

A VISION FOR THE ISLAND

**BOB SEELY
MEMBER OF PARLIAMENT**

TEN KEY PRIORITIES FOR THE ISLAND

Deliver increased numbers of genuinely affordable housing for Islanders, and especially young Islanders.

Protect the landscape, severely limiting green field development and speculative development outside built-up areas

Improve the integration of health and social care, ensure that the NHS on the Island is on a secure footing

Develop public transport (cycle and rail)

Develop the Island's digital infrastructure and economy as part of the Island's drive to attract high-quality jobs

Raise primary and secondary education standards, have fewer but better sixth forms and develop a higher education facility and campus

Use arts to drive inspiration, aspiration, education and regeneration

“We’re developing 40 goals which we believe are critical to the islands future.”

Encourage the ferry firms to support the Island better

Improve our visitor offer and develop high-quality tourism across the Island

Extend the land covered by the Area of Outstanding National Beauty designation and look seriously at whether the Island should become a National Park

“We want to work with you to protect and enhance the Isle of Wight for future generations”

SECTIONS

Introduction	SS
What’s good, what’s not and what do we do to make the Island even better	SS
Building Homes for Islanders whilst preserving our landscape and quality of life	SS
Education: Giving Young People – and all Islanders - Better Opportunities	SS
The Jobs Agenda and the Knowledge Economy	SS
The Contribution of Arts the Sciences	SS
Health: looking after Islanders’ Health, the NHS and Ensuring Quality of Life in Later Life	SS
Persuading Government to Understand the Island - an Island Deal.	SS
Getting around – Island Transport	XX
Concluding thoughts	SS

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INTRODUCTION

**A personal message from Bob Seely
Member of Parliament for Isle of Wight**

Bob Seely
Member of Parliament



Bob Seely, Member of Parliament for the Isle of Wight

Dear Islander

Being the Member of Parliament for the Isle of Wight and representing its people in our Parliament is a wonderful privilege. The role is, for me, a labour of love. I am passionate about our Island and its future. The purpose of being involved in public life is to make a difference. That should be as true for me as it is for leaders across the Island: in the business community, the voluntary sector, the media, local authority officers and councillors, union representatives, along with all Islanders. Indeed, I would like to take this opportunity to thank all those people on the Island who dedicate themselves to helping others: those who work in the NHS, police, fire and ambulance, council workers as well as volunteers from across the Island who spend their spare time engaged in their local communities.

In this document, I offer a vision of what we should aim to achieve to make our Island even better. That does not mean I can do it all, or even lead it. My role is very often to support others, to make connections in Westminster and Whitehall – and to bring people together. For many of these projects to succeed, I will need to work with others; indeed, I may just be supporting and facilitating the work of others. Ultimately, it is what is achieved that matters; not who does it.

I had always hoped to write this document but did not necessarily expect to be doing so as the Island's Member of Parliament. I have been looking at the issues facing the Island for the best part of a decade now. This document is a result of that thinking, and not just as a result of being elected in 2017 as the Island's MP.

I am aware that by proposing new things, and a personal vision, I am opening myself to both scrutiny and potential criticism. If I wanted to play it safe I wouldn't write such a document at all. As far as I know, I am the only MP to produce a detailed vision of what his or her constituency should look like after being elected. In addition, I could suggest as little as possible, to avoid criticism from political opponents if we failed to achieve some of these things. However, I believe that such an approach would be both short-sighted and a disservice to what the public expects. I would rather outline an ambitious plan for the Island and, working with others, see how much of it we can achieve, rather than be timid in our vision. Consequently, this document encapsulates a bold, ambition for our Island.

Bob Seely

Role of Member of Parliament

At the outset, it is important to explain the role of the MP. An MP does not have unlimited powers. I often cannot make things happen. An MP gets to vote on national laws in Parliament. He or she can also have influence over decisions taken at a national level, and clearly, any decent MP should be a strong and persuasive voice for his or her constituency.

So, what can I do? I can press Ministers in Westminster. I can open doors in Whitehall. Working with others, I can champion our vision and aims in the heart of our democracy. On the Island, I have influence, but very limited power. Planning, house-building and land use are local decisions made by Isle of Wight Councillors and guided by council officers, with national Government having a considerable say, especially in the currently flawed system of housing targets. I say the above because most, if not all, of the goals, targets and aspirations in this document will only be reached with the support and determination of other people. Indeed, it is vital for the Council, MP, business, voluntary and other sectors to work together. When I pitch ideas to Ministers, I want to say that I am speaking for the Island. The past inability or reluctance of council leadership and MPs to work together has undermined us. I won't always agree with the Isle of Wight Council, and vice-versa, but we need to have a close and effective working relationship. We do.

WHAT'S GOOD, WHAT'S NOT AND WHAT DO WE DO TO MAKE THE ISLAND EVEN BETTER

I want to look at not only what our problems are, but more importantly what our strengths are. What I want most of all, is for us to collectively remember how unique Islanders are and how unique our Island is; to remember the extraordinary things that we have contributed to our nation's art and science as well as its history and landscape, to be ambitious for its future, not to put up with second best and to have a sense of aspiration for ourselves and our future. That does not mean sugar-coating our problems, but it does mean putting them in perspective.

Okay, so first, what could be better?

Our economic model - how we have planned to grow our economy and increase our prosperity - has often fallen short. For 50 years we have built an economy overly reliant on seasonal tourism and house-building. It has not worked. Because we have built houses, rather than grown businesses, we have too few jobs. And house-building jobs only last so long as the houses are being built.

Collectively we earn 70 percent of the national average if you include everyone on the Island – 91 percent if you include only people of working age. If anything, we are marginally poorer relative to the mainland in 2018 than we were at the turn of the century. There was a relative fall in our GVA per head – the amount we earn – between 2000 and 2005. We have not quite returned to pre-2000 levels relative to the rest of the UK. Although GVA is the standard figure by which wealth is judged, a different figure called Gross Disposable

Household Income (GDHI), suggests that the margin is less. However, either way, we earn less per Islander than our mainland counterparts.

Increasing our population has not made us richer. Indeed, the larger our population, the poorer we have become compared to the mainland, as our proportion of working-age people has declined. The Island is marked by what statisticians call a net migration outflow of the young and a net inflow of older generation - we export our young people. Because we export youngsters, we have fewer people of working age. That means that not only do we earn less than the national average, but we have a smaller proportion of people of working age (57.3 percent) than either Hampshire (60.7 percent), the South East (62.0 percent) or nationally (63.1 percent).

