



VOTE

Jamie
Smith
for Garff

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Hello ...

I'm Jamie Smith standing in the House of Keys elections for Garff.

My wife and I have lived in Maughold for 23 years and our two children, born here, went to the Dhoon and Ramsey Grammar schools.

I am currently Deputy Chair of Garff Commissioners, a role I really enjoy, and I have previously been Chairman. Being a Commissioner is very rewarding; I've been fully involved in the discussions about Laxey and Lonan sewage treatment, various flooding issues, and the sea wall proposals, amongst others.

But Commissioners' work is voluntary. I have quite a challenging job in financial services and I have to juggle the two roles. I would like to get more involved in the nuts and bolts of Manx life on a full-time basis. That's why I've decided to stand.

As a current Commissioner, I have a detailed understanding of local issues and am qualified to stand up for Garff in government. I also believe I have an understanding of the issues for national government and the Island as a whole and will be constantly aware of the need for Government to look after those who are struggling while remembering it is taxpayers' money that government is spending.

We all know what the problems are. I have tried here to put forward practical solutions for debate. If they resonate with you, I hope you will consider voting for me on the 23rd.

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Maughold

I live in Maughold and I love it here. But in recent years, Maughold has lost its shop, its filling station, its sub-post office, and its pub.

I see there being three big issues in the Maughold area that we need to do something about:

1. sensibly sized housing
2. fibre broadband outside Maughold Village
3. the state of the roads: potholes on our rural roads in Maughold are a problem. I have a separate video on highways.

Sensibly-sized housing: this seems to be to be a two-pronged issue. Firstly, young families can't afford to move into Maughold because it is too expensive and there are no smaller houses available, generally speaking.

Secondly, more elderly Maughold residents may wish to downsize but can't do so whilst staying in the Maughold area because of a lack of suitable smaller properties. They are therefore not freeing up bigger family-sized houses for sale. This lack of supply of bigger houses then has the effect of pushing up prices in what is already an expensive area to buy.

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As a Commissioner, I have sat in many meetings debating planning applications for humongous houses when these are not what we need. We need to look at small-scale development of brownfield sites and infilling with small housing developments so as not to spoil the rural nature of this area. The planning process is key here. House-builders want to build big, expensive houses as these make them more profit, but if the planners will not give the go-ahead for these, the house-builders will build something else instead, so let's oblige them to build smaller houses.

If we can enable people to move into Maughold, it will reinvigorate our community's services ... maybe we can even get our shop back!

I joined the petition for the Maughold area to enjoy a faster, more reliable Internet connection. Manx Telecom then ran the service in a straight line from Ramsey to Maughold Village, missing the vast majority of properties in the parish. I would intend to continue to lobby Manx Telecom to expand this across the Maughold area.

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Laxey

Sewerage

I firmly believe that the best solution for Laxey and Baldrine Sewerage treatment is pumping to Meary Veg treatment works in Santon.

As Chairman of Garff Commissioners I worked with the members of Best4Laxey group from its inception. At the time the planning application from Manx Utilities was for a treatment works at Laxey harbour which would put treated sewage into Laxey Bay. In the run up to the planning decision I worked hard to establish the facts and convince my colleagues that Manx Utilities had failed to establish that the Cairn/Harbourside site was the only viable option. There was also no mention of their plans for Baldrine/Gatwick. We, the Board of Garff Commissioners, eventually opposed the Planning Application, and the Planning Committee followed suit.

The next two Garff MHKs will have 22 other MHKs, faced with massive pressure from Treasury to cut costs across the board, fund economic recovery and a reduction in NHS waiting lists.



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Those 22 other MHKs will need to be convinced that pumping Laxey Bay's sewage to Meary Veg is the best solution even though the initial build cost is considerably higher than depositing the treated sewage into the bay. The costs must be presented over the lifetime of the pipeline - 80 to 100 years. In that time the IRBC stand-alone treatment units that appear to be the cheaper alternative over a shorter time-frame will have had to be replaced at least four times, with all the disruption and cost that that entails, whilst the pumped solution will last longer than that, using only electricity which we expect to reduce in cost as renewable sources come on line.

This is a community issue. My children have grown up spending summer days on Laxey beach and in the sea and I think we all want it to be protected for future generations to enjoy.

Flooding

Locally, we need to keep on top of the flooding issue. Quite a bit of work has already been done to avoid the kind of flooding we saw last October but it remains a priority of mine to ensure that the water that flows off the hills is adequately dealt with. I would propose a return to local maintenance gangs who have intimate knowledge of the local area so they know what needs to be done to mitigate heavy rainfall.

