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**Ramsey:**

# **A Prospectus for Growth**

**DRAFT VERSION 1. NOT TO BE MORE WIDELY SHARED.**

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## Contents

About this document.....	3
Introduction .....	4
A vision for Ramsey.....	5
An overview of Ramsey .....	7
Building on strengths 1: Heritage .....	13
Building on strengths 2: Waterways .....	15
Building on strengths 3: Community Spirit .....	21
Tackling weaknesses 1: Poor connectivity and isolation .....	24
Tackling weaknesses 2: Health outcomes .....	27
Tackling weaknesses 3: Lack of employment opportunity.....	30
Conclusion and Next Steps.....	33

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## About this document

This document has been commissioned by Huntingdonshire District Council, funded by the Cambridge and Peterborough Combined Authority, and developed in co-ordination with a local team of councillors, business, and other stakeholders. It delivers a 'prospectus for growth' - identifying Ramsey's strengths and opportunities through highlighting interventions and areas where more detailed planning is required. The document will be instrumental in securing funding to deliver these short-term, medium-term and long-term initiatives which is seen as crucial to the growth and prosperity of Ramsey, as well its wider economy.

This prospectus builds upon the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Independent Economic Review (CPIER), which was commissioned to give a thorough review and set of priorities for the Combined Authority. It recognises three broad economies existing in the Combined Authority region:

- 1) Greater Cambridge
- 2) Greater Peterborough
- 3) The Fens

**Ramsey is primarily part of the economy of the Fens, yet it has access to the Greater Peterborough economy.** Ramsey is not yet part of the Greater Cambridge economy, and poor connectivity is currently an obstacle. However, revised bus service and future options of connecting to the Cambridge Autonomous Metro (CAM) are among opportunities to connect Ramsey and its surrounding villages with the Greater Cambridge economy.

This 'prospectus for growth' report endorses mayor James Palmer's target for the region, to **double its Gross value added (GVA) over the next twenty years.** For this to be achieved, all areas will be required to 'do their bit' to improve the three economies. We estimate that Ramsey's economic output (GVA) was £104m in 2017 - doubling this will take that to over £200m. The interventions hereby enshrine the importance of inclusive growth, in line with the CPIER recommendations.

Lastly, the devolution deal which created the Combined Authority recognises the **important role of market town economies** in growing the wider Cambridgeshire and Peterborough economy. A masterplan or 'prospectus for growth' document for each of the eleven market towns across the region provides the opportunity to look at the unique features of each town, and offers deliverables which will benefit the immediate and wider economy.



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## Introduction

What sets apart the town of Ramsey? What do we want it to look like in ten, twenty, even fifty years' time? What are the big things which need to happen to secure a prosperous future for our residents?

This document sets out our answers to these questions. We begin by setting out a vision for the future of our town, which has been developed in co-ordination with local partners. Then we give an overview of what the town of Ramsey is like, drawing upon a broad analysis of all the available data. Together, these lead to a list of key priorities which, if acted upon, will be transformational for our town.

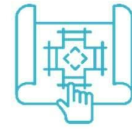
We have called this document a “prospectus for growth”. The choice of words is deliberate. Similar to an investment prospectus, we don't expect everything in this document to be funded immediately. There are some quick wins where an injection of funding can get things moving. For other projects, we will need to spend time developing detailed plans and compelling investment cases before we can begin to leverage in funding. While the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority (CPCA) has funded this report, and is keen to invest in our town, we know we will need to build a coalition of supporters, including central government, to get some of the schemes detailed here delivered.

But we will not let the complexity or time requirement dim our ambitions for our town. Now is a pivotal moment. There have been positive signs of change in Ramsey – from the broad base of support for the Ramsey Million initiatives to the opening of new premises on the high street. At the same time, we are grappling with the questions faced by towns up and down the country – how to support our high street during the transition to greater online retail, how to encourage people into more sustainable and healthy ways of living and moving, and how to attract new labour and business in what has been dubbed “the age of the city”. The towns which will prosper are those which don't shy from taking bold steps to address these issues.

We welcome the involvement of the public and businesses as we develop these plans. [Details to be added of how people can have their say].

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## A vision for Ramsey



**Our vision is that Ramsey will be a growing town, with increased local job opportunities, which is connected into the rest of Cambridgeshire and making the most of its heritage and natural assets.**

Firstly, our town needs to grow in order to survive. While over the last few years our ageing population has declined slightly in size, we are now excited to see some developments coming forward on the fringes of our town. As our community gets bigger, we will strengthen our cohesiveness and resilience by building on the strong community and voluntary sector in the town. And as we do this, we will also look to grow our economy. The Combined Authority's target is to double output (as measured by Gross Value Added, or GVA) from 2017 levels by 2040. We estimate that in Ramsey, our economic output (GVA) was £104m in 2017. Doubling this will take that to over £200m, bringing in more money to support our town centre, grow the wages of our workers and benefit local businesses.

Secondly, we want to create job opportunities in the town. This is necessary if we are going to achieve our economic goals. The north of our town offers especially promising opportunities to grow the private sector in Ramsey. By developing the skills base of our town up to Huntingdonshire levels, and improving links between skills providers and employers, we can attract more companies to the town.

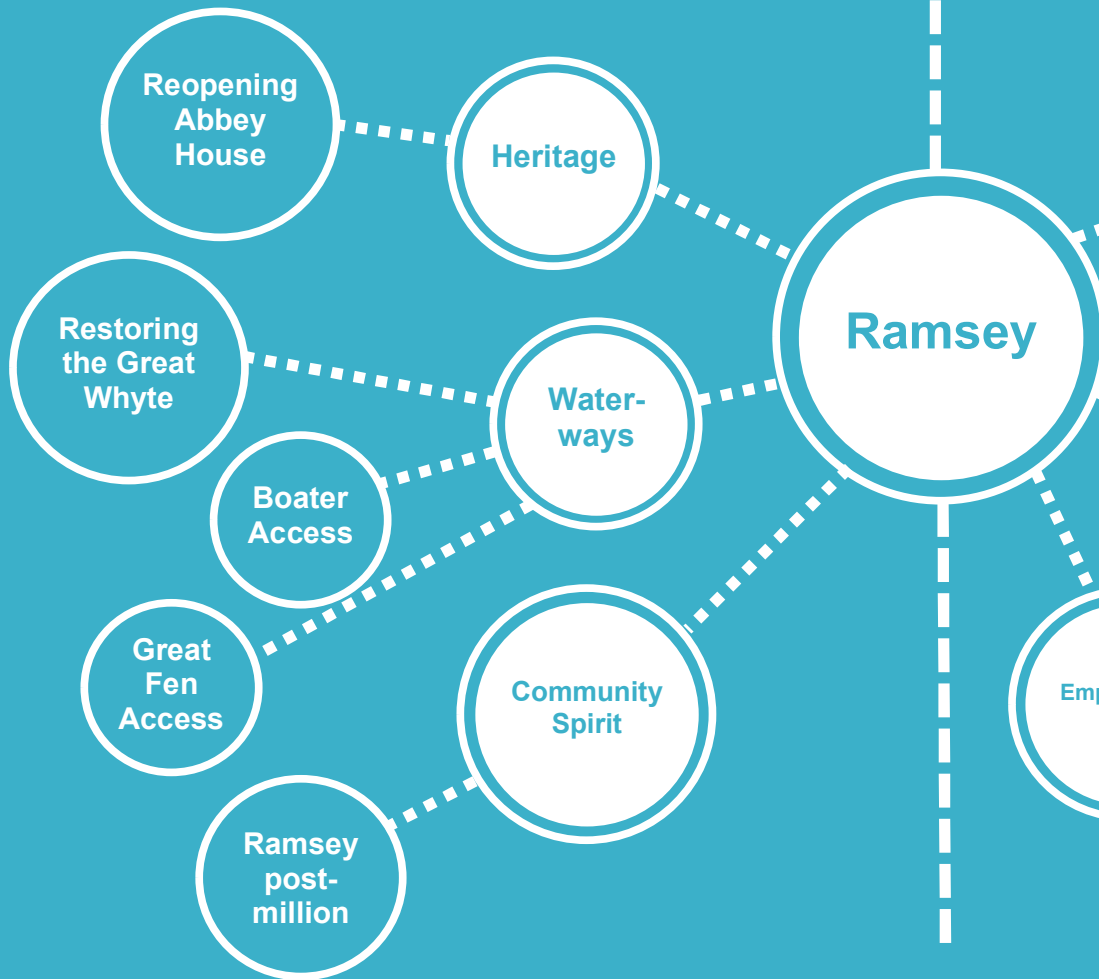
Thirdly, Ramsey will be connected into the rest of Cambridgeshire – which means both the town's surrounding villages, and larger urban hubs such as Cambridge and Peterborough. While Ramsey will always have a rural feel to it, and this is a big part of its charm, we are only too conscious of the costs of isolation. We will explore more creative approaches to improving connectivity, as well as looking to ameliorate local bus provision.