The educational and university revolution



that has energised Bournemouth, Brighton, Southampton and Portsmouth has passed us by. Because there is no higher education and no university campus on the Island, the one guarantee is that if you want to get on in life and get a degree, apart from a few exceptions, you have to leave the Island. For over fifty years we have betrayed our future. This situation is unacceptable.

Whilst we need to cherish and value Islanders of all ages - and make the Island the best place in the UK to enjoy the later years in life - we need to slow or halt the demographic shift. We need an agenda to encourage younger Islanders to stay or to return earlier in their working lives.

As a result of our population increase, our adult social care costs - the cost of looking after older and vulnerable residents that local councils are responsible for - rise exponentially. It does not help that we send our older residents to nursing homes earlier than the national average and at greater cost. Whilst this aspect is being tackled at the moment, our underlying

demographics means that this will continue to be a constant struggle.

As regards housing, speculative development is changing the nature of the Island and damages us. Housing has not been built for Islanders and even “affordable” housing – at up to 80 percent of market value - is not affordable for purchase. It also eats into our green landscape and damages our tourism economy. This pattern is unsustainable and the result of an utter lack of vision. In addition, because land values are low and build costs are high, developers and landowners hang on to land and often do not develop when they get permission. This is a national problem which also affects the Island.

We need a jobs agenda, not a speculative housing agenda. We also need an agenda which - whilst protecting the landscape - builds genuinely affordable housing for existing Islanders and builds an economy that offers our fellow Islanders the hope of prosperity on the Island.

Our Vision

However, there is good news. I believe that we are incredibly well-placed to do well in the coming years, and I believe that the Island can soon be seen as one of the nation’s hotspots.

Why? We have a great quality of life, we have strong community bonds, our voluntary sector is a remarkable success story; we have a brilliantly creative streak and a cluster of high-tech industry. In addition, our education is improving. In the next few years we will have some of the fastest broadband speeds in the world, and there is now a determination from the Council, MP, the Chamber of Commerce and other key organisations to push for a transformative agenda built around jobs, the digital economy, improved education and improved life chances for our young.

Equally importantly, positive changes being introduced in adult social care mean that we can become a model for better living in later life as well.

We are also working towards becoming a national leader in recycling and unifying public services to drive quality and keep down administrative costs.



Despite the failed, speculative house-building agenda, we still have a remarkable quality of life. For those investors and entrepreneurs who want an outdoors lifestyle, we are remarkably placed to offer proximity to southern England with a unique environment.

If we can deliver some of the bigger ideas in this vision, we can drive a regeneration of Island life that will have a significantly transformational effect on Islanders of all ages. Above all, we need to be an Island of aspiration, inspiration and innovation. That is what this document tries to achieve.

Eight main lines of work that I believe are important to the Island.

I have divided up the elements of this document into seven substantive elements. These are:

1. Building Homes for Islanders whilst preserving our landscape and quality of life
2. Education: Giving Young People – and all Islanders - Better Opportunities
3. The Jobs Agenda and the Knowledge Economy
4. The Contribution of Arts the Sciences
5. Health: looking after Islanders’ Health, the NHS and Ensuring Quality of Life in Later Life
6. Persuading Government to Understand the Island - an Island Deal.
7. Getting around – Island Transport

BUILDING HOMES FOR ISLANDERS WHILST ENHANCING OUR LANDSCAPE AND QUALITY OF LIFE

The Isle of Wight has long needed intelligent, sustainable and sensitive regeneration to drive economic and social development. We have not always had it. The current system of government housing targets does not serve the Island well. The system of developer-led house-building, which generates only small numbers of affordable housing, is flawed. It fails to deliver the right type of housing. It is not sustainable. The politics of forcing communities to accept unpopular developments is divisive. In 2015/16, just 35 'affordable' homes were built for Islanders, in 2016/17, it was 34, and in 2017-2018 it was 18. These figures are unacceptable. Not only are they appalling, but 'affordable' homes are generally those priced at 80 percent of the market rate, which means that for many people they are not affordable at all.

The wrong type of housing development actually damages our society. The housing that developers want to build is not the housing the Island needs. Housing Associations tell me that they need one and two-bed properties. What we get is three and four-bedroom housing. One of the most painful and upsetting experiences of the 2017 election was the sadness and

desperation of young people telling me that they were unable to find anyway affordable to live. We must prioritise housing that Islanders need at prices that they can afford. We need social housing, starter housing, key worker housing and specialist housing for the elderly.

Uniqueness of our environments

Yet at the same time, we need to protect the landscape against overdevelopment. The north and the east of the Island in particular are under threat. Our Island infrastructure, composed of a Victorian road system, cannot cope with the excessive volumes of traffic. Our railway system was largely shut in the 1950s and 1960s. We have been given precious little help for the significant increase in population we have already seen in recent years, as developments have not been infrastructure-led. Drivers on the Ryde-to-Newport and Ryde-to-Shanklin routes endure unacceptable delays. Out-of-town shopping centres (Tesco Extra in Ryde, Asda in Newport) and developments on green field sites feed car dependency further.

In Island communities, national parks and AONB, our country needs a system of building that is sensitive to the environment and that caters for the resident population. We do not have this at the moment. Housing is built which is out of reach for local people, and local young people in particular, who are as a result forced out of the areas in which they live or into expensive, often poor quality private sector homes that stretch their budgets to breaking point. On the Island, this process of displacement of our young is accentuated because we are an Island. We need a jobs agenda on the Island, not a speculative house-building agenda.

More broadly, the Isle of Wight needs a reformed model of regeneration: one that invests in people rather than land, and which sees education and the knowledge economy as the true driver of prosperity in all its forms. We need to build communities, not just houses. Using our modest supply of land for aims which have a genuine social worth, such as a higher education or high-tech investment, is more important than providing land for speculative housing. As part of our commitment to our future, we will seek to work with partners so that the Island becomes a national model of genuine sustainability.

Next, we need to use the housing we have, rather than just build more. We have an empty homes register. The Council has powers to act but it could do more. I would like to see it being given greater national powers to take firm action. We should have an active policy of buying-back long-vacant housing (approx. 1,500 properties on the Island) and enabling housing associations to bring it into use. The law needs to be changed.

There are more grants that we can apply for. These include affordable homes programmes - where local authorities and housing associations bid for funding - the Housing Infrastructure Fund - set up to support local authorities to build the infrastructure they need for housing

- and the Home Building Fund - a loan finance scheme geared towards small and medium-sized developers. All these funds and grants are available through government websites and we need to make sure that smaller Island builders and developers know about them and work with the Council to access them.

