

# **Statement of Robert Cowell the Deputy Chairman and Lead Member for Finance and General Purposes, Ramsey Town Commissioners, to support the Public Inquiry into the proposed Ramsey (Boundary Extension) Order 2023**

## **1. Introduction**

1.1 I, Robert Cowell, BSc Hons, am attending the Inquiry for and on behalf of Ramsey Town Commissioners in my capacity as Deputy Chairman and Lead Member for Finance and General Purposes. I also represent Ramsey Town Commissioners at the Northern Chamber of Commerce. The Board voted unanimously for me to represent the Town in helping the Commissioners with achieving our goal of extending the town boundary. Ramsey Town Commissioners' mission statement is very simple – to make Ramsey a better place to be.

1.2 I firmly believe that the Boundary Extension sits perfectly within that vision and that by undertaking this process, we are aiming to make Ramsey better equipped to meet the ever-changing needs of our community.

## **2. Background to the Inquiry**

2.1 I would like to begin my evidence by providing some contextual information about Ramsey Town Commissioners and explaining how our application to extend the town boundary took shape.

2.2 Ramsey Town Commissioners were formed 1865, which was due to the foresight of a number of individuals. The Town had already grown up around the natural harbour and along the Sulby River. Ramsey was a modest port but there was industry in the town as clearly demonstrated by the construction and launching of the Euterpe in 1863 (later named Star of India) a 1,200-ton vessel over 200ft long.

2.3 The Ramsey Town Boundary was first expanded in 1881 to accommodate the Mooragh and adjacent lands. It was then further revised in 1884 as the town grew and expanded.

2.4 The third boundary extension, resolved by Tynwald in 1969, was very much a catch up exercise as the Town Boundary up until this date ran from the Fort on the Mooragh Promenade (by the 2 semi-detached houses at the end of the Mooragh Park) in a straight line to the rear of Ash Grove, across Jurby Road joining in a straight line to the end of Hespera Terrace by the Grammar School and then a straight line to Lheaney Road and ultimately to Ballure tram crossing before meandering down the Ballure glen to the Arches. This Ramsey Town Boundary was desperately out of date, the two world wars and turbulent, difficult times having delayed any expansion of the boundary between 1884 and 1970.

2.5 The Town Boundary change of 1969 was very much a 'catch up with development' approach and sought to bring Ramsey Grammar School, Lezayre Estate, the houses on Jurby Road past Ash Grove, the housing on Andreas Road past Ash Grove and the newly constructed Ormly Estate into Ramsey.

2.6 The 1982 Development Plan was a progressive whole Island plan and by the time of its introduction, there had been significant development in Ramsey with the Cloughbane Estate, Greenlands Avenue Estate, Lezayre Park Estate, Thornhill, Westlands Close and Riverbank Road, Rheast Moor, and the redevelopment of old Ramsey and the construction of Kings and Queens Court having taken place.

2.7 In 1993 the Town Boundary once again had to catch up with development because the areas identified in the 1982 Development plan as 'Areas of predominantly residential use' sat outside the town boundary and had been developed.

2.8 The Isle of Man has two extant planning policy documents for Ramsey and the surrounding area being the 1982 Development Plan and the Ramsey Local Plan 1998. The West Ramsey Development Framework 2004 was prepared by the then Department for Local Government and the Environment to further develop the proposals for the west Ramsey area within the Ramsey Local Plan 1998. The Framework was a recommendation in the written statement and a natural progression; it was published prior to accurate flood mapping being produced.

2.9 The Isle of Man Strategic Plan 2016 is the overarching planning policy guidance and sets out clearly all development control requirements.

2.10 Ramsey has grown as the population of the Isle of Man has increased. In 1970 the population of the Isle of Man was 50,000 (49,312 in 1966); in 1981, the time of the development it had grown to 64,679; by 1991 the population was 69,788 (figures used at the time of the boundary extension). The population in 2021 was 84,069, which represents a growth of 29% during the period.

2.11 In conjunction with the increase in population, the size of the average household has shrunk from 2.5 to 2.08 people per household. This means more population living in, and requiring more, properties. This is across the Isle of Man, but it is clearly shown in the Census figures where there were 3054 households in Ramsey in 1996 and 3875 households in Ramsey at the time of the 2021 census and represents an increase of 27%. This increase of 821 in this period is very dramatic and shows the popularity of Ramsey, that the town has expanded and filled its available sites and that Ramsey needs space to expand.

2.12 The Isle of Man Economic Strategy 2022-2032 sets out details for an estimated population of 100,000 by 2037. When looking at history, the population increased from 69,788 to 84,069 in the 30 year period between 1991 and 2021. There was an increase in the number of households in Ramsey of 821 in the 25 years between 1996 and 2021. Although there seems to be some plans to skew the population to the South of the Island with the large development in Ballasalla, the likely impact on Ramsey of a population increase of 16,000 is approximately 900 households. Some of this could be yielded by the development of the Vullan Site and by the Riverside Development Scheme but this still leaves a significant shortfall that simply cannot be accommodated within Ramsey's current boundary, and this does not take into account the requirement for employment land!

2.13 Within the same strategic document, it is made clear that the intention is to create and fill 5,000 jobs across new, enabling and existing key sectors by 2032, reaching an overall GDP of £10bn. This further evidences the need for the growth of our service centre town.

2.14 Increasing the population needs to be based on skills and economic benefit. It is hoped that the increase in population will be based upon the economically active, an important group to any economy. Housing costs are high on the Isle of Man; affordable decent homes are required, and they need to be attractive to bring and retain the best people to expand our population. There needs to be a variety of choice for all, not just affordable housing.

2.15 This Ramsey Town Boundary Extension is overdue in that the development land in Ramsey is now practically non-existent and the Strategic Plan limits or prevents building in the countryside. It is not appropriate that the Ramsey Boundary catches up with community and development as has been the case in the past. The Boundary must be extended so as to accurately define the land that is either part of a community of interest, is already considered within Ramsey or is required for future development. The Ramsey community and surrounding neighbourhoods depend greatly on the services, amenities, and facilities within the town. It is only right and proper that Ramsey, in its position as the Capital of the North, looks to the future and does not simply take no action and stifle the town and the North of the Island.

### **3. Summary**

3.1 On behalf of Ramsey Town Commissioners, I can confirm that due process has been followed in our application to extend the boundary of Ramsey. I believe we have been successful in our endeavours to promote the best interests of the town in line with our mission of making Ramsey a better place to be and trust this Inquiry and the Department of Infrastructure recognise our good record of local governance and in the delivery of services and facilities within the town.

3.2 We attach great importance to the need of strategically planning for the future requirements of the town and wider communities and we believe that our evidence for this proposed boundary extension of Ramsey is compelling. I have faith that this Inquiry will make a recommendation to the Department of Infrastructure for our application to be approved in its entirety.