Heritage

I would like to see the the Laxey valley - Summit to the Sea - branded "Towards World Heritage Site status". It is much more than the mining heritage, there is industrial heritage from mills to breweries that pre-date the mines. I have spoken to key people who think WHS status is achievable and well deserved. This would be great marketing to encourage tourism to the Island, to Garff.

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Lonan

In recent years, Lonan has lost its shop, its post office, and its pub. The brewery intended to implement an anti-competitive covenant on the Liverpool Arms so that it would never again be a pub, nor could it be a small Co-op, for example, either. It is now an eyesore, but more than that, it is the loss of a community hub. If the Liverpool Arms site is converted into housing I would push for a small shop to be included on the ground floor.

I would like to see Lonan Church saved from demolition and converted to a community facility and occasional festival church. This would be an excellent project to attract lottery funding.

A major part of my opposition to Manx Utilities' planning application for a sewage treatment works at Laxey Harbour was that the proposal made no reference whatsoever to Lonan's sewage, which currently flows raw out of Garwick Bay into the same overall Laxey Bay. From the many meetings I have attended with Manx Utilities on this issue, I do now believe that they understand the need to solve Lonan's sewage along with that of Laxey too. I would continue to champion this in Government. (Please see the section on Laxey sewerage proposals.)

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Onchan

I fully understand those Onchan residents in Garff who feel disenfranchised by the oddity of part of Onchan being in Garff. It was well-meant, balancing the constituency numbers, but Onchan residents are already upset that they have lost their round-the-houses bus route, and now they are not even in the Onchan constituency.

I have researched the possibility of changes. Moving the boundary is possible but very difficult and may take some time. In contrast, changing the constituency name would be pretty easy – to, maybe, "Garff and Onchan East" – prior to any change of boundary.

I am aware that the Onchan MHKs raise issues on behalf of Garff constituents in Onchan. This is very generous of them, but Garff MHKs really must represent them, possibly in conjunction with the Onchan MHKs to provide a seamless service.

Anti-social behaviour is a prime example of an issue that links Onchan in Garff with "greater Onchan". I would like to work with Onchan Commissioners to improve the situation.

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Capital projects

Big projects appear to be poorly managed, run late, and run over budget, the Prom being the prime example that frustrates us all. I see three areas of improvement:

Firstly, the setting up of a central "Capital Projects Team": this has been discussed but it has not happened. We don't even know if it will sit within Dol or Treasury – it should be within Treasury so that we can keep a firm control of costs. I would like to see the formation of this team accelerated as there is no time to lose when such huge sums of our money are being spent, often unwisely. This team must be headcount-neutral by taking project management and legal experts from other departments, who all currently have their own project teams, and pooling resources.

The legal people should be responsible for drafting watertight contracts with penalties for overrun to prevent contractors going off-site to other projects. They are subject to such contracts when they are working on private-sector projects. They should be subject to the same when completing public-sector works.

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Secondly, accountability: across Government, I would like to help initiate a change in culture amongst senior managers with the introduction of proper, structured performance management frameworks like the ones they would be expected to adhere to in the private sector. This is an absolute must to help restore some credibility that the Government is on top of its brief and can be trusted to spend our taxes wisely. Measured performance should also serve to make it less likely that mistakes happen, but when they do, departments should be accountable for them and to learn from them. Too often, big mistakes are made and the wider public has no idea who was responsible or, crucially, whether any measures have been put in place to prevent a similar error in the future.

Senior managers in Government should be cooperating with other departments, rather than empire-building. I would like to see an end to "using up the end of year budget" with iPads and generators – just two examples I've heard of.



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Housing

The lack of affordable housing is an ongoing issue.

I would advocate Rent2Buy via a government-backed not-for-profit housing association, which I do have some working experience of. Some housing would be available for people to buy under a shared ownership scheme whereby the person would buy around 50% of the property and then pay subsidised rent on the rest. These schemes give more people the opportunity to own their own home, especially younger people.

I think affordable housing is such a significant issue that there should be a dedicated Housing Minister responsible for it.

The Government's planning department should be making it harder for house-builders to build large "executive-style" houses that are out of the reach of most of us, and instead should be more ready to grant planning approval for affordable, smaller homes.

We should investigate requiring any off-Islander wishing to buy a house here to prove that they intend to move over and live in it, rather than buying it as an investment, because this is pushing up house prices.

In the meantime, I would also advocate double-taxing off-Island private landlords so that we can plough this money into the building of affordable housing for our young people.

We should take the Island's house builders to task over some of their practices, which is making it very difficult for some people to buy.