We need an integrated approach to planning. For example, in the centre of Newport we have two large supermarkets – effectively giant bungalows. In some parts of the UK, there would be two storeys of housing above it. Why not on the Island? And is there more that can be done to support turning empty property above shops into flats? Sadly, the previous Government scrapped the capital allowance to develop property above shops. We need to reinstate allowances to encourage landlords to investment in town centre property.

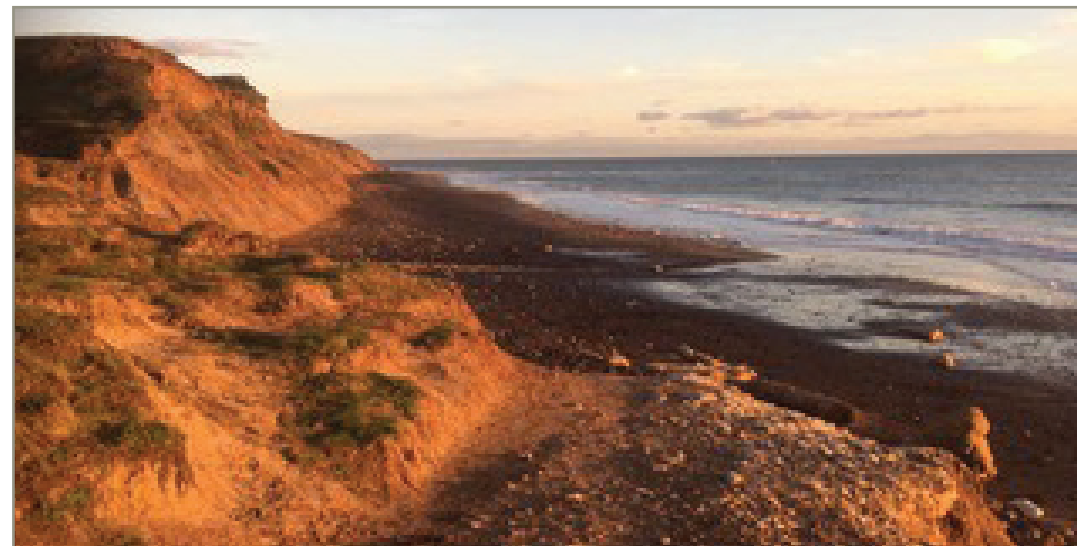
In considering these housing proposals, we are thinking not only of the next five or ten years, but the kind of community we will leave to our grandchildren in 50 years. If we continue to build without thought to future generations, we will ruin the Island in the next few decades.

Greenfield Development

I believe the Isle of Wight's housing policy should oppose ALL greenfield development unless that development has strategic advantage for Islanders and is supported by the local population. A greenfield extension to a strategic employer on the Isle of Wight is an exception; another housing development is not.

Housing for Islanders

In the current climate, I support the building – or purchase from the private sector by housing association – of between 100 and 300 houses per year to meet



assessed need, overwhelmingly for two groups of people. The first group is young people, for whom we need to build social housing and starter homes. The inability of young people to be able to own their own homes is corrosive to social cohesion, deeply unfair and the cause of significant unhappiness. In this group should also be included key worker housing – such as those employed in the public sector. The second group is older residents seeking supported / sheltered housing. We need to make sure our more mature residents have a choice between living in their own homes and moving to a nursing / residential care home, both on grounds of quality of life for elderly people, but also on adult social care costs. Sheltered housing and supported living accommodation is more cost effective in the long run than nursing home care and building sheltered housing also frees up housing stock for others (such as young families).

Sustainability

As part of the new sustainable model of development, I envisage that some of the housing, especially including bungalows, could be purchased by housing associations and repurposed, perhaps by adding a second story to create two properties, thus helping the Island to meet housing targets without eating into our precious landscape. Indeed, a green and sustainable future should become

part of the Island's core identity. We should become national leaders not only in sustainable (re)development, but also in recycling. We need to champion sustainability not only in housing and land use, but in economic growth, use of plastics and energy production. On energy infrastructure and renewables, we should look to develop a smart grid that allows homes and business to control demand for electricity, storing energy in affordable home batteries and then selling back to the grid. Is there more to be done on planning regulation mandating, for example, that new industrial and farm buildings be equipped with solar panels, with the aim of making the Island run on renewable energy?

In addition, we need to support further research into tidal power.

I have been concerned at the low quality of some developments in recent years. We were building better quality housing for poorer Islanders 100 years ago than we do now. We need to ensure better design and quality, and make sure that houses are built in existing communities, near to public amenities, and where possible to a recognisable and distinctive Island design, or innovative low energy designs, sensitive to the built and natural environment. Bog standard, off-the-shelf housing should be objected to on principle.

Outside these areas of special support, I question the basis of government targets for house-building. We do not live in a planned economy. If people wish to buy property, they are free to do so. The most cursory glance at the Isle of Wight County Press shows that much property on the Island remains unsold for long periods, and that there is absolutely no shortage of three and four-bedroom housing – exactly the kind that developers tell us there is need of, or at least is the type supposedly needed to make the developments viable.

I see no need for the Island to use greenfield sites to provide those houses. If property developers wish to buy individual sites and improve and develop property within communities and on brownfield / developed land, I support that as long as the local community wishes it and they meet the relevant planning policies. I assume that this sort of small-scale development will ensure a modest increase in property on the Island, and therefore a modest increase in the population anyway.

The Isle of Wight needs intelligent, sustainable and sensitive regeneration, to drive economic and social development. The current system needs reform. I will do my best to help reform it.

Land Use: AONBs, National Parks and biospheres

The Island is one of the most precious environments in England, mixing rare geology, unique beaches, the richest dinosaur finds in Europe, with scarce, southern downland and marshy inlets. The human addition to this environment has been no less unique. For much of the past 200 years we have been a favoured location for painters and poets, inspired by both the peace of the Island and the inspirational nature of the environment.

In addition, we have Neolithic remains, Roman villas, and architecture from almost every era. We need this heritage - human and natural – protected.

Just over half - 52 percent to be exact – of the Island is classed as an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB). That gives us some protection against over-development, but we are still vulnerable. Inappropriate developments are still being proposed on AONB land.

I would like the Island to consider extending the land covered by the AONB status. This would potentially cover three areas. First, it would encompass the ‘Calbourne corridor’ between Yarmouth and Newport. This area of land runs to the north of the main AONB ‘block’ on the Island and to the south of the Newtown Estuary AONB. I believe it is in the interests of the long-term protection of the Island’s landscape that this area of land be covered by AONB, preserving the overwhelmingly rural nature of the West Wight. I would also seek to extend the AONB around Godshill and, where possible, between around Wootton and Osbourne House.