Finally, we will drive value for the town out of its excellent assets – both in heritage, and in nature. Our historic connections through the Ramsey Abbey, and our enduring status as a fen town make Ramsey what it is today, and should be celebrated. They can also play a big part in making our town more attractive to visitors, which will bring increased spending power to our high street, creating jobs.

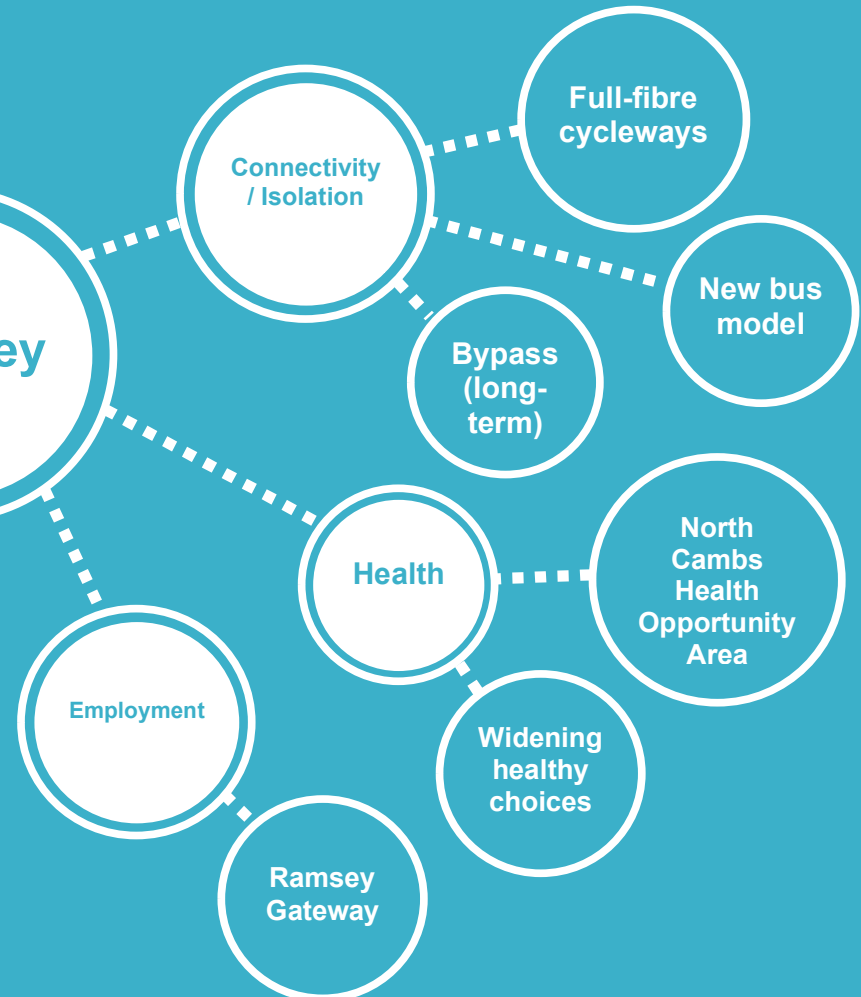
This plan looks to deliver on this vision for the town and people of Ramsey.

# The Plan on a Page

## Building on Strengths



## Tackling Weaknesses



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## An overview of Ramsey



We have looked in detail at what the data and individuals in the community are saying about Ramsey. This highlights three major strengths and three major weaknesses:

Major Strengths	Major Weaknesses
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Heritage</li><li>• Waterways and Fen landscape</li><li>• Community Spirit</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Poor connectivity and isolation</li><li>• Health issues</li><li>• Lack of employment opportunity</li></ul>

Our plans for Ramsey respond to these to accentuate the strengths and tackle the weaknesses.

### A wealth of heritage assets

Ramsey is a town steeped in history - Ramsey Abbey was founded c.985 and was one of England's most influential religious houses in its heyday. The monastery was disbanded in the year 1539, as part of Henry VIII's dissolution of the monasteries and was subsequently acquired by the Cromwell estate in the 16<sup>th</sup> Century. Today, the 15<sup>th</sup> Century Abbey Gatehouse remains as a striking feature, framing part of Ramsey's oldest heritage offer.

Anyone embarking on Ramsey's Historic Town Trail can enjoy admiring and exploring the likes of the Parish Church of St Thomas a Becket, the 17<sup>th</sup> century George Hotel, and the Walled Garden amongst other offers.

As a market town, Ramsey was granted rights for trading in 1267. The market grew in size and reputation in accordance to the prosperity of the Abbey, drawing trade from far and wide to its weekly markets and even an annual fair celebrating the feast of St Benedict.

### A Fen town with good waterway access

Prior to the draining of the fens during the 17<sup>th</sup> Century, large areas of Ramsey had been under water. This process dramatically altered Ramsey's distinct landscape, as 99% of Ramsey's wild fen disappeared. Surviving wetlands include sites such as Holme Fen and Woodwalton, whilst a 50-year project aims to transform and restore the landscape at Great Fen, achieving a visitor attraction and wildlife habitat.

As the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Independent Economic Review (CPIER) argues: "The fens must also be considered as one of the UK's greatest natural assets with a rich wetland ecosystem which affords great leisure opportunities... the value of this natural

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capital must not be overlooked.”<sup>1</sup> “Natural capital” captures the value of the essential ecosystem services upon which society depends. As the effects of climate change become increasingly acute, it is becoming especially important to maintain and support these unique centres of biodiversity.

A number of walks and trails are complemented by good waterway access to the Great Fen, thus building on the landscape’s leisure experience with access by narrowboat. A claim of Ramsey’s waterway heritage is the Shotbolt, a particular design of narrowboat unique to the market town.

Ramsey’s waterways are not all exposed or accessible - a stretch of water called the Bury Brook was in-part covered in 1852 and now runs under The Great Whyte street.

### **A warm welcome: community spirit**

A resounding and infectious community spirit exists in Ramsey. This has been strengthened and channelled by the Ramsey Million, a lottery funded project dedicated to making Ramsey a better place to live, work and visit.

