attend recently, but
800 the principle is widespread in our schools.

I am now going to list, briefly, some performance highlights. We have reviewed many aspects
of the scholarship process, including the establishment of key working practices and the
implementation of a scholarship handbook.

We have digitised all public-facing forms and processes, increasing efficiency and improving
805 the experience of stakeholders.

We have established and embedded a revised approach to catchment areas for our schools,
using GIS.

We have established focused, whole-service CPD days during which all 1,000-plus Education
staff come together on the same site to partake in developmental opportunities and cross-sector
810 dialogue.

We are continuing our focus on training staff to develop skills in supporting children with social, emotional and mental health needs.

We are continuing our proactive ethos in nurturing well-being, so that all children are better equipped to face adverse life situations.

815 We have worked on the development of an attendance strategy through a focused working party, with the aims of raising awareness in the community and further embedding processes and strategies to address poor attendance.

We have continued to embed safeguarding practices through training, consultative processes, professional meetings and targeted training.

820 Staff well-being is high on our agenda, as it is an important aspect of our strategic investment in supporting children and young people.

We have ensured equity of provision across the secondary sector: boys and girls now do exactly the same and have exactly the same opportunities.

825 We work outside the box to personalise programmes for children and young people who are not able to engage meaningfully within the mainstream provision, and we are happy to give them numerous chances and repeat opportunities in order to support their journey.

We champion pupil and staff well-being needs and have consolidated occupational health and mental health support pathways for our employees.

We continue to invest in training teachers to best adapt to the evolving National Curriculum.

830 We are supporting the training of early career teachers with a tiered mentorship support structure.

We provide experienced mentoring to PGCE students in the University of Gibraltar.

In the long-term, we aim to develop a more equitable TLR structure in schools and to ensure that workload is fairly remunerated across all schools.

835 We have transformed the middle leadership and management structure of St Martin's School through a revamp of the teaching structure. This has already enhanced the provision significantly, with the tiered leadership and management structure now increasingly being able to strategically plan for and respond to the large pupil and staff cohorts.

840 We will have an educational psychology traineeship in place next academic year, which will help us double the complement of this much-needed profession.

We will continue to positively review the role and remuneration of SENCos, school counsellors and other non-teaching staff.

845 We are actively looking at more purposeful organisational leadership and management structure for the Gibraltar College, which will be informed by the plans for the new College and the developments in curriculum towards which we are striving.

850 Madam Speaker, given the increase in supported needs children (SEND) in our schools, I commissioned a study into the likely causes of this increase, which we published several months ago. I want to thank Director of Public Health Dr Helen Carter and author of the report Una Geary for the time and focus dedicated to the study, and all the individuals who participated. We have looked carefully at the recommendations of the report, especially those that have a direct correlation with the work we have responsibility for within Education, and are reviewing what we currently do and exploring ways in which we can continue to address these issues within our school settings.

855 In order to support pupils with SEND in an increasingly inclusive manner, last September we opened new learning support facilities (LSFs) catering for nursery and reception-age pupils in our lower primary schools. We also increased the vocational courses on offer at the Gibraltar College so that young people have an extended range of opportunities. This coming September we will be opening another LSF in St Bernard's Upper Primary School to further develop our provision in this regard. Having LSFs in the majority of our schools increases the opportunity for children on
860 outreach programmes to attend their catchment school and supports our promotion of inclusive practices. We have linked up with a special school in the UK which recently received an

outstanding Ofsted report, and will continue to develop a contact network within this specialist field.

865 Many of the other things we have in place to support pupils with SEND are still the same and ongoing, including continued support for pupils at key times of transition between sectors, enhancing our offer of post-16 provision for young people and inclusion of some of the St Bernadette's users identified as those who will benefit from attending some courses at the Gibraltar College. To this end we are developing our use of technology, visual support and communication aids to more effectively support pupils.

870 Madam Speaker, I have set up two curriculum-focused working parties. One is looking at expanding the vocational provision and endeavouring to develop progressive pathways linked to our community's needs, and the second is looking at our examination and qualification offering and reviewing this in order to establish if any changes should be made. The International Baccalaureate is one possible avenue being studied. The working parties will report back to me at
875 the end of the year.