UN Biosphere

Later this year, the Island will to become a UN biosphere. Whilst this gives us no extra planning powers, it is another marker of the Island’s unique quality. The biosphere is in recognition of both the unique landscape but also mankind’s interaction with it. I will be championing this campaign and encouraging the Government to support it.



National Park

Above and beyond the AONB and UN Biosphere plans, there is a third option - that the Island applies to become a National Park.

The rationale for this is as follows.

First, the Island arguably merits such a unique status, for the reasons which I have already articulated. Making the Island England’s “island national park” would confirm our unique status. Second, the Government is welcoming applications. Third, it would help protect our environment for generations to come. Fourth, it would enable us to mount a stronger opposition to fracking.

Fifth, the evidence compiled by Government suggests that National Park status has economic benefits, providing a boost to visitor spend and numbers. Whilst more research is needed and precise amounts have been difficult to quantify, the 2011 National Park Authorities: Assessment of Benefits – working paper, suggested that additional protection could add millions more pounds to the local economy. A Scottish report into the new National Parks in Scotland argued that these designations were a good way to encourage sustainable development. It also argued that National Park status enhanced an area’s profile, aided recreation and tourism, attracted new business and the park authority itself provided direct and indirect employment. In the paper’s appendix, it cited four international case studies: in Norway,

New Zealand, Wales and Poland, where “National Parks have been seen to have brought a clear socio-economic benefit to their local rural areas.”

As far as I am concerned, the Island should have been England’s first national park. National Parks have to meet two criteria: first, natural beauty and second, the opportunities for open-air recreation. Specifically, they should be designated for the purposes of conserving and enhancing the natural beauty, wildlife and cultural heritage of the area concerned, and also promoting opportunities for the understanding and enjoyment of the special qualities of those areas by the public. It is, for me obvious that the Island fits both those criteria.

A National Park could happen in two ways. First, we could apply as a new national park covering all or almost all of the Island. Second, the New Forest National Park could extend through to the west and south of the Island and be renamed the New Forest and Isle of Wight National Park. The latter option would be the quickest as it is possible to alter the boundaries of a national park quite easily and at modest cost. The first option, whilst clearly the preferential option, would take longer and cost more, but may now be more achievable in light of the Government’s recent announcement.

If some or all of the Island did become a National Park, planning powers would be put into the hands of the Park Authority. However, if this Park authority matched the boundaries of the Isle of Wight Council (as the first option above would) we could seek to have its powers combined with the local authority as already happens with many functions – so in reality the decision-making process would be seamless. Alternatively, as members of the planning committee would be chosen by the Park Authority, the majority of them could be democratically elected Councillors. Therefore, the National Park planning authority would retain a strong Island connection, or possibly even integrate with the Island’s current planning authority.

EDUCATION: GIVING OUR YOUNG PEOPLE BETTER OPPORTUNITIES

A measure of future success will be in how many young Islanders choose to stay on the Island and how many talented young people come to live here from the mainland, filling important jobs in health and education as well as bringing their businesses to the Island.

Education is critical to this. The quality of our education is improving, but we need to secure momentum and we need to stop using the excuse of being an Island to explain away poor results. Newham in East London should be a lesson. It is the poorest area in Britain. Many of its children do not speak English at home. Yet it produces some of the best state results in Britain. They make no excuses; neither should we. As with everything we do on the Island, putting up with second best fails our children.

The first thing I needed to achieve as your Member of Parliament was, working with the local community, teaching staff and kids at Sandown, to save secondary education there and get a failing academy sponsor out. The academy programme in many parts of Britain works well, and we have good academy schools on the Island. However, it did not work in Sandown and we needed to change. We won both those battles and I am very grateful to Councillors, the Council and the Sandown school community for an amazing joint

effort. However, winning the battle is not winning the war. Education is not where it should be on the Island. The victory for Sandown still leaves a school needing improvement, and education collectively needing to continue to raise aspirations and standards.

As part of a local and national effort to get things right, the Isle of Wight is working with Hampshire County Council, and in late 2017, we agreed to continue with this excellent partnership. At the last election, the incoming administration made a pledge that within four years all schools were to be good or outstanding. We will achieve this through the school improvement strategy, Delivering Educational Excellence, recently published by the Isle of Wight Council. I am delighted with that ambition. Nationally, Government spending on schools will hit £43.5 billion by 2019, more than ever before. Per pupil funding on the Island has increased. There is more money in education than ever in our history. Over 80 percent of schools on the Island are now good or outstanding. However, I will also be working to get additional support for our schools.

I also believe that we need fewer sixth forms that are able to serve their students better. Currently we have five sixth forms for eight secondary schools. Hampshire has just seven Sixth Forms for 68 state



secondary schools. Currently, our sixth forms do not have the depth and breadth to support Island sixth formers effectively.

Higher Education on the Island

Improving primary and secondary education is critical in everything we do. In addition, as a priority, we need to deliver significantly improved higher education on the Island. I believe that this should take the form of a campus on the Island, almost certainly in Newport.

Why do we need more higher education?

First, because Islanders have considerably lower levels of higher education than the national average. At the last census, 23 percent of Islanders have a higher education qualification as opposed to 30 percent of the national average. This is not acceptable.

Second, some Islanders, especially from poorer backgrounds, are put off by travelling across the Solent. We need to tackle this by bringing more higher education to the Island.

Thirdly, we need higher education to develop our economy - especially in composites and defence - and to help us become more prosperous. We need to be able to attract digital and high-technology businesses.

Fourth, education is a moral good in itself.

Fifth, a Newport campus would help regenerate our County Town.

However, whatever the balance of courses, I believe it that higher education on the Island is critical to the re-orientating our economy, raising our aspiration and inspiring our young people. In addition,

there should be no reason why the Island could not win students from the mainland, attracted by both the quality of the courses and the lifestyle. Whilst the Island is not going to tempt students who want to live in London or Manchester, for those who like sailing, surfing, cycling, riding and walking, the Island is unique.

Options

Personally, I do not believe a 'new' university is in itself the best option. We should instead aim to support existing providers to expand and for them to use an Island-based campus. There are several potential ways forward, although most revolve around a gradual extension of courses, working with existing providers, whilst building relationships with mainland universities. This could entail the Isle of Wight College evolving to offer greater access to degree courses, HTP offering degree apprenticeships, the excellent Platform One music school and the UKSA - one of the best sailing schools in the world - building on their success and having the option to use the campus to house some or all of their students. We could also work with St Mary's to examine the options for trainee nurses and doctors to use the campus, and to see if we could develop a conference economy too.

