

HISTORIC PLACES PANEL REVIEW PAPER

The Isle of Wight

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1 Introduction

- 1.1 On the face of it, the Isle of Wight has everything one might want in a place. In an island just 23 miles across, it has a surprising variety of landscapes, attractive Regency and Victorian seaside resorts, picturesque villages, and interesting historic towns. It is one of the sunniest places in the UK, has no motorways, few chain stores and a slightly slower pace of life. Economically, the Island has a long history of innovation and a thriving marine engineering and composite technologies sector. And all this is just a short ferry crossing from Portsmouth.
- 1.2 However, all this belies some deeper underlying problems. Despite an economy that, in recent years, has performed reasonably strongly, the Island's economic future is fragile. Unemployment is higher than both Hampshire and the UK average, many jobs are seasonal, and wages are low. Whilst this may also be true of many other places around the UK which have a largely tourist-based economy, the physical separation from the mainland poses a unique set of challenges for the Island - transportation costs are higher and opportunities for the development of economies of scale fewer (and this is without factoring in the uncertainties that Brexit might mean for a place whose economy is dependent on ferry links to the mainland). The retail areas of several of its historic towns are also now showing signs of the downturn in the retail economy with a growing number of vacant shop units, vacant upper floors and buildings falling into disrepair.
- 1.3 The Island's population is ageing (placing increasing additional costs on health and social care) and its younger people are leaving for further education and jobs elsewhere. House-building has consistently failed to meet the Island's objectively assessed needs with the result that demand for affordable housing has reached crisis levels. Land values on the Island are low and whilst it does have many prosperous areas, it also has some extremely deprived places.
- 1.4 The visit of the Historic Places Panel is timely for two reasons. Firstly, the Isle of Wight Council has recently published two strategic documents (the Island Planning Strategy and the Isle of Wight Regeneration Strategy, published for consultation in December 2018 and July 2018 respectively) which set out how the Island seeks to address these problems. Secondly, Historic England is currently inviting expressions of interest for funding from the Historic High Streets Heritage Action Zones (HAZ) scheme, a new £44 million fund which aims to revive the nation's historic high streets and which may help to address some of the issues facing the Island's town centres.
- 1.5 The Historic Places Panel was invited to the Island to offer advice about the emerging proposals for three historic towns - Newport, East Cowes and Ryde - each of which has been identified as a focus of one of the Island's key Regeneration Areas. In particular, members of the Panel were asked to consider how successful they thought these proposals might be in terms of sustaining the historic environment of each of the settlements. In the case of Ryde and Newport, the Panel was also asked to provide advice on the issues on which

it thought any bid for funding from the High Street HAZ should concentrate, bearing in mind the limited number of schemes that are likely to be funded nationally.

1.6 In particular, the Panel was asked to consider the following:-

- Is the approach to master-planning and the mix of uses proposed the best way to achieve sustainable regeneration for these areas?
- Are the right factors being considered and the right people being involved?
- What potential effects will the regeneration proposed have for surrounding historic areas' viability – bearing in mind the contraction in retail and need to develop cultural/heritage destinations?
- How can the Council ensure that engaged communities have a role in developing proposals to avoid clashes between programmes and community expectations later on?
- How should the Council manage retail retreat in its historic town centres?
- What measures for the area's regeneration would be recommended for inclusion within potential programmes such as a Heritage Action Zone given early interest expressed for Newport and Ryde?
- In Ryde:-
 - What needs to be done to improve the sense of arrival at the pier?
 - How might the pedestrian and cyclist experience along the Pier and Esplanade be improved?
 - What is the future for the Harbour
 - How might Ryde attract sustainable growth that will repurpose the ice rink and the wider Esplanade area?

2 Initial thoughts

2.1 Although the Urban Panel has been in existence for some twenty years, the visit to the Isle of Wight was the first in its new guise as the 'Historic Places Panel'. It was also the first time that the Panel had been asked, in a single visit, to provide advice on three separate historic towns.

