

**WRITTEN STATEMENT TO THE HOUSE OF COMMONS – Monday 14<sup>th</sup>  
March**

**St Helena: Access**

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for International Development (Mr Gareth Thomas):** On 19 April 2004 [Official Report, col 1 WS] I announced in a Written Statement that the Government would be undertaking feasibility and other investigatory work to determine how best to ensure access for St Helena when St Helena's passenger and supply ship, the 'RMS St Helena', is withdrawn from scheduled service in or around 2010.

That work is now completed. We have looked not only at issues relating directly to access, but also at the potential of various access options to encourage the development of a vibrant island economy. This reflects our aim, shared with St Helena, to achieve economic growth for the island.

We have decided that, subject to satisfactory contract bids and a rigorous environmental impact assessment, we will establish air access for St Helena. This will entail providing an airport, with a 2,250m runway, near the eastern coast at Prosperous Bay Plain. It will be capable of supporting the safe operation of long-haul jet aircraft, such as the Airbus A320 and Boeing 737-800. We will also provide advice to help establish regular air services; and we will support the St Helena government in taking advantage of the economic benefits that the new investment should bring to the island. All private sector investment interest will be considered on an equal footing.

For its part, amongst other supporting work, the St Helena Government will review local legislation on inward investment, immigration and taxation. Our shared aim with St Helena will be the creation of a policy environment, against a transformed background of good access, that will encourage sustainable economic development and progress for St Helena and its community.