There is plenty to do in Ramsey, just some of the regular events include:

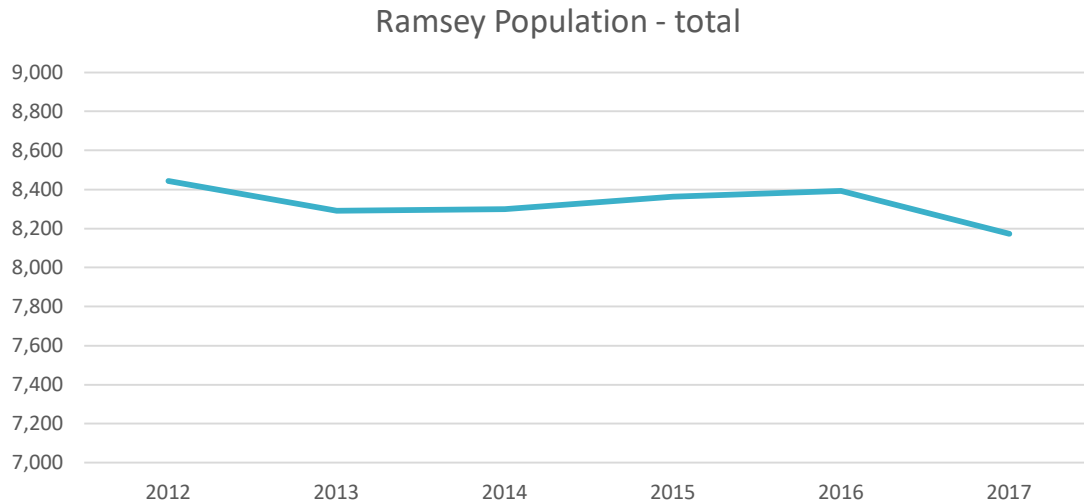
- Repair Café
- CRUNCH and BOSH Youth Clubs
- SPARKS, a social club for adults with learning disabilities
- The Dog’s Meet Community Café
- Timebank, a scheme whereby an individual or organisation invests their time to help others to earn a time credit in return
- Sports clubs, such as the popular Ramsey Cycling Club

These make up a calendar of events, which can be found on the Discover Ramsey website.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.cpier.org.uk/media/1672/cpier-report-151118-lowres.pdf> p9





*Source: ONS ward-level population estimates*

However, it is important to be realistic about the fact that the community itself has a currently declining population (see graph, above). The anticipated delivery of residential provision is expected to create an upturn in the population, but this is yet to be reflected in population statistics. The health of Ramsey’s community, which depends upon active participation across all age groups, is at risk without further intervention.

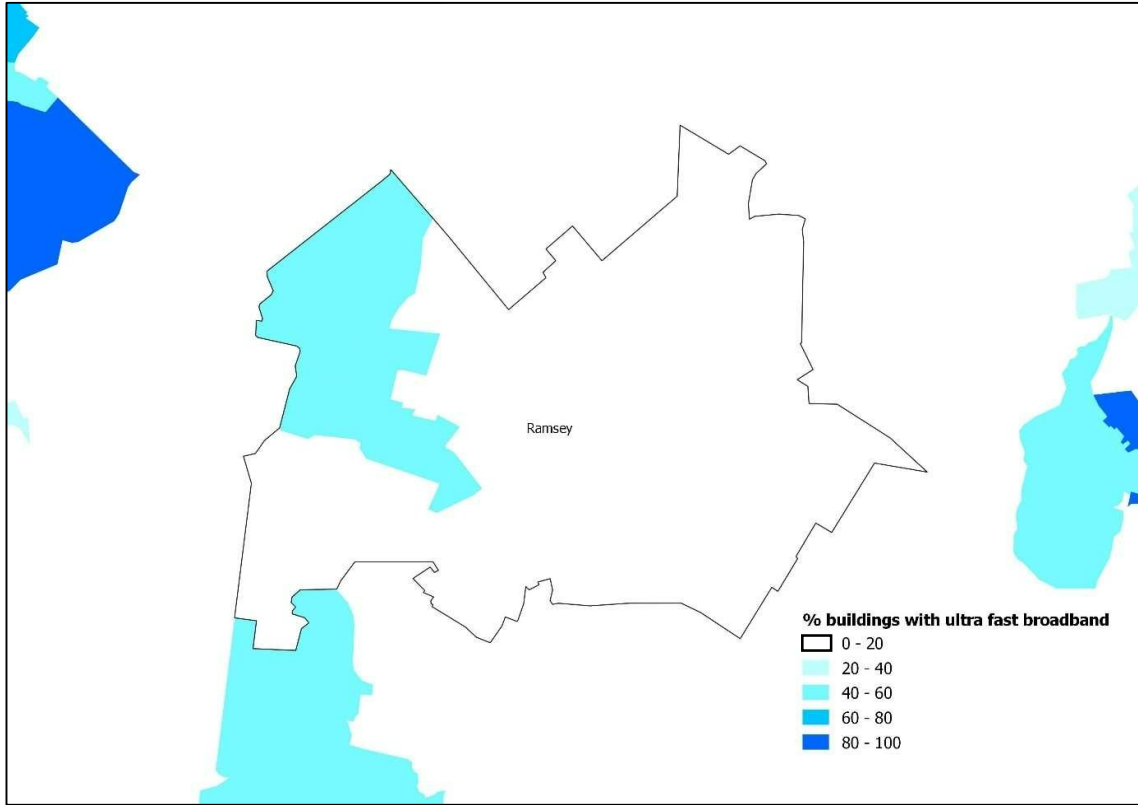
### **Poor connectivity and isolation**

Accessibility is a huge issue in Ramsey. In terms of public transport provision, the community recently fought to save the number 30 bus service (to Huntingdon), with support from the County Council and Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority (CPCA) keeping it going. However, this funding is only guaranteed for another twelve months – suggesting its future continues to be in doubt.

The consequences of this go beyond inconvenience – especially for those unable to drive and where cycling and walking is not an option. A lack of provision reinforces rural isolation, especially in the villages which surround the town. This causes loneliness and severely reduces the quality of life of many of our residents.

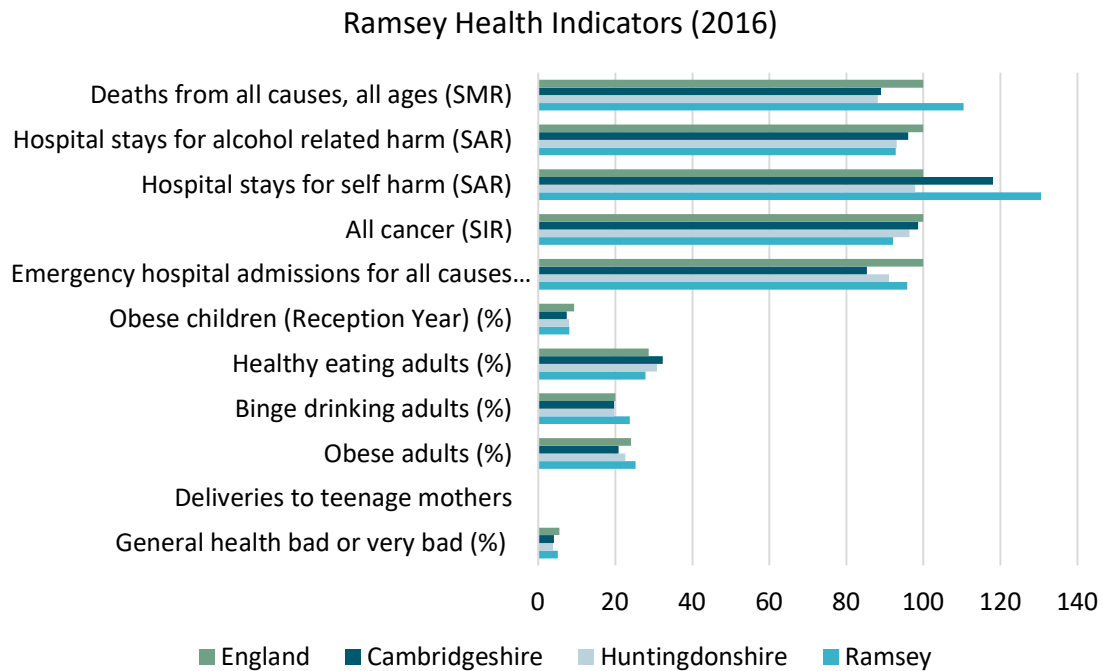
Connectivity is not just about transport. As the map, below, shows, provision of ultrafast broadband (faster than 300 Mbit/s) is almost non-existent in Ramsey. In the digital age, this presents particular challenges – especially around attracting businesses which require this connectivity.