2.2 For a large number of its members, this was the first opportunity they had had to revisit the Island for, in some cases, very many years. For a few, it was their first trip across the Solent. In the course of their two days of presentations, walking tours, and from their discussions with the guests over dinner, the Panel members were struck by just how interesting and varied a place the Isle of Wight is, what a rich and diverse historic environment it possesses, and how beautiful its landscapes were. Thanks to the need to avoid the queues of traffic heading into Newport for the Isle of Wight Festival, the Panel was actually able to see rather more of the Island than had originally been intended. Panel members were particularly impressed by the drive, interest and sheer enthusiasm that its communities have for their towns. Indeed, the Panel could not remember any previous visits where there was such willingness for the local people to get actively engaged, not just in commenting on what should happen to their town, but in driving forward projects to help realise it. The de-

cision to have the tours of each of the towns led by members of the local community rather than by officers of the local authority (as is normally the case in such visits) was inspired and gave panel members a real feeling of the things which each community valued, the issues they considered needed to be addressed, and local people's ideas about the future direction which each town might take. The Isle of Wight Council is also to be commended for the amount of work it has undertaken and the real commitment it has demonstrated actively to engage with these groups. The drive and enthusiasm of the authority's members and officers to embed conservation-led regeneration firmly within the future strategy of each of these places was also extremely heartening.

- 2.3 However, despite the wealth of environmental assets which the Isle of Wight has to offer and the obvious drive and 'can do' attitudes of its residents and businesses, it was evident that, in each of the towns, there are some considerable challenges which need to be addressed. The historic cores of all three have been blighted by, and continue to suffer from, the adverse effects of traffic and congestion. The pedestrian environment of each is unwelcoming and, with few exceptions, the public realm poor. In Newport and Ryde, many retail units lie vacant or, at best, in marginal uses, and several of their key buildings are empty or in an extremely parlous state of repair.
- 2.4 The communities and their representatives in each of the settlements we saw were aspirational for the future of their settlements (and, in a number of places, are busily driving-forward individual projects which they feel will help to realise it), but there seemed to be something of a lack of co-ordination to ensure that what does occur is likely to maximise the benefits for the Island. The Panel is concerned that this may reduce the likelihood of high-quality outcomes for the respective town, its historic environment and the Island.
- 2.5 Although each town has specific, identifiable challenges, it was evident quite early on in the visit that there were a considerable number of problems (and, therefore, potential solutions) that appear to be common to all three, which could be addressed by island-wide approaches. The Report, therefore, begins by looking at each of the towns the Panel visited in turn and, in the final Section, discusses these wider issues.

3 Newport

3.1 Town Centre

- 3.1.1 The walk around the town centre enabled the Panel to appreciate just what a rich historic place the Island's main shopping, cultural and administrative centre is, and how legible its C13th grid-pattern of tightly-knit streets and the two market squares is in the townscape of today. Newport is clearly a busy and bustling place and has some very interesting and attractive historic buildings but, with the exception of the two Squares, for a pedestrian, much of the town centre does not appear to be a place one would particularly like to linger. Like the spokes on a wheel, all roads on the island lead to the hub, Newport, and

they converge in the centre of its historic core. As a result, the narrow streets are very busy, extremely noisy (and we must congratulate our guide Richard Smout for managing to make himself heard!) and, absolutely underlining Sarah Chapman's view that people in Newport walk fast through the town because of the noise. The pedestrian experience of the town centre is not made any better by its poor-quality, rather tired-looking and somewhat-dated public realm. Neither is it helped by having a line of parked vehicles on both sides of the street along virtually the entire length of the High Street, Quay Street and most of the others leading up to them. With so many surface car parks dotted elsewhere around the town centre, the need for this amount of on-street parking must be questionable. Even St James's Square, with Percy Stones' eclectic monument to the Island's most famous resident, is not exempt from these problems. The Panel considered that the town would certainly benefit from some attractive and hospitable public spaces - its two medieval squares are, at present, rather wasted assets.