The most important thing now is that the Council and education community on the Island commit to the ambitious goal of seeing a campus here, as well as an ambitious but achievable goal of significantly expanding the higher education provision on the Island.



THE JOBS AGENDA AND THE KNOWLEDGE ECONOMY

As mentioned, we currently earn between 70-90 percent of the national average, depending on which figures are used. Our goal must be to come close to, and one day surpass, the national average. That means we need a jobs agenda for the Island, and we need to attract high quality jobs, and train and educate our people for them. In the past we have tried to grow our economy by increasing the size of our population. That has not worked. We need specifically to attract jobs and invest in education and training.

We have a cluster of aerospace, marine, composites and renewable energy firms here. We need to sell ourselves nationally to attract more firms in those supply chains. In addition, we need to pitch to online, digital and creative businesses leaving London and heading to Brighton and Bournemouth and tempt them here instead, using quality life and an improving education system as part of our pitch. We need to develop our renewables sector. We need – and have – a Council which is supportive of business. We need to be able to offer quality of life - so no overdevelopment. We need ultra-fast broadband for much if not all of the Island and we need improvements to physical as well as energy and transport infrastructure.

Specifically, we need to persuade Government to share the costs with BAE to develop a Complex Radar Technology

Demonstrator to ensure another half-century of world-leading radar technology on the Island. This in turn will help create the demand for higher education advanced engineering courses here.

Regarding broadband, we need - and are getting - ultra-fast broadband for all the Island. Thanks to a Government initiative and Wightfibre, we will be amongst the very first areas of the UK to have ultra-fast broadband, which means we will have some of the fastest speeds on the planet. The initial deal covers most of the Island - five out of six homes - although some rural areas are not covered. I will be fighting to make sure as much of the Isle of Wight is covered as possible.

Small business, farming and tourism

A sizeable chunk of the Island's economy is always going to be in tourism and farming. It is critical, especially post-Brexit, that our policies support this part of our economy.

Regarding the rural economy, it is great to see independent food producers doing well. Apart from creating great produce, the 'foodie' industry is important for our Island's brand and a good source of local employment. We produce some of Britain's best cheeses, yogurts and breads,



over and above our fabulous garlic and tomatoes.

Related to this, the County Landowner Association argues that the Island small-scale field structure is well suited to animal husbandry. To encourage this, we need either an Island abattoir, or, post-Brexit, to change the law to allow for humane 'home kill' for the food market – effectively a mobile abattoir or slaughter person that can kill animals humanely and prepare them for the human food chain. The National Farmers Union argues that we also need to improve our ability to store grain on the Island.

With all our local food, we need supermarkets to engage more to support local producers and reduce 'food miles'. This is particularly important in a separate community like the Island. Only the Co-op and ASDA have properly attempted to engage with local suppliers. They should be congratulated. The lesson for Islanders should be that we need to support our local food producers by going to village stores, or larger stores that stock Island produce, and we should not support those supermarket chains that cannot be bothered to support our Island. We also need to work to improve the availability of Island produce to both residents and visitors, including public procurement in our schools, hospitals and care homes.

More generally - and yet again - the grant funding system is structured against us. Government does not recognise water as a factor in assessing Remote Area Status. We need this changed. In a recent government grant scheme, Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly were given 60 percent grant funding, when the Isle of Wight received 40 percent.

And clearly, for our land use and environmental management, we need to support schemes which help preserve the landscape on the Island.

Regeneration Projects

The Council have six potential major regeneration projects. Two of them in particular – Newport Harbour and Ryde Gateway – are critical to the future of the Island. We need to get them right, and in both cases create spaces that generate wealth and showcase the best that the Island has to offer.

The Newport Harbour project is probably the most important of these for the long-term future of the Isle of Wight. This project, to my mind, must have a higher education campus (as already outlined) and it needs infrastructure to support the knowledge economy, including buildings to attract digital and start-up firms - although I accept that we will need to have some housing to help fund it. If we are successful in extending railway lines from the current terminus in Wootton, the harbour should also be the new westbound terminus, with a Newport Harbour Station.

Ryde is also critical, although its success is more linked to the tourism and visitor economy. Currently, Ryde Pier Head and Esplanade appear tired and give a poor impression to arriving visitors to the Island. With a little creativity, both could be exciting areas that help showcase the Isle of Wight.



ARTS AND SCIENCES



We need an Arts & Sciences agenda for the Island. Arts raises aspiration and education, helps enrich life, supports regeneration and job creation as well as helping health and wellbeing. It also boosts the tourism economy.

We should be one of Britain's leading cultural destinations. The Lake District had one poet - Wordsworth - and has 20 million visitors. The Island has had poets, painters, artists and thinkers here for two centuries and yet we seem, by an act of almost wilful neglect, to have forgotten that. We between two and two and a half million visitors.

Our Island has inspired some of the greatest poetry ever written and some of the greatest paintings painted. From the late 18th century, for a period of nearly 200 years, the Island was a source of inspiration for artists, and an artists' retreat from mainland Britain. Apart from Scotland and London, no single British county was as important to landscape art and landscape poetry, and apart from West Cornwall, no part of Britain's coast has been as painted as the south of the Island around Ventnor and the Undercliff. JWM Turner sketched and painted on



the Island. Alfred Tennyson, the greatest poet of the 19th century, lived here for much of his life. Keats spent time on the Island and Endymion, one of the most famous poems in the English language, was inspired by Shanklin Chine. Edward Lear taught Queen Victoria to paint here. Julia Margaret Cameron pioneered portrait photography in Freshwater. Miles Birkett Foster and the pre-Raphealites produced art here too. Many other remarkable artists, lesser known today but important to Britain's poetry tradition, found inspiration here. You can see and hear the Island, its landscape and people in many of their works.

And in science too, the Island has a remarkable tradition. The first telegraph station was built by Marconi at St Catherine's Down, the blue streak rocket system was fired off the Needles Battery, sea planes were designed and built on the Island as well as the first hovercraft.

Cultural tourism is increasingly important. It is a driver of prosperity. Yet whilst other areas of Britain famed for their artistic legacies have used them to attract visitors and create an identity, we have - shamefully - failed to sufficiently celebrate ours. St. Ives in West Cornwall now has Tate St. Ives, which attracts over 200,000 visitors a year and brings in £11 million to the local economy. In addition, arts jobs pay above the national average, are more resilient in downturns and art provides psychological and health benefits. It enriches our lives in many ways.

So what could our arts agenda look like?