### *Ultrafast broadband coverage in Ramsey ward*



Source: Analysis of Ofcom Connected Nations Data 2018

## Concerns around health and wellbeing



*Source: Public Health England Local Health Tool*

The chart provides a selection of health indicators which capture the degree of health challenges within Ramsey. In many cases the town is performing in line with the regional and English average, with the exception of two indicators: deaths and hospital stays from self-harm – both of which are higher than the English average and significantly higher than the regional averages – though the high reading for deaths from all causes must be put into the context of Ramsey’s aging population.

Hospital stays for self-harm forms one of the most concerning metrics – with rates 30.5% above the England average.

Type-2 diabetes has been identified as a particular health problem, linked to poor food choice. 27.8% of adults in Ramsey are healthy eating (according to a Public Health England health indicators) compared to a Cambridgeshire average of 32.4%, whilst obesity among children and adults also poses a high risk.

### **Lack of employment opportunities**

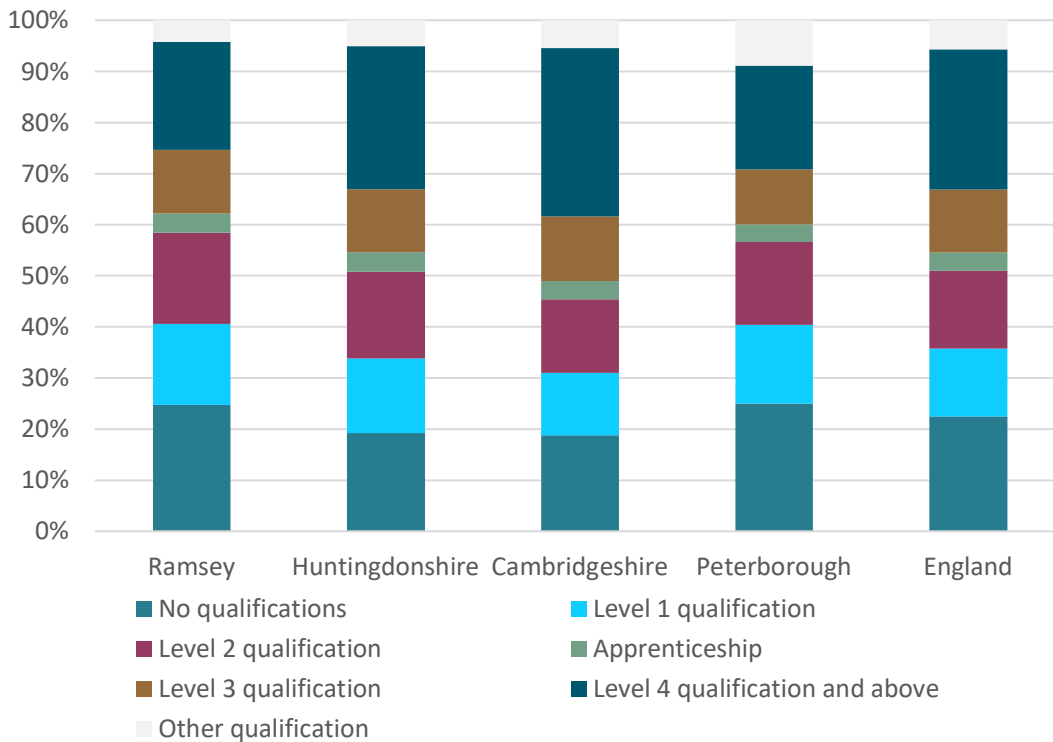
Ramsey has a very limited employment offer. The employment landscape is dominated by micro businesses where many employees are required to work from home to reduce overhead costs. In general, those looking to develop their career opportunities, or businesses looking to expand, will find they have to look outside of the town.

ONS employment data shows education to be the largest sector, followed by retail. This is confirmed by data produced by the University of Cambridge through the CPIER which showed Abbey College to be the largest employer in the town by some margin.

**“It’s not really a place you’d come to for a career”**

A part of the picture is relatively lower skill levels than the rest of the district. The chart, below, visualises Ramsey’s qualifications in comparison with Huntingdonshire, Cambridgeshire, Peterborough and England, indicating Ramsey lags behind both Huntingdonshire and Cambridgeshire but is similar to Peterborough. Only 21.1% of the population in Ramsey have degree-level qualifications, in comparison to 27.9% across Huntingdonshire. Meanwhile, almost one in four residents have no qualifications at all, compared with less than one in five in the district as a whole.

**Skill levels in Ramsey**



Source: Analysis of ONS Annual Population Survey (APS) data

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# Our Plan for Ramsey

## Building on strengths 1: Heritage



Heritage is at the centre of our plans for Ramsey. As we have created the Discover Ramsey platform, we've accentuated the heritage offer with heritage trails and open days, which bring in large numbers.

At the moment, Ramsey still has the status of a "hidden gem" – our heritage assets don't currently have the widespread recognition that they deserve. But by promoting this heritage as part of an attractive, all-round visitor offer, Ramsey can grow its tourist sector, and bring more footfall to the town centre.

The key plank of our strategy for Heritage is to **restore the Abbey House building as *the* major heritage asset in Ramsey.**

The Abbey House is a stately home built on the remains of Ramsey Abbey, at one time the third most significant abbey in England. It was built by the Cromwell family in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, before being restored and extended in later centuries. Features of the house include an ice house, orchards, a pavilion, shrubberies, lawns and a walled kitchen garden. The Lady Chapel in the basement of the house dates from the thirteenth century.

The Abbey House is open to the public upon occasion for visitor days run by volunteer groups. But it is hidden away within the grounds of the Abbey College, and rare opportunities to visit are not well publicised. Our vision is for Abbey House to be at the centre of a heritage-driven offer for the town of Ramsey.

### *What the problem is now*

At the moment, Abbey House is leased to the Abbey College (a high school and sixth form) from a local family up until 2035. However, the College has not used the premises for many years for educational purposes – they are generally deemed unfit due to the condition and age of the building. Nonetheless, the College has to pay for the upkeep of the building, which works out at approximately £70,000 a year. This is roughly the equivalent of 2.5 teachers – meaning that maintaining the building has a direct impact on the ability of the College to offer quality education. This liability also stands in the way of the College achieving ambitions to



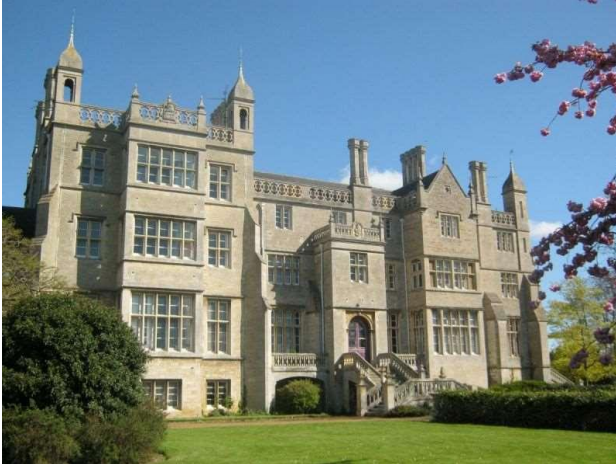
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join a local academy trust. The Governors of the College are enthusiastic to get the House off their hands as soon as possible.

At a deeper level, the problem is a *wasted opportunity for the town*. Its most significant heritage asset contributes little to the experience of residents and visitors.

### ***The opportunity for Abbey House***

If the building (pictured) can be restored to its former glory, and repurposed for an alternative use, it could have many possible functions:



- A visitor attraction, maintained and run by a charitable operator, such as the National Trust or Historic England
- A museum for exhibits beyond just those of the original house – for example showcasing exhibits from across the fens
- A venue for events such as wedding receptions, annual dinners, conferences, etc

Or indeed, a combination of the above. To work out what is possible here, there need to be further discussions with possible partners from the private, public, and third sector about which ideas there is a market for. It is important that, whatever the outcome, there are regular opportunities for the public to visit and enjoy the site, and that it is brought more visibly into the centre of the town in Ramsey.

