

General Election 26 MWT Candidate Question Briefing

This document provides an overview of the questions that will be asked during a short 30-minute Microsoft Teams conversation with Manx Wildlife Trust.

The purpose of the conversation is to understand your views on nature and the environment ahead of the General Election. A single summary blog will be published for MWT's 1,200 members and the wider public. All candidates are being offered the same opportunity and asked the same core questions.

The call will be recorded only to support accurate note taking. Candidates who choose not to participate will be listed in the published blog.

1. Values Based Question - What personal experiences have shaped your view of the natural environment in the Isle of Man?

My grandmother was an early member of the Manx Nature Conservation Trust, which later became the Manx Wildlife Trust. My mother is a volunteer with the Manx BirdLife charity, and has been involved in the establishment and operation of the Point of Ayre National Reserve. She's also involved with organising a citizen science project to record breeding long-eared owls, and is usually vying for top spot on the local on eBird listings. I've spent most of my life closely involved in what some might call 'non-intensive' agriculture, independently creating significant 'wildlife zones' in the process. The older I get, the more I appreciate and spend time in the world-class natural resource we have here - hill walking pretty much every week.

2. Quick Headline Questions (Yes or No)

1. Are you interested in environmental issues in the Isle of Man? **Yes**
2. Would you be happy for the Isle of Man to be one hundred percent reliant on fossil fuels for its electricity generation? **The Isle of Man is not 100% reliant at present, but in principle the answer is NO for a number of stability & security, in addition to environmental reasons.**
3. Do you support the Isle of Man's legally binding net zero target of 2050? **The reason the question is being asked in the first place is precisely why this is not a yes/no question. Net Zero is under political threat in many jurisdictions for exactly the same core reasons that I am standing for election: failures in agency, equality, and accountability. Net Zero has become a political football because the core ideas have not been adequately proven to the public prior to implementation. Very few people would argue against efficiency, security, and clear economic benefits, and that is how Net Zero could have been sold. Sadly, it has not been so. The political system is to blame for the potential failure of Net Zero. Unless we change the way we do politics, it will continue to be so.**
4. Should the Island increase or reduce the amount of land and sea managed for nature? **This is not a yes/no question. In principle, the answer is 'increase'. There is a strong argument that our natural environment is our most valuable and most secure asset. However, unless that argument is presented as part of a truly open debate in which the public actually has clear agency, it will become just another political football.**

3. Core Strategy Questions

A. Space for Nature - Background: Only 20% of the Island's land and 11% of our territorial waters are managed primarily for nature, and many species and habitats remain in decline. Question: How would you create more space for nature in the Isle of Man's territorial land and waters?

The only viable way to ensure long term protection is to clearly link it to economic interest. As noted in my manifesto the IOM significantly under values our heritage and natural assets. Unless we clearly connect them to strong economic value, they will always be at risk. The international market to add value is out there; we restrict access to it.

B. Nature Based Solutions - Background: Nature based Solutions can reduce flood risk, capture carbon, improve water quality and support people's physical and mental wellbeing. Question: How would you support the development and mainstreaming of Nature based Solutions across the Island?

The only viable proposal is to prove it, ensure access and publish ALL information. The wider public is never going to get behind ideas if they cannot easily access the benefits and understand what's going on. Access and information has to come first. We are not very good at that generally.

C. People and Nature - Background: Most residents spend less time in nature than previous generations, which affects wellbeing and can reduce support for environmental action. Question: How would you strengthen the relationship between people in the Isle of Man and the natural world?

As above. It has to start with access. I do quite a lot of travelling and when you see how other places create and maintain access and communicate information, you realise how far behind we are. As mentioned in my manifesto, I have paid and queued to climb mountains (in winter) in several different countries round the world. Why are the hills of the IOM mostly empty, even in peak season? Proper access (including to the IOM itself) and maintenance has to be the starting point.

D. Agriculture and Land Use - Background: Farming covers around 70 percent of the Island's land area. Question: How would you support farmers to deliver food production alongside stronger nature and climate outcomes?

A reasonable compromise will only be achieved within a broader debate about agriculture and food security generally. If the wider public does not see and agree the value of natural resources and food security the entire endeavour is at risk. If the land use market pushes towards energy production (as it clearly could - irrespective of environmental consideration), that is the way things will go unless the public places higher value on the environment generally. Within my lifetime the IOM agricultural industry has been stripped of its market protection, had production subsidies removed, and is now dealing with a transition to support based largely on environmental targets.

Many farmers have given up on the process because it is simply not commercially realistic. All proposals must start with the position that agriculture is business, and all proposals must be commercially viable. That will only happen if the public has agency.

E. Planning and Development - Background: The planning system significantly affects habitats, land use and community wellbeing. Question: How should the planning system balance development needs with the protection and restoration of nature?

As with agriculture, the only realistic option is to demonstrate the value to the wider economy and public, allowing them to have clear agency—rather than preaching at or dictating to them. A political system which blocks agency and/or polarises the public will always leave questions like this to the whim of whoever has manipulated their way into power. If the wider public owns the idea, that is the best security we can provide.

F. Funding for Nature - Background: Nature recovery needs long term, stable funding. Question: How would you ensure sustainable funding for nature conservation and environmental enhancement over the next five years?

The short answer is that within the IOM political system there is nothing any candidate can say or do to ensure secure funding over the next five years. If the make up of the next administration (over which the public has zero influence) swings away from protecting nature that is it, game over. This can be seen right now in the neighbouring jurisdiction - short term economic pressure always wins. The only route to long term stability is to create a political system which fosters education within society, by giving them agency. This is the core of my proposal.

G. Legislation and Governance - Background: Some environmental legislation is outdated, including the 1990 Wildlife Act. Question: Are there any environmental laws, policies or governance structures you believe should be improved or updated?

Given how far out of date current legislation is, there is probably a strong argument for a clean-slate proposal, at least insofar as primary objectives are concerned, and whether new legislation could be tailored to constantly evolving requirements. The chances of success are heavily reliant on changing the political system, as outlined above.

4. Future Looking Question

- If elected, what is the single most important environmental action you would aim to progress during your first year as an MHK?

Access and engagement: Footpaths & Information (Digital & Physical). You cannot sell the value of our natural assets to the wider public if they cannot easily access and appreciate them. Tiny investments (relatively speaking) in footpaths, reserves, information & events would bring huge returns.