



## **RAMSEY TOWN COMMISSIONERS**

### **STATEMENT ON TOWN RATES FOR 2012/2013**

#### **INTRODUCTION**

In common with Central Government and other local authorities, the Ramsey Town Commission has had to consider very carefully its budgets and services in order to meet the challenges facing the Island since the changes in the UK VAT sharing agreement.

In preparing its 2012/13 estimates the Commission has sought to absorb the impact of inflationary increases for the forthcoming year whilst retaining funding for priority works. A conscious decision has been taken to reduce reserve balances retained for cash flow in the first quarter of each financial year, with a credit balance of £560,345 (82.58p) anticipated for the year ending 31st March 2012 [£884,684 in 2011] and a reduced credit balance of £365,975 (53.23p) estimated at 31st March 2013 [£653,940 in 2012]. This will again require the Commission to apply greater rigor in the management of expenditure during the first quarter of the new rate year.

The total net rateable value utilised in fixing the Town Rate for 2012/2013 is £678,579; an increase of £10,169 (0.37%) on the previous year. Growth in the Town's rate base (total rateable value) continues to lag behind inflation. Without growth in rateable values, which can only result from development, the burden of inflation increases and transferred costs or increased charges applied by Government, must be met by existing ratepayers.

Provision for rates discounts, for payment on or before 30<sup>th</sup> June, 2012, of 5% of rates paid by that date, has been provided for in the sum of £82,400 (12.14p). The Commission continues to believe that the discount should be discontinued and that interest should be charged in respect of late payments.

The average loan charge interest applied in preparing the 2012/2013 estimates has been set at 5.75% - an increase of 0.25% being imposed as a consequence of the reduction in the Island's credit rating from AAA to AA+. A figure of 3.00% has been used to allow for inflation during the new financial year, except for energy prices for which a 10% assumption has been made.

#### **TOWN AND VILLAGE REGENERATION SCHEME**

The Commission continues to work closely with members of the Ramsey Local Regeneration Committee, the Members of the House of Keys for Ramsey and the Ramsey Chamber of Commerce, to progress the development of a bid for funding for regeneration initiatives within the Ramsey Town Centre.

The first phase of works, improvement to the lanes between Parliament Street and the Quayside has been completed. They incorporate new natural surfacing, low energy lighting and the introduction of "hidden art". The Commission has retained a provision equivalent to a 2.5p rate towards initiatives in respect of the regeneration of the town centre.

Outside of the regeneration area the Commission is proceeding with the introduction of new pedestrian finger post signage aimed at providing clearer direction to facilities and amenities within the town.

In conjunction with the regeneration initiative, the Commission will continue to target the condition of private property, utilising powers vested by the Local Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 1984 and the Building Control Act 1991. During 2011/12 the Commission engaged contractors to undertake default works necessary to make a property on the Mooragh Promenade safe at an overall cost of £35,687. Financial provision of £10,000 is made in the forthcoming year against default works that may be necessary to other property. Although the Commission will be seeking to recover any costs, it is considered prudent to budget for this expense. The Commission is progressing action in respect of a number of properties within the town, but recovery of cost may not occur in the year of expenditure.

## **TOWN HALL AND OTHER PROPERTY**

The Town Hall and Library continues to show improvement in terms of service provision and facilities. It is used regularly by many organisations for events, presentations and training courses and it continues to be a highly practical and popular venue within the Town.

The Ramsey Civil Registry and the Coroner for the Sheadings of Ayre and Garff are located in the Town Hall. The Commission recognises the opportunity to broaden the range of services able to be delivered locally to the community of Ramsey and the north. Work will be commencing shortly to create a new police office within the Town Hall premises, the Courthouse is now occupied by the IOM Post Office. The Commission is pleased to be able to work with the Department of Home Affairs in creating co-joined offices which it is believed will improve communication and partnership working between the Commission's staff and the Police.

During the course of the past year the library internet facilities were relocated to the ground floor. The library is also serviced by a wireless internet "hot-spot" enabling users with wireless enabled laptops to obtain free access to the internet within the library area.

The Age Concern Computer Drop-In Centre continues to operate and has been supplemented by an Age Concern Lifelong Learning Centre. The Commission is pleased to work in partnership with Age Concern to contribute towards the bridging of the "digital divide".

The Commission intends to undertake a review of the services provided through the public library in order to ascertain the best means of ensuring that those services are relevant and proportionate to the current and future needs of the community and delivered in a fashion which provides value for money for ratepayers.

The Members of the House of Keys for Ramsey continue to hold a monthly political surgery in the Town Hall on the second Saturday of each month. The Commission will continue to encourage functions and displays with a view to maximising use of the Town Hall facilities.

The former swimming pool on South Promenade has been leased for 25 years to a newly established company, Buffalo Bowling and Leisure Limited, which in 2011 opened a Bowling Centre and restaurant providing a useful indoor activity option for young people, residents and visitors to the town.