- 3.1.2 Claire Kennard, the Council's Area Regeneration Manager, informed the panel about the work it has been doing through the 'People First Zone' to try and improve the pedestrian experience of Newport - the first stage of which being a programme of pavement-widening and better footways. She also outlined a series of long-term (and, until such time as these can be realised) shorter-term temporary measures which it is exploring in order to address some of the short-comings of the public realm. While the Panel wholeheartedly support these initiatives, it considers that improving the pedestrian experience of the town centre is going to require more fundamental change. Improvements to the public realm need to form part of a wider package of measures which includes addressing the problems caused by vehicles. There is no doubt, whatsoever, that traffic is having a disastrous impact on the visitor experience of Newport, especially during business hours. Unless traffic movement is tackled, the wider challenges facing the town centre are likely to be very hard, if not impossible, to resolve.
- 3.1.3 The Panel fully acknowledges that addressing the problems caused by traffic in the centre of Newport will be difficult and expensive, but problems of this sort can be approached incrementally as part of a long-term strategy. The Medina Bridge, if it becomes a reality, as well as the proposed pedestrian/cycle bridge proposed as part of the emerging harbour masterplan may make this easier, but taking action should not be contingent on these happening. It will require the Isle of Wight Council and the people of Newport to make some tough choices that will quite possibly be unpopular in the short term. The Panel were told by a number of people that there is a lot of local opposition in Newport to the concept of 'pedestrianisation'. Such fears and concerns are not an uncommon occurrence whenever such schemes are proposed. However, where this is the case, a number of local authorities have trialled temporary street closures to test what the impacts permanent traffic exclusion might have. This approach was used, very effectively, in Leeds when pedestrianisation was first mooted. The trial removal of traffic from the town centre was found to be so successful in terms of both the retail economy and pedestrian footfall, that it was eventually made permanent. If such an approach is to be tested in Newport, perhaps the first objective should be to get cars out of

St James's Square and the short section of the High Street between the memorial to Queen Victoria and the Guildhall.

- 3.1.4 Any review of traffic and movement around Newport should include parking provision (although a review of the amount and disposition of parking is something which could, and perhaps should, be undertaken as a separate exercise). One of the things that particularly struck the Panel was the large number of surface car parks spread around the town. In this respect the Panel considered that Newport might learn much from looking at King's Lynn, a historic town dealing with many of the challenges currently being faced by Newport (including low land values and a growing demand for additional housing) and, like Newport, a town centre that is fragmented by numerous pockets of surface car parking. In King's Lynn, the Council undertook a review of car parking provision in the town in order to explore what potential the redevelopment of some of these sites might offer to provide both much-needed housing within the heart of the town and also help to stitch the urban fabric of the historic core back together. Given that the Isle of Wight Council is looking at the possibility of a multi-storey car park to the north of the harbour and, possibly, also a Park and Ride site, the Panel felt that there was a need for a strategic review of car parking provision around the town. This should, firstly, identify the most appropriate location for any replacement car park, secondly, which of the existing car parks are fundamental to the economic well-being of businesses in their vicinity and, thus, should be retained, and thirdly, which of the car parks might go in order to provide the opportunities for redevelopment.
- 3.1.5 Like many town centres, the High Street shows many of the typical signs of the retraction in the retail economy nationally – vacant shop units, underused, empty and, in some cases, inaccessible upper floors, and properties beginning to show problems of lack of maintenance. Of the two town centres visited on the Island, the impact of the retail recession on Newport is, if anything, probably greater given the smaller number of independents. Whilst the town has, apparently, a very healthy small independent sector, as Sarah Chapman pointed out, small traders often find it difficult to fill the larger units vacated by the closure of a national store and, in many cases, the pension funds which typically own such properties seem quite prepared to leave their buildings empty. Given the particular challenges facing the High Street, the initiatives the Council are putting into place to address them and, more importantly, a local community actively engaged in its regeneration, the Panel considered that many of the requirements already seemed to be in place for a potential High Street HAZ. Moreover, the Panel considered that the town centre offered considerable potential to encourage greater use to be made of the vacant and underused upper floors for residential use. This could not only help to meet some of the considerable need for additional residential accommodation on the Island but, potentially, also help to provide some 'city-living'-style accommodation which Chris Ashman, the Council's Director of Regeneration, considered was currently missing (and, if present, might help to encourage younger professionals to move to the Island). However, the Panel recognises the not-inconsiderable challenges that many of these properties may have not simply to make those void spaces accessible, but in converting them into attractive/high-amenity places where people will choose to live. To this end, the

Isle of Wight Council may need to undertake feasibility studies to establish the potential economic returns.

