



# Peter Biggs

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# Election Manifesto



I believe in complete equality of reward and opportunity, and that the work of the Government should be as transparent as possible. I have a good understanding of the Falkland Islands Government and how it operates, including its strengths and weaknesses. I think the foundation of good governance is to take special care of the young and the old and vulnerable, and to ensure that everyone has access to good quality healthcare, a full range of educational development, and freedom to say and do whatever they want within the law.

## POLITICAL STABILITY

When quantifying the government priorities of the Falkland Islands I believe the story starts with **political stability**. We have seen how precarious that is, and we should never lose sight of the vital role our allegiance with the United Kingdom has in our future. I also believe that the representatives of the people of the Falkland Islands should always be involved in any decisions or discussions regarding the future of the Falklands. I live in the hope that one day Argentina will mature into a democracy that respects the democratic rights of the people of the Falkland Islands, and until that day we should maintain the moral high ground and never reduce our vigilance.

## THE ENVIRONMENT

The second priority is **the environment**. The Falklands is relatively small, in global terms, and the truth is that we do not have any “environment” to spare. Larger countries act as if they can afford to “write off” large areas for commercial exploitation/experimentation, while the rest of the county gets on with its business. I think that is a fatally flawed approach that will come back to haunt future generations in many parts of the world. While serving as your representative I will do everything in my power to ensure that the Falkland Islands does not let our near pristine environment be used for industries that may bring about its ruin. Many people see this time as a tipping point for humanity, and even in the relative isolation of the Falklands we cannot escape the realities of climate change and environmental deterioration. Now is the time to shift up a gear in preparation for the major changes to our way of doing things that will be required if we are to fulfil our share of reducing atmospheric carbon. I believe we have two immediate-action responsibilities, as a government, corporately and individually: the first is to do whatever we can to reduce or stop further environmental damage (sewage and waste management and fishing industry detritus are just two obvious priorities); the second is to work towards reducing the carbon output of the FI using alternative energy solutions and increasing the thermal efficiency of homes and other buildings.

I must acknowledge the good work that has already taken place in the Falklands towards preserving the environment, namely in the installation of wind electrical generation by FIG, and the schemes and incentives for wind and solar solutions that are increasingly available for farms and individuals. We hope that the new power generation plant for the Stanley area, when it happens, will have flexibility for future connectivity with alternative energy systems linked to housing and other buildings. I am also aware of the work that has already been done towards the Stanley sewage system and waste/recycling management. Every effort must be made

for these projects to be carried on to a successful conclusion.

I was pleased to see the publication of the Environment Strategy and I see it as a useful tool to assist the planning of a phased reduction of the carbon footprint of the Falkland Islands.

I will push for a commitment from FIG to request all government departments to consider the environment in everything they do, and for the population to do the same.

I also recognise the tireless efforts of Falklands Conservation and many other organizations and individuals towards protecting the future of the Falkland Islands and attempting to repair erosion damage and repel invasive species.

## THE ECONOMY

The third priority is the **economy of the Falkland Islands**. The economy of the Falklands is still strong, and balanced budgets are still attainable. **Capital projects** that have been put off for years are now being addressed and these will put a huge strain on government income and reserves and will test the ability of government departments and contractors to plan accurate financial forecasts. A factor for resolution is whether more than one capital project can be developed at any one time. The new port facility, possibly one of the largest construction projects to be undertaken by the FIG, is now in the advanced planning stage. Key to the success of this project is the accurate and comprehensive assessment of the design requirements of potential users. Other major projects in development are the replacement power station for Stanley and the vulnerable persons unit.

These ambitious projects will be made more difficult by global industrial supply chain problems and rising transport and material prices. It is essential that the new assembly review the capital projects in the early stages of their office. For the port project and other capital works to give best value to the Falklands it is essential that there is maximum involvement of local businesses. It is inevitable that a substantial part of the workforce required will have to come from overseas, probably on an unaccompanied basis, and the Falkland Islands Government will have to do whatever is required to expedite this process in a way that satisfies immigration and medical regulations. The **shortage of labour** generally is an ongoing problem that is tied in with various elements of the infrastructure and immigration system. This reminds us of the importance of having an immigration system that gives priority to people who will fill gaps in the labour force skills base.

The new Assembly is faced with existing plans for the government to borrow a large amount of money to fund a project. The Falkland Islands is in the relatively good position it is now because in the past we have resisted the temptation to borrow. I want the new Assembly to look carefully at any existing plans that involve FIG debt, and to be completely transparent regarding the consequences of borrowing, including interest calculations and repayment schedules.

There has been great progress on the work done to the MPA/Stanley road, and it is pleasing to see FIG using a seasonal tempo of work effectively. The employment of specialised staff for this task demonstrates an effective method of operation that may be used for other larger projects.

The **cost of the public service** in the FI has increased alarmingly over the last ten years: I want the new assembly to work with the administration in assessing the reasons for this increase, and to work out ways of streamlining the service to improve value for money. I mean no disrespect to the people that work in the Public Service, and I can see that they produce some wonderful work, but the machine has to be proportional to the size of the Service, and that is not currently the case. There is also a need to check that the policy formulation process has not become blurred between the administration and Legislative Assembly: MLAs are elected to create policy, the administration are hired to carry policies forward– this must be transparent at all times.

I am in favour of annually looking at the **taxation system** with a view to possibly increasing the personal

allowance to ease the tax burden on the lower paid.

I would like to see the Falkland Islands Government modernise its financial systems to provide electronic payments.