With regard to new vocational courses, in September 2023 we introduced a City and Guilds Award in Design Craft/Fashion Wear and eSports BTech Level 2 qualifications. Two further vocational courses, the Cambridge International in Sport Studies and the City and Guilds Level 1 Award in Construction, are being offered in September 2024. We plan to establish the Science and
880 IT in-sector and cross-sector working parties and curriculum groups in this coming September to look at further widening the options available.

We have invested and will continue to invest in new hardware devices to enhance the learning experience. This includes new SMART boards, interactive TVs, desktop computers and Spheros robots. We are planning to pilot the use of virtual reality in our schools to further enhance
885 teaching and learning. We have increased the number of iPads available in all schools and will continue to do so with the aim of eventually providing each pupil with an iPad.

Continuous professional development has been arranged to improve the use of the SeeSaw platform, which is used by all primary schools.

890 Working in conjunction with GibSams, £52,000 was donated to mental health projects by CAF. These have been progressed since the last Budget, with many initiatives including trauma communication training, which was delivered to over 400 education staff.

The school counsellor team is fast approaching its fifth anniversary, and it is hard to understand how we coped without them. The service has embedded itself positively into the education system and provides a holistic approach to pupil support, with many children and young people engaging.
895 In September 2023 the team adopted a new database system. It is already becoming evident from the outputs that family or domestic issues are highlighted as a prevalent theme, suggesting that family therapy interventions may be required moving forward. The counselling team has been supporting Level 4 Diploma in Therapeutic Counselling College students by providing guidance and placements in educational settings. We remain committed to increasing the number of school
900 counsellors during the lifetime of this Parliament.

The Department, in collaboration with the Cardiac Association, the GHA, St John Ambulance and the GFRS, have co-ordinated the positioning of five automated emergency defibrillators (AEDs) outside government schools.

895 We have a very close working relationship with many Departments and Agencies, always working together in the best interests of the young in our community. These include the Care Agency, the RGP, Environment, Public Health, the GHA, Industrial Relations, the University of Gibraltar, Personnel and Development, the Youth Service, Equality, the Training Centre, the Gibraltar Law Offices, ITLD, Digital Services, Civil Contingencies and many others across the board, because Education touches everywhere and everywhere wants to support education.

910 With the number of staff and the constraints on time, planning and timetabling that working to strict academic years places upon us, processes that work for other Government Departments do not work as well for Education. For this reason we are overhauling our internal recruitment

framework to ensure a more robust and fair approach to recruiting the best staff, according to school, subject and pupil needs, in a timely manner.

915 We intend to finalise the review of the TLRs and wider leadership and management structure across the service. We endeavour to ensure the implementation of our Department's net zero sectoral plan. We strive to improve attendance levels across our schools. We aim to increase our range of vocational offerings. We aspire to develop more access pathways in our post-16 provision, working with other agencies for learners with more acute learning needs, with the new
920 Gibraltar College facilitating this workstream. We intend to establish a mechanism to increase the Department's visibility over private schools and establish safety and safeguarding regulatory requirements for private nurseries.

Madam Speaker, during the last, and still recent, election campaign I should have charged royalties to my GLSP Liberal running mates for the use of our new schools in most of their speeches
925 at hustings. The truth is that what we have achieved in Education, both in the way that we teach and where we teach, is unbelievable and probably world beating. All of us said during the campaign, 'Ten new schools in 12 years,' when the GSD constructed zero new schools in 16; worse than that, they ran them almost to the ground. It is hard to believe that the latest three new schools were only opened this academic year, just 10 months ago. Already they feel well lived-in
930 and loved, with our magnificent teachers having added their hearts to their professionalism, and with the new Governor's Meadow, Bishop Fitzgerald and St Mary's Schools now thriving in their brand-new sites. *Se dice muy fácil*, but a great deal of work goes into it, and I do not just mean by the contractors. The way we do it is that the detailed preparation, design, selection of equipment, adjustment, correcting and improving are all monitored at a meeting that I chair every two weeks,
935 with the schools' teams, developers, contractors and specialists all involved, thus ensuring that they are exactly what the children need to thrive on their educational journeys. The results are there for all so see. We are now embarking on a similar process in the remaining four schools – Gibraltar College, Hebrew Primary and St Joseph's Upper and Lower – and in the increase in size of provision for St Martin's, all set out in our manifesto. This will bring a great deal of work, but we are experts at new schools now, and I am relishing it.
940