Well, the first thing I wanted to achieve was to persuade Arts Council England to name the Island as a priority investment area. They did so last year. This means that they will look more favourably on applications from Island projects. We also need to make our arts projects and

centres on the Island more resilient and better organised collectively. Therefore, we need to develop an arts and museums partnership. Cornwall is the model for this and I am delighted to say that this important move is now underway thanks to leadership in the arts community.

More generally, I believe alongside the higher education campus in Newport Harbour, we need the development of an arts quarter, indeed the quarter would be integral to the campus as a centre of learning.

Second, we need to deepen our relationships with national galleries and get them to do more on the Island. They receive hundreds of millions of pounds in public support; very little of which has ever been spent in the Isle of Wight. Yet parts of their collections come from the Island or have been inspired by it: be they Turner's water colours and oils, or the vast collection of dinosaur bones held by the National History Museum. And surely, the natural home of a V&A satellite museum should be at Osborne House?

Preferably, I would like the Island to be able to attract a significant satellite gallery, but at the very least we need to deepen our relationships with our national institutions and get more out of them for the Island.



HEALTH CARE. LOOKING AFTER OUR HEALTH, AND THE NHS, BETTER, AND ENSURING QUALITY OF LIFE IN LATER LIFE

The pressures on our healthcare are shared by many other parts of Britain. The NHS is moving to delivering services from larger centres, putting pressure on district general hospitals. Serving an increasingly elderly population puts immense pressure on the health system, especially when it is insufficiently integrated with adult social care. Financial pressures are sadly commonplace. The Isle of Wight Clinical Commissioning Group is estimated to be spending £19m (10%) above its target funding allocation and the Isle of Wight Council is also under financial pressure.

In addition, we need to add the Island factor. We have St Mary's Hospital because we are an Island. Our population is half the size of that which is normally served by a district general hospital. As with other public services, we suffer 'diseconomies of scale'; maintaining acute services is more difficult on the Island because we cannot share resources. In particular, we have found it difficult to retain staff. The NHS on the Island is looking to overcome staffing issues by

sharing roles with the mainland. This is absolutely vital and is connected not only to the NHS on the Island but also how we present ourselves to the rest of Britain and the many other factors that people look at when they move here, such as education and quality of life. The latest figures produced by the Trust show that the extra cost of providing healthcare on the Island is more than £5 million per year.

So, what does a long-term vision for the Island's health look like?

Above all, it will feature integrated working, flexibility, as much home care as possible and the use of technology to overcome physical barriers caused by the Solent.

First, healthcare is becoming increasingly specialist. General surgeons are becoming rarer. Due to our size it will



make sense to share some expertise with mainland trusts. So, flexibility and joint working with NHS Trusts on the mainland is vital.

Second, we need to support as much home treatment and GP treatment as possible in the three local centres in Ryde, Sandown and Newport. These are the bases for our district nurses and community work and are based around groups of five to six GP practices. These centres conduct minor but important operations.

In general, we need to fight the NHS tendency to centralise. We need to provide national-standard healthcare whilst decentralising, bringing services down to the home or the GP surgery, wherever possible.

Third, we need to use technology to overcome the physical barriers of the Solent. It may be that for slightly more complex medical procedures, Islanders will still need to travel to the mainland, but why do they need to go to mainland hospitals for all their pre and post-operation appointments? A consultant available on tele-medicine and specialist nurses in situ can give a better patient experience. I wonder if, when the Trust has put itself onto a firmer footing, it can become a national champion of telemedicine, working with the Department of Health

and other organisations to use modern technology to find novel and creative ways of providing healthcare. Ditto health data, which has been poorly used nationally, but used correctly, can play a major role in preventive medicine.

Fourth, the Island should aim to develop national and international experience in certain types of specialisations, such as elderly care and dementia.

Combining Health and Adult Social Care

Much of our ability to deliver quality healthcare will be to integrate health and adult social care for older Islanders. One in four Islanders is over the age of 65 (27 percent to precise), and this will increase to 30 percent by 2025, with a current rise in the numbers of very elderly - 80 plus - residents too. In terms of our demographic and in terms of people living longer, we are now where the rest of Britain will be in twenty years. Therefore, we need to get aging 'right', both for ourselves, now, and for the rest of the country in the future. It is clear that the Council, voluntary sector, health sector and MP need to work more closely together to make good the My Life A Full Life programme, which was meant to ensure that health and adult social care work closely together. There are some immediate things that need to be done.

Building extra-care housing to give older residents a choice. The Council team is ensuring that we these homes. They give our older residents the option of moving into specialist accommodation. It means they have a choice between staying in their own homes (which they perhaps find difficult to look after) and going into a nursing / residential care home (which could impact on their savings and capital). Extra care homes could in turn allow housing associations to buy bungalows and other properties, and repurpose them for one or two younger families who need housing.

Supporting the elderly to leave hospital on time. Getting older people out of hospital and into their homes is not primarily about saving money. It is about saving life. The damage to an elderly person overstaying in hospital is startling. A 2016 National Audit report noted that older patients lose

five percent of muscle strength per day. It also highlighted a study which reported that 10 days of bed rest led to a 14% reduction in leg and hip muscle strength and a 12% reduction in aerobic capacity: the equivalent of 10 years of life. Every day in hospital for an elderly person risks catching illness from others, and muscle wastage. Getting older residents out of hospital on time and safely, extends life itself as well as quality of life. Again, excellent work is being done by the Council to deliver social care packages to ensure that older residents are properly supported when they go home: effectively the hospital moves to the home with the person. It is better for the person - and better value for money - than keeping that lady or gentleman in hospital.



TRANSPORT

If our goal is to have an Island where we get the balance right between preservation of landscape and improving quality of life, whilst having higher quality jobs and tourism and the right sort of housing, then transport is key. Many journeys will clearly continue to be by car. However, the roads from Ryde to Newport and Ryde to Shanklin often have congestion which was once unheard of on the Island and is increasingly similar to the congestion seen in some mainland commuter areas.

So how can we improve things?

Thanks to the Highways PFI, we will soon have the best roads in Europe. However, we are very unlikely, to get large scale road infrastructure such as dual carriageways - should we even wish for it. The one piece of significant road infrastructure that we will need is a bridge over the Medina north of the Newport Harbour area. Therefore, beyond rebuilding our roads, we should be aiming to develop public transport.

On the railways. South Western Railway, the new franchise operator for the Island Line, has recently submitted its Priced Option to the Department for Transport. In a letter to the Secretary of State, I have argued for the maximum amount of investment in Island Line rolling stock, track and stations.

