

Leadership.... in a world of change.

On September 29th, when you go into the voting booth, you are actually asking several questions...

“What’s next for Ramsey?

What’s next for the Isle of Man?...

And, most importantly...Who can best protect your welfare in the difficult times ahead?”

Since you last made that choice, in 2006, global events have changed the world we live in and the Island we live on. In fact, our Island has faced one battle after another to protect our way of life and our economic and political independence.

As the world has faced near collapse of its banking system and recession, our UK and Irish neighbours have been damaged by huge debts. We have faced relentless attack by the international community and, most recently our VAT sharing agreement has been rewritten, substantially reducing our revenues.

The forthcoming General Election is therefore one of the most important we have faced for a generation. It will define our future for many years to come.

However, we face that future from a position of strength. We will not go into recession and our economy is still growing. We have low unemployment and substantial financial reserves to call on, with no external debt.

But, as we pause for this election, the world moves relentlessly on. Your choices need to ensure that you have the most able people in your corner to face these continuing challenges. It won't be easy and there will be difficult and possibly painful choices ahead as we fight to protect our achievements.

This election is not a popularity contest. Nor is it about making false promises that cannot be delivered. It is about proving why you should vote. It calls for proven leadership, vision, courage and unity of purpose. It also calls for experience.

Over the last ten years, first as Minister for the Treasury and latterly, as your Minister for Economic Development, I have had unique experience in helping lead our Island through troubled times. This experience will be invaluable, not just to face the threats ahead, but to turn those threats into opportunities.

Locally, we must also accept that a vibrant Ramsey needs a vibrant Manx economy. We can no longer afford to be distracted by yesterday's squabbles or backward thinking. We have to look to the future with confidence and self belief, working together to defend our achievements, our rights and our independence. More than anything, we owe this to our young people.

I offer you my experience, leadership and passionate belief in Ramsey and our Island. Together with your support on polling day, I believe we can deliver that future.

Priorities.

The change in our VAT sharing agreement will mean a loss of around a third of our net income. Our absolute top priorities have to be the rebalancing of our Budget and the stimulation of further growth in our economy.

To achieve these aims we must firstly reduce the size and cost of Government. We have reviewed the structure and now we must consider the scope of Government. However, neither will work without a fundamental rethink of the culture of Government.

The world has changed and so must the way we go about delivering Government services. We must think smarter, not bigger, to protect key services and we have to engage the whole of our workforce at every level to achieve a leaner, fitter and more sustainable structure into the future.

There must be no sacred cows and the whole of Government's service provision must be critically reviewed.

Economy

Even greater focus and support for economic growth is absolutely vital if we are to replenish our lost revenues and create the jobs we need for our young people.

We have one of the most successful economies in Europe but the competition is getting fiercer all the time. We must proactively encourage expansion of our existing businesses and better target new opportunities as they arise to enable further diversification in future.

We must promote the whole Island as an enterprise zone to keep ahead of our competition. There has to be a complete review of red-tape, bureaucracy and over regulation to free the enterprise and creativity of our people.

Training & Youth

Greater support has to be given to training and retraining to build our skills base, to help grow our workforce and help the unemployed back into work again. Our education system needs to give greater recognition to the needs of vocational training. The success of a school should not just be measured by A level results but also how it caters for the less academically inclined students.

Around half of our current unemployed are aged under 24. This has the potential to be a serious problem in the future if we do not continue with dynamic initiatives to urgently address this.

Planning

We must recognise that Planning has a pivotal role to play in developing the economy. Whilst continuing to protect our environment we must also ensure that it is responsive to new opportunities to stimulate growth as well as to deliver more speedy decision making.

Tax

Our tax structures have been under attack for some time. It is fundamental to our economy and our quality of life that we maintain our competitive tax rates both for companies and personal liabilities.

Without the 0% we could lose a substantial part of our economy very quickly.

Without question our current economic success has been based on a close working relationship between Government and the business community.

In the challenging times ahead we need to build on that relationship and develop a Government of all the talents, drawing on the expertise and connections of all our people. On its own, Government can only create the general environment for business and society to flourish.

UK Relationship

Events of the last few years have clearly shown that our relationship with the UK has changed.

At this time I do not believe that full independence would be best for our Island. However, I do think that we have to progress in a more independent manner. We must review all the agreements which currently exist between us to ensure they best suit the Isle of Man for the future. We must also strengthen our external promotion and lobbying to ensure the interests of our Island are better understood in the international arena.

In spite of the enforced changes to our VAT sharing agreement I still believe that our Customs Union with the UK is still beneficial in many ways and I would therefore be opposed to abrogation at this time.

Pensions and an ageing population

A major problem facing most developed countries is an ageing population with a changing ratio of 'working contributors' to 'dependent pensioners'. It is fundamentally important that these two groups stay in balance, or the pension may become unsustainable in its present form.

In the Isle of Man, that ratio is reducing so we must ensure we maintain a vigorous workforce. It is likely that the UK will be changing the basis for assessing pensions over the next few years. As we have a reciprocal arrangement, we must ensure that we take appropriate steps to protect and sustain Manx pensions in the long term. Equally we still face the growing problem of providing adequate nursing and residential care for the elderly to remove the fear that exists for many as they grow older. Jersey is implementing an insurance surcharge on all employees and this may be an option for the Island to consider.