3.2 The Harbour

- 3.2.1 For a site whose development could have such a major impact upon the future economic fortunes of not just Newport but, in all probability, the whole of the Medina Valley, the Council's proposed masterplan for the harbour was disconcertingly vague at the time of the panel visit and the Panel found it difficult to get a clear understanding of what exactly the Council wanted to see developed here. At that stage the Masterplan seemed more a 'wish list' of the types of uses which might be established here than a clear spatial vision of what would be desirable for Newport in this location and in terms of the island as a whole. The Council have subsequently published a consultation version of the masterplan including proposals for a new 'iconic' cultural venue, education, residential, commercial/hotel and industrial uses, with a new square interfacing Quay Street and the harbour. This is an extremely important site and needs to be thought of in terms of creating a new 'gateway' into Newport, a route which connects the northern part of the town with its cultural focus, the Quay Arts Centre, and linking through to its historic core. As such, the Isle of Wight Council needs to approach this site with a lot of confidence. It needs to produce a place-making document which sets out, explicitly, a clear vision of what it wants to see developed here and the quality of development that it is seeking to achieve. Without it, there is a real fear that this area will end up being simply another one of the typical edge-of-town-centre, piecemeal, lowest-common-denominator developments that disfigure so many of the country's historic settlements. The panel will be interested to see the masterplan progress and will be pleased to discuss their impressions of the consultation draft when delivering this report.
- 3.2.2 The Panel believes that the answer to this site is a landscape-led Masterplan where the buildings are set around a green spine, which runs through the heart of development, beneath the Medina Way viaduct connecting to the former warehouses at the head of the Medina estuary. This should form part of a wider landscape strategy for both sides of the urban river (say a mile downstream from the Quay). There is nothing to suggest that things will move quickly, so a framework that addresses green and blue infrastructure (and how it can be used to gain access to nature and routes to the open countryside), flood risk management and guidelines for built development is essential. During the visit, mention was made about the prospect of creating a tidal barrier to retain deep water in this part of the river. If this is a realistic prospect, then the strategy ought to address that as well as navigation, flood risks and, possibly, the case for a new river crossing for walkers and cyclists. The Panel also recommended exploring necessary options to improve the appearance and aesthetics of the bridge and under-bridge that will form the main link from the harbour to the town centre. Options discussed included 'greening' the bridge through planting or green wall systems (see Natural England's *Green Bridges* 2015 guide for a literature review on the subject), as well as art and painting and that enlivens the space – see for example the im-

provement of the spaces at Navigation Street, and beneath the A38 Suffolk Street Queensway Flyover, linking Birmingham New Street Station with the 'Mail Box' development and Gas Street, canalside regeneration area.

3.3 Archaeology

3.3.1 Newport was a major medieval settlement. The redevelopment around the Newport Dock area will, quite possibly, impact upon waterlogged remains of Newport's medieval harbour. The Panel felt it was essential that archaeological considerations are factored into the scheme from the beginning. [The topic is discussed in greater detail in Paragraph 6.4)

3.3.2 Given the long history of the town, delivering more housing within the historic core through the redevelopment of the surface car parks will almost inevitably have archaeological implications (and costs). Given the low land values on the Island, in order to increase the attractiveness of these sites to the market the Panel considered that there may be merit in 'de-risking' them by providing potential developers with a better understanding of their archaeological potential. One mechanism could be through the existing Extensive Urban Survey¹ - an approach which was a key component of King's Lynn's Heritage Action Zone.

3.4 Conclusions

3.4.1 Newport is very rich, historically and architecturally, but there are no significant attractions apart from Carisbrooke Castle on the outskirts. The Panel felt, therefore, that rather than tourism, attention should be focused on making the town a lively, attractive, welcoming place for locals, securing its place at the heart the island's shopping, food and drink and cultural offer. If it becomes that kind of place (and bits of the jigsaw are already there) that will make it much more attractive to visitors as a local service centre and a base for short breaks. A parallel might be Ludlow, which serves this role very successfully in the Welsh Marches with a reputation for high-quality slow food and an attractive market town environment. Whilst Newport may have its challenges, for a town of its type and size, it is busy and in fairly good heart. The Panel are convinced that bottom-up business and social enterprise is the way to go. Claire Kennard's role shows how the Council can act as an enabler and facilitator of the voluntary effort.