For that investment, the Island Line needs to run a regular, 30-minute service. Therefore, for the current track layout, it needs a new passing loop near Brading. It also needs significantly improved ride quality and newer rolling stock. Preferably, to be competitive with cars and buses, it also needs improved speeds. Stations need to be more welcoming,

and especially Ryde Pier Head and Ryde Esplanade, both gateways to the Island. Ryde Pier Head should be a colourful, exciting, entry point to the Island. Currently, it is too drab. We need to improve cycle storage facilities too and the new rolling stock should be cycle-friendly. If there were ever money available, we should, where feasible, develop a cycle route alongside the rail track to make the line a rail / cycle corridor.

Island Line also needs to work hand-in-glove with the Isle of Wight Steam Railway (IWSR). This is for the following reasons. First, the IWSR attracts some 100,000 visitors. Most drive to, and park at, Havenstreet. The IWSR believes that a link into Ryde St John's would strengthen the IWSR's accessibility. I support this. It would enable coaches to park at Ryde St John's. It would also raise the possibility – dependent on South Western Railway's agreement – of the IWSR using the old, Victorian depot building at Ryde St John's to house some of the IWSR's collection. In short, Ryde St John's could be developed as the gateway to the Steam Railway and a visitor destination in its own right – helping with the regeneration of this part of Ryde.

Extending Island Line

For me, the ultimate goal for Island Line would be the extension to both Newport and Ventnor. There are significant problems with both. However, we have a generational chance to re-examine both routes and to see if they would be feasible.

Extending the railway track into Newport Harbour would require greater integration with the Isle of Wight Steam Railway and, even with passing places, would require a track sharing agreement. The line from Wootton would need to be extended by

nearly three miles, and a new route into Newport found. However, the Steam Railway have long-term aspirations to extend both into Ryde St Johns and to Newport, so there is certainly the potential for closer working and the extension of existing lines. A new station in Newport would link our county town with Ryde, and ease congestion on the Fairlee Road. It would also support Newport Harbour regeneration.

Regarding Ventnor, getting the train back into the town would help the town and help connect it better with the east of the Island. It may also be an integral part of any attempt to attract a national arts institution to Ventnor. However, there will be issues about potential routes through or around Wroxall, as well as access to the tunnel.

With both, if there is a desire to see the routes extended, we should look to secure a feasibility study to offer an up-to-date assessment of the potential costs and opportunities of either extension.

Roads

Thanks to the foresight of a previous Council, the Island is rapidly moving to having the best roads in Britain. Almost all are being rebuilt or resurfaced in the seven year core investment period stipulated by the Highways PFI (Island Roads). However, we need a new bridge over the Medina, just north of Newport.

Cycle Routes

There is more too that we can do with cycle routes. We have made good progress in recent years, the credit of which should go to groups such as CycleWight, Natural Enterprise and the Council. However, it is a realistic aspiration for us to become Britain's leading cycling destination. Cycle routes, by transport standards, are cheap. Encouraging

cycling for Islanders and visitors makes sense. The advantages on the Island are overwhelming. Nine out of ten islanders work on the Island, and many work within a mile and a half of their home. Some 14 percent of the 2.4 million visitors to the Island use cycling or walking as their main mode to explore the Island.

Cycling also brings significant health benefits. That is important as we have some chronic health issues here. In 2014 the Isle of Wight Council's Public Health Team reported a 4.1 percent rate for chronic heart disease against a national average in England of 3.4 percent. Our rates for high blood pressure, at 16.7 percent, are higher than the English national average of 13.6 percent, and we have a higher chance of suffering a stroke against the national average (3.1 percent against 2.54 percent in England). Obesity is a growing concern. It is estimated around 65 percent of residents on the Isle of Wight are currently overweight. The occasional dangers of cycling on the road are outweighed by the public health, transport and tourism benefits. Environmentally, encouraging cycling reduces congestion, improves air quality and reduces road wear.

The critical routes that need developing are:

- The West Wight Route (NCN 22). This is an eight-mile stretch linking Yarmouth/Freshwater (population 7,829), as well as the villages of Calbourne, Newbridge, Wellow, with Newport. This multi-use route will mostly follow the redundant railway line and make use of existing the Rights of Way network. Research estimates that more than 8,000 residents would potentially make use of this proposed trail, delivering a mid-value economic benefit of £816,000 per annum.

- Gunville Greenway (NCN 22). This route will make it easier and safer for people to cycle in and out of Newport to the west. It will provide extra travel



capacity to the schools and housing in Carisbrooke and Gunville. It would also form a very important missing link to NCN 22 which at present stops in the centre of Newport. The route would therefore have an important economic and social benefit.

- Wootton to Ryde (NCN 22) – This route is intended to allow quick and easy access to the centre of Newport. The route would be based on the old Newport to Wootton railway line. A high-quality route would have an enormous impact on the traffic issues of Newport at peak times. Should the railway be extended, the rail line and cycle route should run together.

These three projects will complete the east/west NCN 22 route. On its completion it will connect all four gateways to the Island. In addition, we need to complete the Newport to East Cowes route. This runs alongside the eastern bank of the Medina estuary, linking the communities of East Cowes (population 3,956) with Newport (population 25,500). This traffic free route is partially complete but requires

an additional one mile of construction. Cycle trip volumes on the equivalent Cowes to Newport route on the western side of the Medina are approximately 110,000 per year, and this new route has the potential to generate similar levels of cycle trips. It is a key part of the Medina Valley Coastal Community Plan.

As well as these routes, I believe that we should consider other investments in the cycle network too. These fall into three groups.

- First, could there be an option to run a cycle path alongside the Military Road. Such a route would be an iconic attraction for cyclists. It would get cyclists off the road and link the south of the Island (Chale and, via the Undercliff, Ventnor) with the West of the Island.

- Second, we should find funding to upgrade significantly the quality of Island bridleways, many of which are deeply rutted and unusable for cyclists. Whilst cost may prohibit the repair of all, the most

important ones in terms of developing a cycling network should be prioritised.

- We need to improve the surface quality of much of the existing cycle network.

The fixed link

I am not spending a great deal of time on the subject of the Fixed Link, because it is currently so unlikely to happen. I need to focus on potentially achievable aims. We may well have a fixed link in 25 or 50 years' time, but I do not believe that we will have one in the next decade. The figures do not add up. In addition, the fixed link debate is an example of exactly the type of debate we should not be having. From the outset, the fixed link has been presented as a panacea for all the Island's problems, whilst those who object or question it are shouted down. In whatever we discuss on the Island, we need a constructive and civilised debate.