I believe we need an Independent Inquiry to investigate what might be the best and most appropriate system for the Isle of Man.

Benefit Reform

Our benefit system closely follows the UK, which also sets our NI rates. The UK is now considering a fresh approach to the level and range of benefits provided. I believe that now is the ideal time for us to review our own system to ensure that it is more appropriate for our Island's needs, is better aimed at those genuinely in need and affordable in the long term. We must also ensure that it does not act as a disincentive to people looking for work. It inevitably must also challenge the concept of universal benefits for those not in need.

Local Government Reform

More than ever this election must produce National politicians charged with considering the bigger and longer term strategies as well as having an understanding of the International challenges which affect the Isle of Man. To assist with this I believe that we must once again return to the issue of reforming Local Government, to separate the local from the national. Fewer but larger Authorities would then be able to carry many of the responsibilities borne by central government. As a former Ramsey Town Commissioner I strongly support Local Authorities but to survive they must have more relevance and play a more strategic role in Governing our Island.

Legislation

We have a global reputation for our ability to enact appropriate legislation quickly and effectively to allow new business sectors to flourish.

We must protect this from layers of bureaucracy. I believe that Tywald should consider limiting the amount of new legislation we impose by adopting a "One in, One out" approach to new legislation and regulation. Every new layer added would be balanced by a removal.

This will keep our legislation relevant and reduce outdated proposals which are no longer needed. I support the reform of the Legislative Council but need to be convinced that any new system is both workable and will avoid permanent conflict between the two Branches of Government, leading to instability.

I would support a totally independent review, to introduce new thinking into the debate, leaving Members more time to deal with pressing priorities. This will avoid a repeat of the interminable navel-gazing by Members in the last House.

Ramsey investment

Comment is sometimes made that Ramsey is a “forgotten town” with regard to Government investment.

The truth is very different. Over the last five years, Ramsey has benefitted from actual and planned investment of well over £60 million including.....

- Rebuilding Lezayre Housing Estate
- New housing at Kerroo Glass, Cooryt Balleigh and Yew Tree Apartments
- New swimming pool
- New hotel
- New school, ‘Scoll Ree Gorree’
- New EMI unit
- New Civic Amenity site
- Stabilisation of Queen’s Pier
- Extension of natural gas network to Ramsey
- New sewerage treatment plant
- Glen Auldyn reserve

I am committed to making sure Government investment in Ramsey will continue, even in these difficult economic times.

I believe...

- Absolute priority has to be given to rebalancing Government finances following the VAT reduction
- Growing the economy has to be central to rebuilding revenues and generating the jobs we need to maintain a vibrant and prosperous community
- We must protect our competitive tax system
- Government must engage with the public more effectively and promote appropriate Freedom of Information legislation to ensure openness and a better understanding of issues
- The Island must strive to raise its international profile and further strengthen its links to Westminster and other key decision-making bodies to protect our interests
- Government must be open and honest with the people regarding the challenges ahead
- We must recognise and address the extraordinary challenges facing our young people regarding provision of education, employment and housing
- Within the resources available, the protection of our health services must be a priority and we should use this time to address our housing shortages, both to help first time buyers and the construction industry
- We need a long term strategy to ensure the provision of adequate public and private sector pensions
- We must fight to protect our precious environment and to deliver a future powered by sustainable energy
- Most of all Government must use all its energies to protect our quality of life and continue to promote a prosperous and caring society based on fairness, compassion and inclusivity
- Ramsey needs to look to the future and use available finance to regenerate
- Ramsey should have its Marina and send a clear message - we encourage investment in our town.

Regenerate Ramsey!

As Chairman of the Ramsey Regeneration Committee, I passionately believe in the future of our town. Work has already begun to regenerate the centre of Ramsey and I have been promoting the refurbishment of the Courthouse area, which will provide a new town centre focus for the future.

Together with the Lanes, Market Place and Quayside, and following extensive consultation with the people of Ramsey, we will see the gradual resurfacing and landscaping of the heart of Ramsey.

Together with new lighting, street furniture and street art, I believe that this will be a major step to restoring pride to our town centre.

This has another benefit - civic pride goes a long way towards keeping crime low - this has been proven time and again around the world.

To help shopkeepers play their part, we're also providing financial grants to paint and improve their shop fronts.

Plans are already being drawn up for the redevelopment of the MER station as a bus and tram transport interchange, together with additional parking.

Proposals are also being considered to redevelop the Albert Road School site. This is likely to consist of a mixture of housing, parking and possibly commercial development in due course.

I strongly support the belated development of a marina in the harbour. The previous negative debate about a marina caused serious damage to our ability to attract new investment to the Town. Preparatory work has been carried out by the Harbours Division. Although a final decision on the position of a marina still has to be taken, progress has been made. This will depend, of course, on the future availability of finance.

We need to send out a very clear message...

"Ramsey welcomes new investment and development.

We welcome progress and are looking to the future and are not clinging to the past. We owe it to our younger generation to take the town forward with optimism to deliver the future they deserve".