4 **East Cowes**

4.1 Introduction

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https://archaeologydataservice.ac.uk/archives/view/hampshire_eus_2003/downloads.cfm?REDSQUIDARCHIVEES_16428187-99d5-4e3a-8716-eee7fce855f9_0&area1=isle_of_wight&area2=newport

4.1.1 Whilst East Cowes may have a history which stretches back over five-hundred years, from what Panel members were able to see during their walk, what remains of its historic core is now, save for a handful of locations, very fragmented and much of the historic street pattern that was evident on early OS Maps of the town has been largely eradicated by the highway infrastructure and marshalling yards associated with the port. Nevertheless, what the town may lack in terms of historic fabric, it more than makes up for in the drive and enthusiasm of the local community for its local heritage. The East Cowes Heritage Centre is an impressive repository of information, photographs and artefacts collected by the community over nearly three decades and members of the Panel were only sorry they were unable to spend more time perusing its exhibitions.

4.2 The proposed V&A Museum

4.2.1 The Panel was hugely impressed by the get-up-and-go of the East Cowes Arts and Culture Group to get things happening in East Cowes. The intention to develop an attraction within the town that will capture just some of the 250,000 visitors which go each year to nearby Osborne House appears, on the face of it, to be an exciting proposition, particularly if part of that attraction is, in some way, linked to Queen Victoria (and Prince Albert). Finding out that the V&A Museum happens to hold a collection of dresses designed by a top couturier who resided in East Cowes during the Victorian era seems a heaven-made match, particularly given that the V&A has a history of allowing its collections to be displayed in other parts of the country.

4.2.2 It seemed to the Panel that much of the drive behind the proposed V&A link-up has been a desire by the local community to find a new use for the vast space of the iconic Columbine Building which was due to be vacated as part of a strategy to relocate the marine businesses further up the Medina. Chris Ashman had informed members that, for a number of reasons, this is no longer likely to happen and, as a result, the current occupiers will probably remain in this former seaplane hangar for the foreseeable future. In the Panel's view, every effort should be made not only to ensure this important landmark building does not end up being lost and its site redeveloped, but that the building is, as far as is possible, retained permanently in industrial use as a crucial anchor and symbol the maritime heritage of East Cowes.

4.2.3 Only if it is clearly shown that continued industrial use is not viable should alternative uses for the Columbine Building be explored. The mixed cultural and community uses proposed by the Arts and Culture Group would certainly be an exciting prospect that the Panel would be happy to support, subject to further testing of impact and viability.

4.2.4 If the Columbine Building is successfully retained in its current use, then an alternative site (potentially elsewhere on the Island) should be sought for the major cultural and arts hub that is so clearly needed.

4.3 The future role of East Cowes

- 4.3.1 Boat building, marine engineering and innovation, together with the port operations are not only a fundamental element of the history and heritage of East Cowes but are still the activities which give the town its distinctive character today. Indeed, once you have catered for the needs of the marine industry and the other existing businesses and the transport infrastructure associated with the ferry and the floating bridge, you are not actually left with much. You cannot lose these areas to other uses. The Panel was absolutely certain that whatever goes on in East Cowes should not prejudice the marine and ferry industries which are a key part of the functionality of both this place and the Island as a whole. In this respect, the Panel was reassured by Chris Ashman that, for the Isle of Wight Council, East Cowes will continue to be the hub of the Medina Valley in terms of economic growth and will remain a focus for marine engineering and composite technologies.
- 4.3.2 Of all the regeneration goals set out in the Council's Regeneration Strategy, increasing the number of well-paid, skilled jobs was, in the Panel's view, the most important. It will grow the island's income base and generate year-round expenditure on goods and services, and it will help to shift the present unsustainable demography of the island by increasing the proportion of economically active residents and (as a corollary) make it easier to enable the dependent elderly to "age in place".
- 4.3.3 The island appears to have niche strengths in marine engineering, wind and tidal energy, composite materials and digital technology. All of these will need space to grow and a proportion of them will need waterfront sites. This is what East Cowes can, and should in the future, provide together with infrastructure for ferries, yachting marinas and, potentially, a site for the new boat museum (and complementing the activities of its neighbour on the opposite side of the Medina). Access to the water for the industries that need it should be the guiding principle for planning policies in the port area. From this perspective, the Columbine Building appears to be doing precisely what it should and, to this end, the Panel felt that the Isle of Wight Council should confirm its future as shipbuilding and repairing site and encourage further investment and expansion. Whilst Historic England and the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport would require additional evidence of possible special interest to be able to consider a renewed application for listing of this building, the Council could take their own measures to protect the contribution of this building's architecture to the area's heritage. This could include 'locally listing' the building as a non-designated heritage asset, removing permitted development rights using an article 4 direction and considering expanding the Ryde Esplanade Conservation Area to include the building, conferring statutory protection from demolition without planning permission (see 7.9 Recommendations). Each of these measures allows greater opportunity for consideration of the building's historic or architectural interests when making decisions about its future.