### ***What needs to happen to grasp this opportunity***

Firstly, **a significant amount of money is required to restore the property** to a state where it could be taken on by another operator. This sum is currently estimated at between £0.5m and £1m – in the short term, a feasibility study will be required to develop this costing further. At the same time, **work is needed to identify who might be interested in taking on the property**. This must be a wide discussion with a range of potential operators, to understand the market demand, and build the case for investment in the property (to avoid the risk of investing in the property for no return).

Finally, as plans develop, we will need to work closely with the Abbey College. In return for removing the liability of the property, the College will need to help with developing access options to the property – to allow public access in a way which does not compromise the safety of the students at the College. This may require a transfer of some of the land around the property at the same time.

## Building on strengths 2: Waterways



Ramsey is unique among Huntingdonshire's market towns in that it is situated in fen countryside. The area surrounding the town is laced with drains and dykes as part of the infrastructure used to manage water levels. But while the fundamental purpose of these waterways is functional, they also offer fantastic leisure opportunities for narrowboaters, canoers, and anglers.

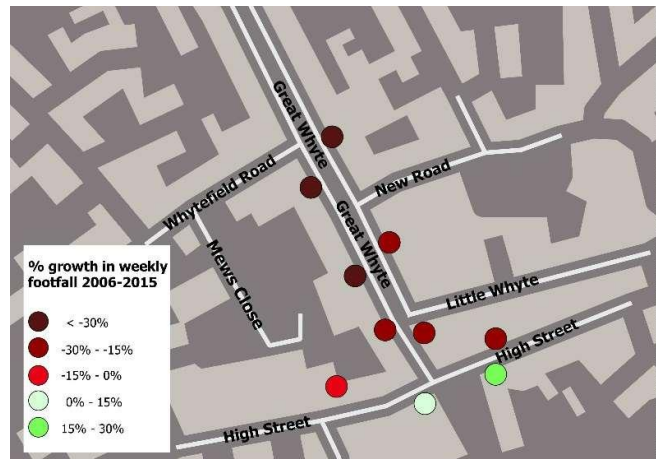
There are three elements to our plan to make more of the waterways in the town, the delivery time of each will depend on the scope of ambition.

In the spirit of producing a transformative vision for Ramsey, we start with a long-term ambition, the daylighting of the Great Whyte and which would secure the river as a environmental feature, before addressing some more immediate priorities concerning the Great Fen and increased boater traffic.

### 1. Restoring the Great Whyte watercourse to transform the town centre environment

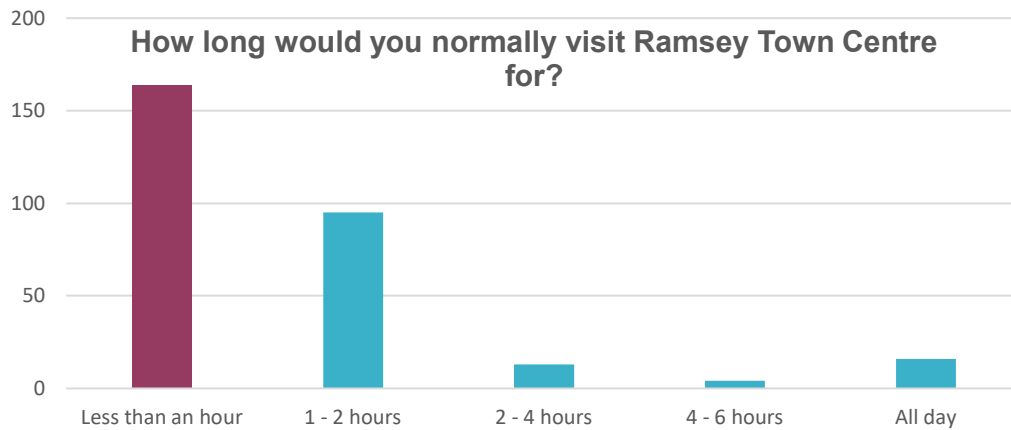
The Great Whyte is the primary commercial thoroughfare in Ramsey. It runs North to South for approximately half a kilometre, with a combination of shop, cafés, and community facilities. The street, however, is facing many challenges:

- Like many UK high streets, declining footfall is a problem. As the map, right, shows levels of footfall dropped off all along the Great Whyte between 2006 and 2015, in some places by over 30% (see map).



Source: Analysis of data from Pedestrian Market Research Survey (2015)

- The limited town centre offer means that people don't tend to spend that long in Ramsey. In a Shoppers Survey conducted last year, 56% of shoppers surveyed said they normally spent less than an hour visiting Ramsey Town Centre.



Source: Ramsey Shoppers Survey 2018

- The Great Whyte is also spoilt by the volume of heavy goods vehicles travelling down the street to and from industrial buildings at the North of the town. This adds noise, and removes the ambience of what should be a more pleasant street to walk along.
- There are however, some green shoots. The new mural in town (pictured) is reflective of a desire among the young to celebrate Ramsey's heritage and reimagine it in a different way. And businesses such as the new Gin Bar and Wildwood Café show that the high street is beginning to adapt to the changes demanded by the "experience economy".



#### What this would look like



Since the Middle Ages, a navigable canal has flowed down the Great Whyte (see sketch, left, dated from the 1840s). This was culverted (covered up) in the 1850s. **But there is now an opportunity to restore what was lost**, giving this waterway back for the residents of Ramsey to enjoy. This would involve making a real feature of the waterway, as a visually attractive setting with

plants, benches, and other areas to dwell. It would highlight the heritage of Ramsey and its status as a fen town, bringing features from the surrounding countryside into the town



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centre. It would increase the dwell time of town centre users, boosting opportunities for socialising. It would be a celebration of all that is unique about Ramsey, and raise the profile of the town.

### ***How this intervention would work***

We have been in conversation with the Middle Level Commissioners, Environment Agency, and Cambridgeshire County Council to understand how this could be done. All parties are in agreement that there is nothing fundamentally unfeasible about the idea (most notably, it does not seem likely there are any flood-related concerns, though this needs to be established). The key features would be:

- Removing the culvert which currently covers up the watercourse
- Relocating the car parking along the eastern side of the Great Whyte to a site behind the Nationwide Building Society. This currently belongs to Huntingdonshire District Council
- Installing plants, especially reeds, which can be attached on coils. These would bring fen countryside features into the town. They would help to purify the water, and make the river an attractive visual feature
- Building meander flows into the watercourse. This will increase the speed at which the water flows, helping to raise the level of the water, wash away sediment, and create a more interesting feature
- Wider landscaping around the Great Whyte to provide places to sit and enjoy watching the water, as well as other features like trees, and attractive signage to create a real sense of place.
- Integrate a continuation of the cycle path which currently comes to a halt at the North of Great Whyte. Giving cyclists priority through the town in a segregated bike lane will encourage active travel through the town.

It may be possible to phase the intervention in stages, to test its popularity and appeal among the townspeople.

### ***What this can deliver***

There are at least six benefits which this scheme can directly deliver for Ramsey, and one for local government partners. They are:

- 1) Increased footfall along the Great Whyte, reversing the current decline. When the river was exposed for works in 2016, residents and passers-by stopped to investigate the 'hidden' watercourse. This would be more pronounced in the event that the river was not only exposed, but actively made a feature of.