## **LOCAL AUTHORITY HOUSING**

The cost of public sector housing provision continues to be met by Government through the provision of 100% housing deficiency grant payments. For the rate year 2012/2013 the projected deficit on the Commission's housing, based on the capital programme in place at the time of rate setting, is equivalent to £2,576 per house for the year, or £49.55 per week for each of the 579 tenanted properties in Ramsey at 1<sup>st</sup> February 2012.

The Department of Social Care has advised that the public sector rent increase for 2012/2013 will be 10%. The Maintenance and Administration Allowances have been increased in line with inflation.

Current waiting lists for accommodation in Ramsey, as at 1st February 2012, show a total of 124 (134 in 2011) applicants in varying need of first tenancies. 32 (32 in 2011) tenants are seeking transfers to alternative accommodation. During the period 1st January, 2011 to 31st December, 2011 29 properties (26 in 2010) were let to new tenants and 41 transfers of tenants to alternative properties (50 in 2010) were effected. There were also 2 inter-authority transfers.

## **HOUSING DEVELOPMENT & REFURBISHMENTS**

The contract for the redevelopment of the Lezayre Housing Estate has been completed within the past financial year; however, certain remedial works have been identified as necessary and are now being carried out to the majority of properties in Phase 1 of the development, due to faulty materials. It is important to place on record that the problems are entirely due to materials and not due to workmanship. Every effort is now being made to confine the cost of the remedial works to within the figure already paid under a negotiated insurance settlement. This work is progressing well and is anticipated to be substantially completed within this financial year.

The Commission, working with the Department of Social Care, has embarked upon a programme of kitchen replacement, focusing on our older housing stock, to bring the kitchen/dining facilities up to modern standards. This work is being carried out under the umbrella of an all-Island Kitchen Framework Agreement that is being managed by the Department. This aims to take advantage of economies of scale to carry out a large number of similar refurbishments. During the coming year it is intended that work to the kitchens in 132 of our properties will be completed.

During 2010/2011 the Commission undertook the demolition of the Albert Road School. This site is currently being used as a temporary car park until redevelopment proposals can progress. This is projected to be within the next 2-3 years. The adjoining sites of

Mayfield and Close Woirrey are also being assessed for possible appropriate redevelopment in partnership with the Department of Social Care and the Ramsey and the Northern Districts Housing Committee, within a wider development programme. A sum of £5.5 million has already been identified in the projected Capital Expenditure for Local Authority Housing, in connection with such future redevelopment.

The capital programme for housing works in Ramsey up to 2015, contained within the Isle of Man Budget is shown in the following table:-

	Total Estimated Cost 000's	Probable to 31.3.11 000's	2012-13 000's	2013-14 000's	2014-15 000's	2015-16 000's	2016-17 000's	Further Payments 000's
Planned Maintenance Programme	4,209	950	1,747	500	107	555	350	
Lezayre Estate Redevelopment Phase 1								
Redevelopment Phase 2	7,429	7,300	129					
Redevelopment Phase 3/4	4,479	4,479						
Redevelopment Phase 5	6,362	6,250	112					
Redevelopment Mayfield Flats	4,489	3,411	1,002	76				
Replacement	5,500		50	550	1,500	1,600	1,500	300
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>£32,468</b>	<b>£22,390</b>	<b>£3,040</b>	<b>£1,126</b>	<b>£1,607</b>	<b>£2,155</b>	<b>£1,850</b>	<b>£300</b>

Planned maintenance works include the completion of fascia, gutters and windows replacement schemes to various estates, due to be completed by May this year. Further schemes are presently being considered and developed in conjunction with the Department of Social Care in relation to improving the external envelope of some of our older properties: including re-roofing; re-rendering and dashing, or external coatings; and possible demolition of chimney stacks. The Commission also continues to review its housing stock by way of an annual survey which is used to inform and update the forward maintenance programme; this process has formed a model now being adopted by other housing authorities as best practice throughout the Island.

### **SWIMMING POOL CONTRIBUTION**

A sum of £20,200 has been included in the estimates as the Commission's contribution towards the cost of Northern Swimming Pool, which is administered by the Northern Local Authorities Swimming Pool Board. This amount equates approximately to the product of a 2.5p rate.

## **CAR PARKS**

Works have been carried out by Island Drainage and Groundworks Ltd to make good the area of car park at the entrance to the Station Road Car Park where a major area of unstable ground was identified. Financial provision of £21,000 (3.14p), representing the loan charges on borrowing over 10 years, was made to meet the cost of a capital scheme. Whilst there was inevitable disruption to the operation of the car park during the works, close liaison with Shoprite Ltd and the provision of information to the general public, ensured that the contract was completed as quickly as possible, with the minimum of disruption to car park users.

General maintenance works are scheduled to be progressed within the car parks this year.

## **REFUSE COLLECTION**

The Commission continues to operate a commercial charging system for refuse based on the PM Onboard Weighing System with commercial customers being invoiced for the full disposal cost of business waste collected by the Commission, an average of approximately 600 tonnes per annum.