As I have said before, I see the Gibraltar College as the Department of Education institution that will grow and expand more than any other in the near future. One of the successes of the College this year has been in its work on training counsellors, with the UK awarding body, who
945 visited Gibraltar, considering the delivery of the course at the College to be outstanding in quality and achievement. In these days of demands on mental health support, training proper qualified counsellors is critically important and is receiving the support of the GHA, the Care Agency and the Government's well-being team. The College is already expanding its offer, partnering with external bodies like GAMPA, Mayfair on Main and Bassadone Motors. In adult education alone, this year they have held 33 courses with 286 students enrolled across these.

950 Data are key to understanding and informing what we do and how we develop policies. Last year we conducted a survey on vaping, in conjunction with the GRA. We are planning to survey the forms of transport children use to access schools and are working with the University of Gibraltar on the use of electronic devices, including video games, so that we can inform our developing policies.

955 I have mentioned language several times, and I do so again in the context of education. Education has been blamed by some for the alleged loss of the Spanish language element of Llanito. That might have been so when I was in school and when a word of Spanish would be rewarded with a thwack on the hand with a thick leather strap, but that is no more the case. While the language of learning – because of the examinations our students sit – is English, our
960 bilingual/multilingual identity is accepted and indeed encouraged in our schools. I firmly believe that we have caught this in time and saved our linguistic diversity, as exemplified not just by the *villancicos* in our Christmas concerts but by the nurse song sung by many of our schoolchildren where 'Incy Wincy Spider climbed up the spout' has been replaced with '*Incy Winsy araña se fue a la caleta*'. *Si queréis lo canto completo, pero bastante largo es este speech ya*, so I won't.

965 Madam Speaker, some Members of the Opposition seem to enjoy having a go at me for
regularly introducing new legislation. I am, indeed, responsible – I have counted – for close to 300
legal instruments over the past 12½ years, ranging through Health, Public Health, Education,
Environment to Transport and Traffic. I make no apology for this, and indeed I have a lot more in
the pipeline. During the course of the last financial year, both before and after the election, we
970 have totally revamped the Education and Training Act; I thank the Hon. Mr Reyes for co-operating
tremendously on that. I have introduced legislation on environmental governance, heritage, metal
detecting, contaminated land, litter, recycling, vehicle idling, and yes, Mr Clinton, ivory. More
legislation is on the Order Paper to be taken during this or subsequent sessions of Parliament, or
to be published as regulations, covering, for example, animals and road traffic accidents, the
975 keeping of animals, regulation of public service vehicles, restriction of smoking on the Upper Rock,
cycling, control of major accident hazards, genetically modified organisms, nuisances, and PLETS,
and we will publish revised schedules to accompany the Education and Training Act in relation to
nurseries, scholarships and curriculum.

980 Before I conclude – I am getting there – I want to mention my friend and former colleague in
my journey in the Botanic Gardens, Andrew Abrines, who retired recently and was honoured just
two weeks ago by being awarded this year’s prestigious Banksian Medal of the Royal Horticultural
Society: quite an achievement.

I also want to add my personal recognition of the work of my late friend Daphne Alcantara. I
remember that one of my first actions on being elected Minister in December 2011 was to approve
985 the purchase of a new seat for a close relative of Daphne at KGV, which had been denied
previously, a relative with dementia who was being treated in the wrong place and in the wrong
way. We worked very closely together since then to put that right, to develop dementia homes
and dementia care and to provide headquarters for her society. This is just one personal anecdote
but the value of her work, as we all know, extended well beyond and touched many. **(Several**
990 **Members: Hear, hear.)** *(Banging on desks)* I acknowledge the acknowledgement of the
Opposition, because all in this House, I am sure, are as one in remembering Daphne.