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- 2) A much more active streetscape in Ramsey. Cafés and restaurants will be able to use the space between their frontages and the river for putting out tables, increasing community interaction.
  - 3) As Ramsey looks increasingly to the visitor economy to support its development, this feature will raise the profile of the town significantly, and could well be picked up in the national press as an example of cutting edge urban design. If plans to develop the Abbey House come forward, this feature would help to naturally draw people from the House into the town centre.
  - 4) The open river and infrastructure around it will help to calm traffic through the town centre, by effectively part pedestrianising one side of the Great Whyte. **Many of the shoppers who responded to the Shopper Survey in 2018 were supportive of pedestrianisation**, with ideas like “Make the Great Whyte from High Street to Library pedestrian only” and “Pedestrianise the Great Whyte and divert all traffic” being put forward. This will contribute further to improving the aesthetic environment of the Great Whyte.
  - 5) Significant health benefits. Public Health England’s Healthy High Streets report describes healthy high streets as: “Good quality design and furniture in local high streets that provide accessible, safe, communal spaces foster social interaction and strong local economies and can be used to create healthier, safer and more cohesive local communities.”<sup>2</sup> They go on to note that some of the key features are:
    - be easy to navigate, including crossings
    - provide shade, shelter and places to stop and rest
    - be walkable and provide options for cycling
    - have low levels of noise and air pollution
    - provide things to see and do
    - consider the local context of the high street, its features and current use, and how all these factors interact with one another

**These are all currently lacking in Ramsey, and would all be included in this plan to transform the Great Whyte.** The report goes on to comment that: “Introducing blue space such as ponds is also beneficial to health. Blue space has a restorative effect on health and wellbeing and contributes to creating a sense of place, encouraging social interaction through focal points and points of visual interest.”<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup>

[https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/699505/25.01.18\\_Healthy\\_High\\_Streets\\_Briefing\\_document\\_Final\\_version.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/699505/25.01.18_Healthy_High_Streets_Briefing_document_Final_version.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

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- 6) Land values on the Great Whyte, and in the town more generally will increase. Research shows that there is a clear link – with one review finding that: “The studies reviewed consistently demonstrate that property price premiums are associated with surface water quality. Of the 43 distinct studies represented in the 48 publications reviewed, the expected, statistically significant relationship between water quality and property price was demonstrated in at least one of the models developed in all but two studies.”<sup>4</sup> (NB, this may create an opportunity to help fund the intervention through a land value capture mechanism).
  - 7) This will also deliver a saving for Cambridgeshire County Council, who will no longer have to pay for the maintenance of the culvert. Since 2012, the Council has spent £1.3m on brickwork repairs and concrete arch strengthening in the Culvert.

## **2. Developing access to the Great Fen**

The Great Fen is a project of huge significance in Cambridgeshire and nationally. It seeks to restore a large area of wild fen land, which was lost during the draining of the fens in the 17th century. It brings together the two nature reserves of Holme Fen and Woodwalton Fen, and the final new wetland area will be approximately fourteen square miles. This will make a large contribution to levels of natural capital in the area and increase biodiversity by allowing rare species – such as the bittern and the fen violet – to thrive. The Great Fen is run by a partnership of the Environment Agency, Huntingdonshire District Council, the Middle Level Commissioners, Natural England, and the Wildlife Trust for Bedfordshire, Cambridgeshire and Northamptonshire. Together these organisations are working to transform this landscape for the benefit of wildlife and local people.

Ramsey is on the doorstep of the Great Fen and has been identified by the Great Fen as a “gateway community” (along with Yaxley). This means that Ramsey is a natural entry point with close connections to the Great Fen. The team at Great Fen are committed to the local economic development of surrounding towns and are working to develop new access into the site, with car parks and trails to encourage tourism.

Now there is an opportunity to significantly improve access to the Great Fen through the waterways. The first part of this will be enabling boats to turn at the north of Ramsey (see point 3, below). There will then also need to be engineering works along the river between Ramsey and the Great Fen to enable boater access.

This will also connect up the Middle Level for boaters via the Great Fen, enabling people to travel from the Nene to the Great Ouse via Ramsey and Great Fen. This is a huge opportunity for growing boater tourism in Ramsey, helping to stimulate the local economy.

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<sup>4</sup> Nicholls, Sarah & Crompton, John. (2018). A Comprehensive Review of the Evidence of the Impact of Surface Water Quality on Property Values. Sustainability.

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### 3. Bring boater traffic to Ramsey

Ramsey's waterway connections also allow the opportunity to bring boater traffic to use the town. At the moment the closest boaters can get to the town is the Bill Fen Marina, which is over a mile away from the town centre, and not easily accessible by foot. By building a turning circle at the North of the Great Whyte and installing moorings, we will bring more visitors into the town, helping to stimulate the town centre economy.



Boating tourism has contributed over £6 billion to the UK economy, a growth of 65% since 2013. Nigel Hamilton, Chair of British Marine Tourism has commented: 'Boating related tourism is a very diverse segment of the UK tourism market, reflecting a wide range of budgets, types of craft and holiday experiences.'<sup>5</sup> Ramsey needs to improve access to its waterways in order to reap the benefits of increased boating traffic.

#### *How this intervention would work*

Drawing upon previous work undertaken by Ian White Associates, who carried out a feasibility study on the possible works, this would have a few key aspects:

- Creating a winding hole big enough to allow a full length (72 ft) broadbeam boat to turn around
- The provision of bank protection on the Eastern side of the river for 200m south of the current turning area (at Bill Fen)
- The provision of 200m of moorings, which would give capacity for seven to eight full length narrowboats
- Improving the public realm around the basin, including signage to set out the terms of using the moorings (anticipated that there would be a 48 hour limit on using the moorings).

The estimated funding requirement for these works, based upon previous work, is within the range of £250,000. Part, or possibly all, of the funding for this initiative can come from money from developers at the Ramsey Gateway (via an agreement known as a "Section 106 agreement"). There is also some previously set aside money from the Tesco development, which may be able to help here.

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<sup>5</sup> <https://britishmarine.co.uk/News/2019/April/Boating-tourism-on-the-rise-contributing-over-6-billion-to-the-UK-economy>

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## Building on strengths 3: Community Spirit



### **Working together has been a simple, yet effective impact of the Ramsey Million.**

Reflecting on the period between 2013 – 2016, a Heritage Group Member commented: *“People have started to work together instead of overlapping. There is a feeling of positivity in Ramsey.”*

This positivity, or community spirit, is an asset to the town. If this is to continue, Ramsey’s spirit needs to be nurtured. Much of the town’s optimism is underpinned by clear achievements and successes. For this energy to be preserved and grow, Ramsey needs to continue to keep active and connect with its community, focusing on projects that make a local difference and are tailored to the need of the people who live there.

Ramsey’s community spirit can be employed to “future proof” the community – helping to respond to the twin challenges of a shrinking and ageing population.

#### **1. Future proofing the community – responding to a shrinking population**

**Ramsey is faced with the reality of a shrinking population.** Securing housing development is the principal solution, but in practice, Ramsey has often been overlooked as a desirable investment by large firms.

There is capacity for Ramsey’s community spirit to play a role in changing attitudes, working with local developers and creating a welcoming community.

- Local developers are already showing greater interest in Ramsey. It is local contractors, opposed to big firms, who are driving forward new developments around the town.
- Residents of Ramsey have acknowledged that change is inevitable if their town is to survive. It is worth setting this apart from the ‘Not in my back yard’ (NIMBY) mentality: a reaction that may tolerate development but strongly opposes its proximity to the individual’s home. Of course, there are many valid reasons for being cautious of development but there is also a counter movement where communities embrace change and prove welcome hosts. Ramsey can adopt this positive and proactive attitude, sharing a message which embraces development as part of a ‘Yes in my back yard’ (YIMBY) approach.
- Ramsey’s community spirit creates the potential for newcomers to easily become embedded in the community fabric. This approach is a cultural response to population decline in that it creates an inviting environment for potential new residents and aims to engage new arrivals. As developments come forward on the edge of town, it is vital for the community to mobilise and integrate these as part of the community. One way of achieving this is via a **community programme which reaches out to new arrivals and welcomes them by providing points of contact, sharing knowledge and promoting a variety of events.**

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## 2. Future proofing the community – ageing population

**Ramsey has an ageing population, though there are deliverable community actions which endorse the spirit of living better for longer.** Ageing is an inevitable part of society and has been recognised as a ‘Grand Challenge’ by the UK Government. Local communities have a role to play in placemaking for the ageing population, providing an environment that appreciates quality of life.

The Ramsey Million has already reached members of its ageing community, therefore it is a case of building on these initiatives to increase awareness of measures which benefit the older and often most-vulnerable members of society.

