**SPEECH FROM GOVERNOR CAPES AT COMMEMORATIVE STONE CEREMONY, AIRPORT SITE**

Bishop Richard, Members of Legislative Council, other distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen, boys and girls.

Good afternoon and welcome to this landmark ceremony at Prosperous Bay Plain.

On 3 November 2011, only a few days after taking the oath of office as Governor, I stood with Members of Legislative Council at the Parade Ground in Jamestown to announce that, just a few minutes earlier, a contract had been signed with Basil Read to construct St Helena’s airport. A day to remember.

Today, standing here at Prosperous Bay Plain just over 2 ½ busy years later, one cannot fail to be mightily impressed by the massive progress achieved here by Basil Read, on budget and on, or even ahead of schedule. Sharon Wainwright would have been thrilled to see all this.

To Deon de Jager and all those who have worked so hard on this historic undertaking, to the many Saints and the workers from further afield - well done and thank you! Not too far to go now.

Over the past two years when asked about the biggest challenges of my job I have always said that the least of my concerns was construction of the airport.

Why? Because it was clear from early on that Deon de Jager and Basil Read were up to the job.

No, the big challenge for all of us is to see that St Helena is positioned to fully benefit from air access.

Sound **economic** and **social** arguments underpin the justification for investing in this airport. Social gains will come relatively easily. For example, having rapid access to specialist medical care, much easier and quicker journeys to and from the Island by family and friends and, for our sporting enthusiasts, making it possible for St Helena’s sports teams to participate in international competitions.

The more complex, less easy task, is preparing St Helena to be able to benefit from new economic opportunities. But we can do it.

Air access gives us the opportunity to halt the many decades of economic decline. To give St Helena the means to prosper by developing a vibrant economy, to give St Helena a confident, bright future that will reverse the flow of young Saints leaving St Helena.

That is the goal. That must be the focus for our energy and resources.

While it is important that the foundations we are standing on here are well made, it is equally important that the foundations of the new air access economy should be firmly established.

Deon de Jager and his team have shown that - with the right attitude, with determination, with a ‘can do’ mind set, so much can be achieved.

That is how this airport is being built.

St Helena must adopt the same approach to building a new economy. It is happening in the fishing sector. Trevor Thomas and the crew of the Extractor, with determination and a ‘can do’ approach, are showing the way to success.

It is time for change, to adjust to the new realities and to grip new opportunities.

Government will do all that it can to provide support and advice for those that need it.

These are exciting times for those who are prepared to invest in the future. I encourage anyone who has ideas on improving or expanding their existing business, or starting new ones to speak to Enterprise St Helena. They are there to help.

Let’s see to it that when the history of this period is written it will be seen as the time, the turning point, when St Helena was set firmly on a new compass bearing leading to prosperity and well-being for many future generations of Saints.

Before I close these brief remarks I must thank all those who helped to organise this ceremony and everyone who contributed material to the time capsule. And my thanks to all of you for being here this afternoon to witness these proceedings.

**Governor Mark Capes**

**28 June 2014**