The **Fishing Industry** generates the majority of FIG's revenue. I am aware it has recently been subject to increased licensing expenses and more stringent conditions. It is essential that the fishing industry develops and thrives, and that FIG is part of that process in supporting it with efficient services and effective and scientifically sound monitoring of fish stocks, combined with a fair and transparent licensing regime. A stable administration system that provides the industry with the reassurance required to invest and grow is the best way forward. In return for stability the industry should strive to become as clean as possible, with no sea dumping of non-biodegradable rubbish, fishing equipment or fuels and lubricants.

## THE LAND

The **farming industry** is more than farming sheep and other animals. Farmers and farm owners are the custodians of the land of the Falklands, and they are now facing some huge challenges. The general trend for less rain in the essential "top-up" phase of the year is starting to result in ponds and land becoming noticeably drier all year round, with consequential reduced plant growth and animal health problems. There may be lessons to be learnt from other areas of the world that have similar vegetation and land characteristics and are experiencing similar problems. In any case FIG should be getting the best advice as quickly as possible, before the situation results in more irreversible erosion. One of the tasks of the new Assembly must be to consider all options for supporting the camp population, diversifying where possible (but not at the expense of ruining the coastal waters!) and enhancing the essential services (ferry and supply shipping, road repairs/haulage, FIGAS, etc). I know there are some good ideas out there, on carbon offset and using land that is unsuitable for livestock, that are worthy of serious consideration. It is hoped that wool prices will increase as the world economy resets itself, post covid. In the meantime, FIG should continue to support the farming community with a fair wool purchase scheme where necessary.

The potential of **tourism throughout the camp** is growing all the time, and hopefully FIG and its agencies can work together towards more diversification, development, and an increasingly well-connected rural community. There is increased use of wind and solar power sources in camp and FIG should recognise and encourage those who have the initiative and energy to push this carbon reducing innovation forward.

## TOURISM

The years immediately before the start of the pandemic showed **tourism** developing quickly in the Falklands. In some areas it is true to say that tourism demand was outstripping supply, and FIG and the Tourist Board must continue to provide encouragement and incentives to enhance facilities in Stanley and the rest of the Falklands. The Trip scheme was a good initiative, and I am pleased to see it continue into 21/22.

The question of **re-opening the Falklands to tourism** is made more difficult by the need to accept that there is limited medical resilience in the Falklands. Following the extensive vaccination programmes throughout the world, the next couple of months will show how the pandemic is shaping. If the signs are right, I am in favour of allowing tourist ships access to the Falklands, subject to having completed an appropriate period of isolation at sea. I am also in favour of a cautious re-opening of the **South American airtlink**, however any reopening of the Falklands to tourism will have to depend upon an acceptable risk assessment at the time.

An important point to bear in mind is that **tourism** is more than taking people to see penguins. Tourism provides a wonderful opportunity for the Falklands to showcase what it has to offer, and every driver and tour guide has a chance to make a difference in being a positive influence on those they host.

## EDUCATION & MEDICAL AND SOCIAL SERVICES

**Education and training** continues efficiently despite overcrowding. The creation of a training centre has provided great facilities for other methods of training, but staff and pupils must be feeling the strain of having school classes scattered in different buildings and church halls. There have been future proofing problems with previous I&J School extensions, however the current problem is that there is no more space for expansion. A plan must soon be made as to the priority of expanding school accommodation for both the F.I. Community School and the I&J School.

I am a firm supporter of providing **higher education** opportunities, both academic and vocational, for all students. I think the current system is fit for purpose and is a source of pride for the residents of the Falklands.

Looking after the ill and vulnerable is the mark of a good society and I am pleased that we can still afford to do this through our **Medical and Social Services**. I take this opportunity to register my praise for people in those services, and other parts of community, that were on the front-line during the pandemic, especially in the time prior to vaccination.

## COMMUNICATIONS

**Communications** in the Falklands continue to develop; however, internet speeds and reliability continue to be points of hot debate. I am aware of the challenges that must exist in providing telephone and internet services over such a large area populated by so few. That is one of the reasons why it is understandable that many people in the Falklands are excited by the advent of Starlink, which seems designed to solve the problems of internet connection, especially in remote locations. I know there are contractual reasons for the exclusion of Starlink in the Falklands, however I believe MLAs should ensure the appropriate research is carried out to fully understand the situation, and to ensure the best possible service is available in the Islands.

## IMMIGRATION

The first member of my family came here in 1842, and yes, you guessed correctly, he was an immigrant! **Immigration** is a hot topic at the moment; however, I am sure the current immigration policy was approved by MLAs. My view on immigration is that there should be a structured system that allows entry to those who will make a positive contribution to the Falklands. People that have skills and qualities that are needed in the Falklands should get some priority. We have restrictions on people from outside of the Falklands buying property as we must – the Falklands is a relatively small place with relatively low property prices, which we must protect if we want a healthy housing market for the residents of the Falklands.

## IN SUMMARY

To summarise my position as an election candidate: I am standing for election because I care about the Falkland Islands. I want to save what we have for future generations. We are extremely lucky to live in a country where the environment is still in near pristine condition. What we must do is prevent further damage and change some aspects of how we live, and we can have a sustainable future. I am a good listener and will carefully consider all views given to me; all decisions I make will be those I consider best for the future of the Falklands and the people that live here.

### Contact details

House: 21068

Email: [pbiggs@horizon.co.fk](mailto:pbiggs@horizon.co.fk)

Mobile: 55009