- **Dementia Friends** is an Alzheimer’s Society programme, which invites individuals to become a Friend or Champion. The programme offers information sessions and online training with the aim of transforming the way people think, act and talk about the condition which effects so many, particularly of our ageing. Creating Dementia Friendly spaces can be as simple as recognising some of the everyday complications and boundaries faced by people suffering with Alzheimer’s Disease, recognising tell-tale signs and responding with warmth and kindness.
- Ramsey can build on existing schemes to **combat or alleviate loneliness**. A good example would be expanding the benefits of Ramsey’s Timebank, (a scheme where an individual or company’s invests their time to help others to earn a credit in return). The case study (below) is an example of a community-wide loneliness campaign which individual events and voluntary schemes can aspire to comply with.
- Improvements to transport connectivity between Ramsey and its surrounding villages, as well as connecting Ramsey to public services further afield is an important part of future proofing the community. Particular attention must be paid to Ramsey’s bus network, as this mode of transport is often favoured or the only available option for an ageing community. This is picked up further under the “Tackling Isolation” section of this report.

### Case study: In Good Company campaign

Norfolk County Council firmly believe that **‘No one should spend a lonely day in Norfolk if they don’t want to’.**

The ‘In Good Company’ campaign is designed to combat loneliness and does so by inviting businesses and individuals to make a pledge. Organisations can qualify for a quality mark, which demonstrates commitment to their local community.

The campaign has been recognised as best practice by Government, the Jo Cox Commission, Campaign to End Loneliness and Local Government Association.



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### 3. Ramsey Post-Million

**The Ramsey Million's community programme will continue to be funded until 2023.** In the years that follow, it must become a springboard to continued community activity. Ramsey is home to at least 63 community groups, but these require support in order to continue and for any additional groups to be established.

**Small amounts of guaranteed ongoing funding in the form of a community pot can help many of the great initiatives ongoing, which are at risk of being cut or reduced when funding runs out.** It is crucial that this includes continued funding for the Discover Ramsey website, and some employed resource to run heritage and volunteer events.

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## Tackling weaknesses 1: Poor connectivity and isolation



Ramsey is currently too remote across many different modes of connectivity. Trying to make the status quo work into the long term is unsustainable. We will explore new options to improve connectivity.

### 1. Full-fibre cycleways with pedestrian provision

Full-fibre cycleways have recently been trialled in the Netherlands, an area which in landscape is identical to our Fen countryside. The bike lanes are produced from recycled plastic, which has numerous advantages:



- It is more environmentally friendly than asphalt in its production, and it reduces plastic waste
- It is more robust, not requiring regular repair, and due to its modular nature, minor repairs can be made quickly and easily. The cycle ways are also more weatherproof, meaning they will endure over a longer timeframe.
- Sections of track are joined by connectors, meaning there is scope to continue to develop and expand the network.

The introduction of cycleways must be complemented with a safe pedestrian offer, encouraging residents to take shorter journeys between Ramsey and its surrounding villages.

The cycleways can also have broadband fibre cables put into them (see diagram) meaning that these cycleways can bring not just connectivity for bikes, but also internet connectivity. Developing a network of these cycle ways in Ramsey will mean that new housing or business premises can easily tap into the full fibre network to have high-speed connectivity. **Therefore this intervention tackles a lack of both physical and digital connectivity.**

### 2. A better model for the bus network

While our bus service to Huntingdon has been saved for another year, in the long-term a new approach to buses needs to be developed.

The Strategic Bus Review published by the Combined Authority has begun to answer this question. This review picks up on many of our concerns, noting that “getting [rural bus services] right matters for the most vulnerable in our community”<sup>6</sup> and that “circuitous

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<sup>6</sup> CAMBRIDGESHIRE AND PETERBOROUGH STRATEGIC BUS REVIEW: OPTIONS REPORT p45



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routes and infrequent timetables coupled with the lack of early morning and evening provision”<sup>7</sup> have caused many to abandon buses altogether.



However, while the report recognises that a disjointed bus market is causing serious problems in rural areas, the review stops short of recommending the strongest powers the Mayor could take on with regard to buses: **franchising**. Franchising is an approach where the Combined Authority would set out routes, and invite bidders to compete for them. This allows control over the whole network, meaning services can be joined up more effectively, and when procuring routes, the

Combined Authority could bundle together more and less profitable routes together. Greater Manchester is already taking this step, recognising that “A truly integrated transport network has the potential to transform Greater Manchester.” We believe the same is true for Cambridgeshire, and therefore **ask the Combined Authority to consider bus franchising for our area.**

The Ramsey Million Partnership has commissioned the Campaign for Better Transport to secure improvements to the town’s transport provision. As a new model for bus network is designed, local people will be consulted to shape the network. This will include gauging usage and demand and determine routes.

Ramsey are also currently working with Integrated Transport Planning Ltd. (ITP) to devise a viable bus network that delivers a service in accordance with the community’s needs. Franchising can be especially beneficial to local communities as it means they can be involved through consultation in designing the network. Bus users themselves outline critical routes and services, the significance of which may save or instate services which may easily be overlooked.

### 3. Long-term aspirations for a bypass

Longer term, it is hoped that it might be possible to remove some of the traffic from the town centre by creating a bypass around Ramsey. This will need to be tested to ensure it strengthens the high street, rather than damaging it.

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid. p38

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#### 4. HGV Covenant

Heavy Goods Vehicles are an important feature of many local businesses, but they can seem rather out of place in the centre of town, and can cause congestion and delays. HGV traffic contributes to air and noise pollution, their frequency and weight are conducive to excessive road surface repairs and they can create safety hazards for pedestrians and other road users.

A number of Ramsey businesses have signed an HGV Covenant, an agreement between local communities and Commercial Vehicle Operators to reduce noise, pollution and increase safety.<sup>8</sup> Hauliers are invited to sign this a voluntary code of conduct which stipulates the designated route for HGV traffic. It is worth noting exceptions to the Covenant include instances where road works and accidents restrict the ideal route and that agricultural traffic is not [classified] as HGV. Importantly the Covenant shows engagement and co-operation with local businesses, and further adoption will significantly reduce [harmful] HGV traffic in the centre.

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<sup>8</sup> <https://www.cambridgeshire.gov.uk/residents/travel-roads-and-parking/roads-and-pathways/heavy-or-abnormal-loads-on-the-highway/>



## Tackling weaknesses 2: Health outcomes

Health is a challenge in our town – with weight and diabetes of particular concern. We want everyone to be able to live healthy lives – so we need to help people to make healthy choices.

Many of the other ideas in this report have health in mind. Plans for cycle ways will help to encourage active travel instead of car usage. Restoring the waterway to the Great Whyte will encourage people to walk around the town centre and brings mental health benefits. Encouraging community spirit will ensure people look out for each other, and counteract the proven links between loneliness and ill-health. However, there is a case for a more direct focus on health, given the severity of the issues involved.

### 1. An “Opportunity Area for Health”

A big initiative for health, put forward in the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Independent Economic Review (CPIER) is captured in key recommendation 9:<sup>9</sup>

#### » KEY RECOMMENDATION #9:

**An Opportunity Area for Health, including mental health, should be created in the north of the area, recognising it as being just as serious an issue for social mobility as education. This pilot should be championed by the Mayor, the local health system and Public Health England, and linked to the proposals for the devolution of health and social care.**

“The area” in question is Cambridgeshire and Peterborough. While district-level health statistics show Huntingdonshire at or around the average on most health measures, we know that this hides some of the challenges we face in Ramsey. Our health metrics are in fact much more similar to those of Fenland district, which underperforms the UK in several domains of health. **Therefore, as this initiative comes forward, Ramsey must be included.** We are also conscious that a lot of policy thinking at the moment is going towards how towns can be improved – and health is a big part of the picture here. Along with the Fenland towns of Chatteris, March, Whittlesey, and Wisbech, we are prepared to trial bold initiatives for health in our towns.