Finally, as ever, I wish to express my thanks to all the staff, including my amazing personal
Ministry staff, the best Ministry team that I have ever had, for looking after me; and, of course, to
my Heads of Departments and CEOs, Keri Scott, Emil Hermida, Stephen Warr and Mark Boulton,
995 and their staff for their hard work every day and for their constant support.

Madam Speaker, as I said last year, the administrative staff in my Departments, some of whom
look after sections that are huge in terms of personnel and responsibility, are essential to the
running of the Departments and keeping Gibraltar going. We have increased so much in outcomes
and delivery that sometimes it appears that those in the offices doing the accounts, managing the
1000 leave, preparing the salaries and wages are not appreciated. They most certainly are, and I am
totally committed to recognising and responding to their needs.

My thanks to all the schools, who make me feel so welcome on all my visits; to all the staff in
the agencies, companies and contractors that work to my Departments; to NASUWT, UNITE and
GGCA; to the Chamber of Commerce and the Federation of Small Businesses; to all the NGOs –
1005 environmental, heritage, cycling, too many to list, who are so committed to what they believe in,
often working as volunteers – for being committed, honest and reasonable in pursuing their aims;
to all those many citizens appointed to voluntary commissions, boards, working groups and
committees for which I am responsible; and to those in other Departments with whom I have
regular contact, such as the staff at No. 6, including the Offices of the Chief Minister and the
1010 Deputy Chief Minister, the Chief Secretary – former and current – and staff, the Financial Secretary
and staff, the Chief Technical Officer and his staff, the Civil Contingencies Co-ordinator and his
staff, the Director of Personnel and Development and his team, and the Attorney-General and all
at the Gibraltar Law Offices for always being there when I need them. Thanks also to you, Madam
Speaker, and your staff. You have stepped into the role in the way that those of us who knew you
1015 knew you would, with firmness and understanding – not a mean feat, considering what sometimes

transpires here – and, of course, to the Chief Minister, Deputy Chief Minister and my colleagues old and new.

1020 Gibraltar is blessed. No matter what may come our way, we will take it and shape it and emerge all the stronger for it, but to do this we need not just the determination and mettle of the
1025 Gibraltarian but also the vision and leadership of a good government, of *this* Government. Adversarial politics may be fine for some, and I think we will see quite a bit of that over the next few days, but it can get in the way of us seeing that there are times when we need to be united, that we have common enemies who relish the sight of us trying to tear each other apart. We have more important things coming. We have an international audience out there, no doubt monitoring our every word.

I will end by repeating here what I said to an international audience at Gibraltar Day in London's Somerset House. I wondered what the many dignitaries present thought of Gibraltar. Here is what I said:

And I quote, think that it is fair of me to ask, what comes into your mind when you hear the word 'Gibraltar', and to ask you to consider what 'Gibraltar' means to you. Do you think of the majesty of its geology, of the impact of its geography, the importance of its history, from Neanderthal to 20th-century war, of its biodiversity, its location as a focus for migrating birds, its monkeys, even? Or do you see it as a finance centre, an insurance hub, or a tourist destination? It is any of these and all, and many other things besides, such a small place inspiring so many perceptions.

Well, to me, it is home. A home where I was born and raised, under the Union Flag that crowned the Rock, and crowns it still, with freedoms that I took for granted and that for much of my youth were not shared by those who lived but metres away to the north. A home where language and gastronomy do not define and are not defined by sovereignty; a home where art thrives, dance excels and music drifts across our rugged landscape, often dressed in red and white; a home with a growing depth and breadth of literature already making its mark away from our shores.

Distinguished guests, I say all this because, above all, Gibraltar is about Gibraltar, about its identity and about who we, its people, are; a small nation that is like no other – that *is* like no other – that will survive simply because it is. Let everyone remember that!

1030 Madam Speaker, with apologies for the length but with pride as to the content, I too commend the Appropriation Bill to the House.

Deputy Chief Minister (Hon. Dr J J Garcia): Madam Speaker, may I propose we recess until 4 p.m. today?

1035 **Madam Speaker:** We will recess until 4 p.m. this afternoon.

The House recessed at 12.36 p.m.