The fixed link is not a panacea, and those that present it as being so are misleading Islanders. It would clearly have benefits, but how many is open to discussion. It would help Islanders get quickly to the mainland. It would probably help us to access jobs, and clearly a road link would bind us into the mainland economy more closely.

However, to make a road tunnel viable, we would, by the Fixed Link group's own estimate, need to at least double our population: that means another four towns the size of Ryde or Newport on the Island. We would lose the ferry jobs. St Mary's Hospital would close; the only reason we have a hospital is because we are an Island. In addition, once a fixed link is built, house-building pressure on all parts of the Island, and even in the AONB, would become overwhelming without planning guarantees.

The fixed link under the current theoretical plans would go to a junction on the M27, currently one of the busiest sections of

motorway in Britain. It will be one route, to a motorway junction, 15 miles from Southampton or Portsmouth. It will not make getting to the centre of Portsmouth or the centre of Southampton much quicker.

Local authorities on the mainland currently give no indication that they would be willing to support the project, and they will have to give up significant acres of land to do so.

Currently approx.. £115 million pounds a year is spent by Islanders and visitors getting to and from the mainland. The Fixed Link group believe that the interest payments on the approximate £3 billion needed to build a tunnel would amount to at least £90 million per year. Out of the £115 million, the Fixed Link group estimates that the Yarmouth to Lymington ferry route would remain operational, as would the Red Jet and Fast Cat passenger links. These account for a sizeable chunk of the £115 million. The Fixed Link group accept that even the current expenditure on the two most popular ferry routes: East Cowes to Southampton and Fishbourne to Portsmouth, would not be enough to pay for the interest on a tunnel. Even if it was just enough, the amounts spent would be the same as the current ferries, which means the same prices; averaging perhaps £30 to £40 one way. For how long would Islanders be happy to pay £30 to £40 for a car journey to the mainland? A bus would be much cheaper, but it would connect with a motorway junction. It could connect with Solent public transport, but this would require significant extra investment.

As there would be one primary route in and out of the Island, roads around the entrance would likely have to be widened. The costs, both financial and environmental, would be significant.

I am happy to support an independent feasibility study, but I want all the implications of the tunnel to be examined, not just the narrow economics of it

otherwise, I believe, the circular campaign over the fixed link will continue ad infinitum. Therefore, as well as feasibility, there needs to be an impact study too.

I repeat, there are certainly potential benefits. Whether they outweigh the costs is another matter. If money becomes available, or the project becomes viable, then we should give it serious consideration. Until, then, I need to get on with trying to make a difference now.

Ferries

The ferries were privatised badly, without any public service obligation. This was wrong. Since then, both companies have been loaded with debt, debt that passengers pay for every time we use the service. In addition, they deliver a very high profit on their turnover, three to five times greater than average. The owners of the ferry firms do exceptionally well at the expense of the Island.

I do recognise that they have tried, up to a point, to be good citizens to the Island, and they do help to drive traffic and tourism. They do also put money back into the Island – about £1 million pounds per year, although this is poor return for the Island given the size of their profits. Overall, the firms' shareholders have been prioritised

over the needs of Islanders. We are a captive market for a potential duopoly for whom there is little evidence of pro-active competitive pricing, but there is currently little interest within Government for nationalisation or further regulation.

A major investigation was launched into cross-Solent travel by a Transport Infrastructure team headed by Christopher Garnett. Probably the most important result of this was the idea of a Transport Infrastructure Board (TIB) to lead regular and meaningful dialogue with the ferry companies.

In general, there are various options for the Island's future dealings with the companies. These include a closer working relationship with Island representatives through the TIB, a public service obligation and/or greater regulation. I want to let the Board develop a relationship with the ferry companies first before we seek alternatives. I will be guided in part by their recommendations. It is, however, clear that the ferries need to more effectively demonstrate that they are on the side of Islanders.



GETTING AN ISLAND DEAL

The Isle of Wight is an Island. That is a statement of the obvious, but it is one that Government does not necessarily want to accept. In a report prepared for the Isle of Wight Council, the University of Portsmouth has estimated that the additional cost of providing local authority services - due to being an Island - is £6.5 million per year. We gain no extra funding for public services. The three Scottish Island constituencies, the Western Islands, Shetland and Orkney, receive approximately an extra £6 million each, despite having significantly smaller populations. Government support programmes for isolated parts of the UK do not apply to the Isle of Wight because when the rules were written, no account was made for isolation caused by water. Why this has not previously been successfully challenged, I do not know.

The Island loses out in public funding in several ways. We cannot access some neighbouring local government services, be that sports centres, libraries, etc. This is called 'public goods spillover.' Second, due to transport costs, the population size and limited opportunities of scale, there is a premium for conducting business on the Island. This can be partly, but only partly overcome, by super-fast digital, which will be arriving in the next few years. Third, the sense of isolation and 'dislocation' acts as a deterrent to skilled individuals to relocate to the Island as well as imposing a negative effect on what the University of Portsmouth called "knowledge intensive and multi-specialised urban economies." This extra cost is reflected in other areas too, such as healthcare.

In addition, the Green Book assessment – the Government's way of assessing public sector investment, counts against

the Island because we are geographically limited. We have fixed borders. It is difficult for us to claim that a scheme in Cowes will benefit Fareham or Southampton, for example. Therefore, it is sometimes difficult for us to win government funding for projects.

There is no simple solution to the above, apart from an ongoing programme of educating and influencing government ministers and officials so that they understand that the Island is just that - an Island - and rules designed for a mainland community do not work for us.

I started this campaign of influence and education as soon as I was elected, arguing that the Island needed a better deal from Government. I have mentioned it on many occasions, both inside Parliament in debates, including my maiden speech. I also held a Parliamentary debate on government funding of public services on the Isle of Wight. In May, I spoke at a debate organised by the All Party Parliamentary Group on UK Islands (which I established and chair), on the economies of Islands. I expect to hold more such debates in the months and years to come. Government has sounded sympathetic, but it needs to turn words into actions.



SUMMING UP

The purpose of this document is to provide a vision for the Island, and an overall framework for my work over the coming years. It is also to help to stimulate debate.

It sets out some ideas that I believe would be beneficial for the Island, having spoken with many fellow Islanders over recent years – particularly since being elected in 2017. I cannot achieve these things by myself, but collectively, we, as an Island, can.

This is not a static document, but a starting point. I anticipate publishing updates as it continues to develop and draw on the input of many Islanders – and the evolving needs of our community.

It is the greatest privilege of my working life to be able to represent the Isle of Wight as your Member of Parliament. I promise that I will do all I can to achieve the best outcomes for the Island.

Please do contact me about your ideas for the Island. You can do so at:

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