The average annual domestic waste arising in Ramsey continues to be around 2800 tonnes per year. Domestic refuse disposal charges imposed by the Department of Infrastructure have increased by 13% from £30.74 per tonne to £35.00 per tonne.

For 2012/13 the Commission will continue to use the arrangements that were introduced following a review of refuse collection services, and which have proved to be very successful. A new refuse vehicle is to be ordered later this year to replace a vehicle that it is no longer cost effective to retain in the fleet.

## **SEWERAGE SCHEMES**

The Commission acts as agent for the Isle of Man Water and Sewerage Authority in the maintenance of the Town's sewerage systems, the costs of which are met by the Water and Sewerage Authority and not borne by the rate fund.

An Environmental Scoping Assessment has been carried out by Consultants AECOM from Belfast, on behalf of the Water and Sewerage Authority, in respect of the location of a proposed Wastewater Treatment Works development on land at Balladoole Farm to the north of Ramsey, adjacent to the recently opened Northern Civic Amenity Site. This report will form part of the supporting documentation for a future planning application. Whilst full details have not yet been released it is envisaged that the provision of the new Treatment Works will eliminate the discharge of raw sewage into Ramsey Bay.

Works continue to be carried out to several of the pumping stations within the Town, with upgrading works having been progressed, including the provision of new electrical cabinets that will house the telemetry systems providing vital information regarding the status of the pumping stations to the Commission's Works staff and to Meary Veg, where all drainage information is gathered on an Island wide basis.

The Commission has been advised that the Sewer Agency Agreement is to be determined by the Isle of Man Water and Sewerage Authority on 31<sup>st</sup> March 2013.

## **DECORATIVE AND STREET LIGHTING**

The Manx Electricity Authority has not identified any major undergrounding schemes during the 2012/2013 year. Maintenance of the existing street lighting infrastructure within the Town is ongoing and improvements aimed at reducing the running costs of the system are being investigated.

Options are being investigated as part of the second phase of regeneration within the Town into the provision of low energy street lighting within the area around the former Courthouse Building. As part of the regeneration works, decorative lighting enhancements in this area are also being investigated.

## **STREET CLEANING**

The Commission has negotiated an agreement with the Department of Infrastructure Highways Division to carry out street sweeping within the Town on an agency basis, the contract will include the treatment and clearing of weeds from pavements within the town centre.

The cost for the initial year is to be £97,000, with provision made for the use of both a mechanical sweeper and a hand push "twin-bin" operation. The main areas within the centre of the town, including Parliament Street, the Quay and Market Place, are the priority areas with other areas within the Town to be progressed on a programmed basis. It is recognised that operational needs will be required to be determined on a seasonal basis and when events within the Town are held. It is anticipated that the local responsibility for this function will provide a more focussed provision than at present.

## **MOORAGH PARK**

Following the scheme in 2010 to renew and extend the surface water drainage through the Mooragh Park, the Commission is progressing a scheme to resurface the Mooragh Park driveway which has deteriorated significantly. It is envisaged that these works will commence in April 2012 and, whilst there will be some disruption to operations within the Mooragh Park, the provision of phased works will ensure that access is provided to the various facilities as required.

A specific sum of £10,000 is provided for a fourth year towards improvements to the woodland pathways running through the Brooghs. Previous works have been well received and have greatly improved the amenity of the area.

The Commission has recently appointed a new Head Gardener, following the retirement of the previous post holder. A review of the provision of bedding plants and, where possible, substituting them with perennial planting is being undertaken. In addition, the layout of planted areas within the Mooragh Park and other landscaped areas within the Commission's control are being reviewed and recommendations regarding future schemes will be brought forward this year.

## PLAY AREAS

The Commission undertakes weekly inspections of all play areas and play equipment. An annual inspection by independent specialists is also undertaken to ensure that equipment remains compliant with relevant safety standards and fit for use. The play areas and adult exercise equipment continue to be well used and the ongoing investment in maintenance and upgrading ensures that they are amongst the best available on the Island.

## STAFFING AND ADMINISTRATION

The Commission's staff of both full and part-time employees is the equivalent of 43.03 full time employees. The Commission will continue to review any posts released through the resignation or retirement of existing staff with a view to absorbing duties within existing staff resources where possible. The Commission continues to review the provision of appropriate systems and equipment to ensure that its staff is able to operate in the most efficient manner.

All vacancies will be carefully considered, where it is not possible to absorb staff losses, consideration will be given to acceptable reductions in service levels where possible and practicable, before posts are advertised for reappointment.

## RATE SETTING

Having regard to the aforementioned the **Ramsey Town Rate for 2012/2013 has been set at 342p** in the pound, an increase of 10p in the £ or 3% over the 2011/2012 rate. A summary of the net estimated cost of the main services and facilities provided by the Ramsey Town Commission is attached to this Report.

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