While the parameters of this Opportunity Area are currently undefined, we think key elements will be:

- **North Cambridgeshire to be used by Public Health England as a testbed for different interventions in health.** This would include interventions with a focus on behavioural change and preventative measures, to help people transition to healthier diets and more active lifestyles.
- **Support for mental health services at schools.** As noted in the introduction, Ramsey has notably higher rates of self-harm than the England average. While we cannot get the age breakdown, it is likely that much of this comes from the younger population in the town –

<sup>9</sup> <https://www.cpier.org.uk/media/1671/cpier-report-151118-download.pdf>

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in the most recent Children’s Society Good Childhood Report, over 15% of UK young people and children surveyed had self-harmed in the previous year<sup>10</sup>.

- **Advocating ‘Good quality work’ in the workplace.** This approach is part of CPIER recommendations and responds to the stark reality that poor mental health in the workplace depletes the UK economy by between £74bn and £99n a year.<sup>11</sup> The ‘Good quality work’ scheme addresses employee’s wellbeing, mental and physical health and aims to reduce sickness-related absences and the cost of presenteeism (when an employee is at work, but unable to function to maximum capacity.)

## 2. Widening healthy choices on the high street

There are some steps the town and district councils can also take to help here. In particular, Public Health England in their Healthy High Streets report recommend “Use planning and licensing policies to influence the retail offer on the high street, protecting locally-owned retail stores and tackling over-concentration of certain shops, to conserve retail establishments that stock healthier, locally sourced products.”<sup>12</sup>

At the most recent count, Ramsey has eleven takeaways in the ward<sup>13</sup> – an inordinate amount for a town of its size. This works out as approximately 1.35 per 1,000 residents – compared to the England average of 0.97 per 1,000 residents. And there is a limited supply of fresh fruit and vegetables available on the high street on non-market days – with residents mostly having to go to Tesco at the north of the town. This means residents are not being helped to make healthy choices. We will work with Huntingdonshire District Council to look favourably on restaurants and shops bringing a healthier offer to the town, and work to prevent the introduction of more takeaways on the high street.

### Case Study: Gateshead

Gateshead is a local authority which has taken concentrated action to improve the food offer for residents. In its Vision 2030, it set out a vision for Gateshead to have the “healthiest communities in the country”.

In order to make this a reality, Gateshead has created a Hot Food Takeaway Supplementary Planning Document. This recognises that “the consumption of hot food take-away foods and fast-foods are determinants of excess weight gain”. It then provides specific guidance

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<sup>10</sup> [https://www.childrenssociety.org.uk/sites/default/files/the\\_good\\_childhood\\_report\\_full\\_2018.pdf](https://www.childrenssociety.org.uk/sites/default/files/the_good_childhood_report_full_2018.pdf)

<sup>11</sup> <https://www.cpier.org.uk/media/1672/cpier-report-151118-lowres.pdf>;

[https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/658145/thriving-at-work-stevenson-farmer-review.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/658145/thriving-at-work-stevenson-farmer-review.pdf)

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[https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/699505/25.01.18\\_Healthy\\_High\\_Streets\\_Briefing\\_document\\_Final\\_version.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/699505/25.01.18_Healthy_High_Streets_Briefing_document_Final_version.pdf)

<sup>13</sup> Data sourced from Public Health England dataset: Density of fast food outlets in England by local authority and ward. Available at <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/fast-food-outlets-density-by-local-authority-in-england>

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about where planning class A5 uses (hot food takeaway) can be granted. They state that planning permission will not be granted for A5 use:

- within a 400m radius of entry points to secondary schools, youth centres, leisure centres and parks
- in wards where more than 10% of the year 6 pupils are classified as obese
- in wards where the number of A5 units equals or exceeds the UK average by 1,000 population
- Where granting the use would create more than two consecutive units (clustering) along any one frontage, or mean that more than 5% of commercial uses in the district or along any frontage was greater than 5%.

These policies have resulted in Gateshead refusing every planning application for a hot food takeaway lodged since the introduction of the policy (with decisions upheld upon appeal). In recognition of the importance of Gateshead's achievement, the Council was awarded the Local Government Chronicle's Award for Public Health in 2017.

Sources:

<https://www.gateshead.gov.uk/media/1910/Hot-Food-Takeaway-SPD-2015/pdf/Hot-Food-Takeaway-SPD-2015.pdf?m=636669063713470000>

<https://www.gateshead.gov.uk/article/4254/Council-wins-national-award-for-stand-on-takeaways>

### **3. Improved active transport infrastructure**

The idea for active transport connectivity has already been taken forward in the section above on tackling isolation. In particular, we want to continue to promote cycling as an opportunity in our town, looking to encourage a bike shop/cycle café to set up on the Great Whyte.

## Tackling weaknesses 3: Lack of employment opportunity



As well as better connectivity to other employment hubs (see Tackling Weakness 1) we need to create opportunities within our town. We are building increasing amounts of housing in Ramsey, and while some of this will inevitably be for out-commuters, we need to be providing jobs within our town as well.

We have one key action here, which is **maximising the opportunity of the Ramsey Gateway site**.

Ramsey Gateway is a site to the North of Ramsey, just North West of Tesco. Road infrastructure has already been built in to enable the development of the site.

Last year, the site was purchased, and plans have been submitted for it. These include a Multi-Use Games Area (MUGA), a mix of retail uses, and a mix of commercial space uses, including offices and an incubator unit for small businesses. Permission has now been given to proceed with the development.

### *Site plan for Ramsey Gateway*



Source: Planning Application 19/00364/OUT

While the retail on the site will offer some new major brands which do not yet exist in Ramsey, the real prize on offer is the commercial space. At the moment there is no quality office space in Ramsey – providing this can bring in a type of business which doesn't as yet have a presence in the town. The incubator space will provide a space for homegrown Ramsey businesses to start up and grow on. And warehousing and distribution units will help the town tap into a successful industry in this cluster in Peterborough.

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The only risk with the site is that currently the development is phased over two periods, with the retail uses coming first, and the commercial uses coming second. Without the Grampian condition (a planning condition which prohibits development until a specified action has been delivered) there exists a possibility that retail space will be delivered *without* the accompanying employment. In this situation, the development may end up being a net loss to the town, creating competition with the Great Whyte and High Street, yet not offering significantly increased employment in return.

Therefore, we need to work with the Combined Authority Business Board and Huntingdonshire District Council to identify businesses which would have an interest in the commercial space at Ramsey Gateway. This will help us accelerate the delivery of these units.

### *Lifelong learning in Ramsey*

**Ramsey needs to drive up its skills levels and nurture aspiration within its communities.** This will specifically target young people studying for their GCSEs, A levels and NVQs by ‘plugging the skills gap’, but also endorse lifelong learning with schemes highlighting access to training and reskilling the existing workforce. The Local Industrial Strategy recognises the necessity to ‘empower local people to access education and skills to participate fully in society, to raise aspirations and enhance progress into further learning or work to help them stay and progress in work’.<sup>14</sup>

A Ramsey approach will sit alongside the Combined Authority’s Skill Strategy<sup>15</sup>, designed to enhance the foundations of productivity. Initiatives include:

- Greater co-operation between employers and education providers, particularly around careers advice and events
- The creation of a Skills, Talent and Apprenticeship Recruitment Hub, to provide assistance and support in the transition into apprenticeships, HE and employment
- Proposals around a new university in Peterborough
- Devolution of the Adult Education Budget from 2019/20

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[https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/818886/Cambridge\\_SINGLE\\_PAGE.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/818886/Cambridge_SINGLE_PAGE.pdf)[https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/818886/Cambridge\\_SINGLE\\_PAGE.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/818886/Cambridge_SINGLE_PAGE.pdf)

15 <https://cambridgeshirepeterborough-ca.gov.uk/assets/Employment-and-Skills/Skills-Strategy-Final-Version-5.6.19.pdf>

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- A Skills Brokerage Service designed to encourage co-operation between businesses, skill providers and the workforce



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## Conclusion and Next Steps

[To be finalised once actions are agreed]