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Roads and the Dept of Infrastructure

Highways is currently part of Infrastructure. I firmly believe that the Department of Infrastructure is far too big and, partly because of this, our highways are not being adequately maintained. On the doorstep, there are numerous complaints about potholes, parking, speeding, and footpaths.

1. We all find the state of the roads shocking. Let's stop patching them, as that does not last any time at all. Water gets underneath and washes it away. Instead, we need to start a program of properly resurfacing them. It will cost in the short term, but in the long run, it has to be more effective.
2. Parking: we should be encouraging bus travel, particularly for commuters, so that parking is less of an issue in towns.
3. Speeding: we need to look into innovative street design from others countries. There is technology out there – for example, crossings that will automatically go red when a speeding vehicle approaches. I would also promote better driver education in schools.
4. Footpaths: How can we promote active travel with so many of the Island's footpaths impassable or actually shut? This is a funding issue but must be addressed in order to enable us to make the most of our beautiful Island.

There is so much that needs to be done that there really must be a dedicated Highways Minister within the Dol to really get stuck in to looking after our roads. This person needs to be prepared to be the obvious face of the Highways division, accountable for changes that are made so that disastrous alterations like the red and black zebra crossing in Kirk Michael do not happen.

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Education

The Department of Education is to be congratulated for doing its best to keep the education of our children and young people going during the pandemic. There will inevitably be catching up to do which is going to place further strain on teachers. They need to feel supported by us, the community, but they will also need to feel the benefit of the government's financial support to get education through this tough period.

Returning graduates

I would advocate offering financial sweeteners to returning graduates. I see this as being most effective when offered to those who have graduated and then built up their skills off-island over a period of years. When they have gained work experience let's encourage them to return to the island when they are a little bit older and ready to settle down here.

Vocational training

This should be supported and extended to provide the Island with skilled young people. I would like to see an expansion of the apprenticeship scheme.

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Climate change

Climate change is probably the biggest problem facing us and the one where we could easily get swept up in spending lots of money with insignificant return.

Some people will feel that we should be embracing every new idea to counter climate change. However, I would say we need to be realistic. We are a small island and need to be looking at what other countries are doing and taking their best ideas.

So I would say the following are relatively cheap and need to happen now:

- Solar panels on every public building possible;
- All new homes to have electric vehicle charging points and air-source heat pumps; and
- An uptick in bus usage to make bus travel more of a habit. We could encourage this with, for example, free bus travel for under-22s like they have in Scotland.

In the medium term, we should hold a watching brief so that we do not make expensive mistakes. We should investigate the following:

- Wind, wave, and tidal power: being an island in the middle of the Irish Sea, perhaps we could harness more of this.
- We should be encouraging renewable technology companies to trial their new ideas here. We missed a big opportunity to do this with low-range electric cars.
- We should look into electric buses.
- We need to look at alternatives to Douglas and Peel power stations.
- I will champion all the Commissioners' recycling initiatives.

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Digital divide

Increasingly, companies and the Government are offering their services either solely online or making it more difficult if you are not accessing them online.

Some examples of problems caused for people with little access to the internet are:

- the recent census that was online-only unless you actually requested a hard copy;
- children being taught online during the Covid outbreak, when the schools were closed; and
- landing forms for returning residents during lockdown.

I think we need a two-pronged approach:

1. make it easier for people who are not technologically-minded to access hard copies of information that they need on a day-to-day basis
2. make it easier for them to become more technologically-minded

I would propose the following:

Fibre broadband rolled out to rural areas. This is a necessity, not a nice-to-have.

I would look to increase inter-generational contact between the elderly, who are generally less tech-savvy, and the young, possibly through the Duke of Edinburgh scheme, to get young people volunteering to help the elderly become more technologically literate.

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The Department of Education needs to be resourced. The pandemic caught us all on the hop but we should be making sure for next time, if there is one, that our education system is prepared to ensure that no student is left behind if they do not have the technology for online learning.

We need to support our post office network and stop any more closures so that people can get help with accessing government services. There is an issue with the profitability of some post offices but we have seen what happens in the private sector when profitability trumps all else: you end up with a situation where services are closed down, leaving users unable to access the basics. I am thinking of the banks pulling out of towns and taking their cash machines with them so that customers cannot easily access cash. Whether or not a post office is profitable, it needs to exist in order to provide essential services and a bridge to Government.

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It would be an honour to serve as your MHK. Thank you for taking the time to read this. I hope you will consider voting for me with one of your **two votes!**

If you would like to discuss any of the issues raised in this manifesto or anything else that concerns you about Island life please feel free to contact me.

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