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Open letter to the Chief Pleas of Sark
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Dear Chief Pleas

VISIT TO SARK

I am writing to thank you for your hospitality during my visit to Sark in June. My apologies for the delay in writing to you.

Sark is a very beautiful island and I greatly enjoyed exploring it and meeting a diverse range of Sarkees. I am also grateful for the kind gift of a print of Sark, which will be displayed in my private office as a reminder both of my visit and my role as Minister with responsibility for the constitutional relationship with the Crown Dependencies.

I am particularly grateful to the General Purposes and Advisory Committee for providing my officials with your briefing paper ahead of my visit. This was very helpful in focusing our discussions on the issues you identified as being priorities for securing Sark's future and I was grateful for updates in those areas. The key now is to focus on delivery of those priority issues, to engage with the community (a priority you have identified in itself) on them so that they understand what has been prioritised, why and to provide the community with a clear understanding about how they can engage with and feed into the process of government. I am pleased to note that Chief Pleas met yesterday to debate and decide on the future structure of Chief Pleas committees. This is an important step forward and I hope one that will assist you to improve good governance on the island and progress your other priority areas of work. I would find it very useful if you could let me know what time scales you are planning to progress the other individual strands of work and where you feel our support may be most needed so that my officials can plan ahead.

I was also pleased to meet with representatives of Sark's business community, who put forward a range of views about how best to secure the Island's economic future. There did appear to be a consensus that land reform is a priority in this regard, and I am pleased to see that this issue is in your prioritisation plan. I would encourage you to communicate your policy intentions clearly to the wider public. This will not only help to reassure investors but will also ensure that all parts of the community can contribute to debate on this important issue.

It will be crucial to ensure that, before any land reform legislation is drafted, the legal issues are examined in detail so that there is a clear understanding of the consequences of changing legislation of several centuries' standing. I understand you are exploring ways of doing this, however, it will be particularly important to pay regard to the potential impact of any such changes on other legal rights during the course of your considerations.

I look forward to hearing further about the progress that you make with respect to issues of policing and rule of law, particularly in light of your review of policing on the Island. These are key elements of good governance and it is vital that the people of Sark feel confident in coming forward and reporting any allegations of harassment.

As ever, my Department and the other 'Friends of Sark' stand ready to support you in your important work of securing Sark's future.

I would be grateful if you could convey my thanks to your Senior Administrator, your officials and those members of the community who assisted in organising this successful visit programme.

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Edward Faulks

EDWARD FAULKS