4.4 The Classic Boat Museum

4.4.1 The impressive collection of boats, classic yachts, and associated artefacts curated by the Classic Boat Museum is yet another project in East Cowes initiated and managed by a committed team of volunteers (and, regrettably, was somewhere else the Panel had only a fleeting visit). Members were delighted to learn from Mark McNeill that a permanent site had been secured somewhere in the Cowes/East Cowes area for the Museum to relocate (although where this would be was something Mark was not at liberty to divulge). This new location would enable it to expand and to develop as an active museum in the community focused on championing the Island's outstanding marine heritage. The Panel considered that it would be fantastic for this part of the Island if this new facility rather than being simply a 'static' collection of marine craft, developed into a more dynamic centre which worked more closely with the existing marine and boat-building businesses in the area, making greater use of their considerable skill-base, and providing hands-on opportunities for apprentices. Indeed it was considered that a facility that combined curation of a collection representing the history of classic boats alongside research and education in the design of craft to support the next generation of boats and boat builders and designers, was also an opportunity to draw-in partnerships with mainland Universities helping to also encourage a student population to the island.

4.5 The Esplanade

4.5.1 To the Panel, the Esplanade, with its sweeping views over the estuary mouth, felt somewhere for the locals rather than for visitors - and a marked contrast to the noise and bustle of the port area. The SEEDA and HCA-led redevelopment of the area to the east and south of the Esplanade has, thankfully, been shelved (in the Panel's opinion, the scale and design of what was proposed seemed wholly alien to this place and likely to harm its character). Now that the Council is leading the Masterplanning of this area, Members were hopeful that a more sensitive scheme will be developed. This is a challenging site (not least because it involves designing something which will relate satisfactorily to the water's edge – always a tricky thing to get right) and to produce a development which does not diminish the open character of this part of the settlement. Any taller buildings must be designed and sited with particular care especially to the east of the Old Barracks and the terrace of coastguard cottages where such structures would be very damaging. In particular, the Panel hoped that the design quality of the new housing would be more sensitive to the character of the area than the scheme that has been built opposite the Columbine Building. [This issue is dealt with in greater detail in Paragraph 6.3].

4.6 Other matters

4.6.1 Norris Castle - During their visit, several people raised concerns to the Panel about the state of repair of the Grade I Listed C18 Norris Castle, a pseudo-medieval landmark building on the approach to the Island from the sea whose condition has deteriorated markedly over recent years, leading to its inclusion on the Historic England Heritage at Risk Register. Although the Panel did not

visit it as part of their trip, nevertheless, they felt that, as part of their Report, they should take the opportunity to remind the Council of the need to address this important building and its associated estate.

5 Ryde

5.1 Introduction

5.1.1 On their arrival on the Island, from the end of the near half-mile-long pier, the Panel had been fortunate enough to experience what is considered to be the best view of Ryde, with its buildings rising up the hillside away from the foreshore and its skyline punctuated by the church spires and the turret of the Town Hall. However, on closer inspection, it was evident that, despite clear evidence of investment in residential and commercial properties, this fine Regency/Victorian town appeared to be struggling very badly. Ryde exhibits both the classic problems of a British seaside town and those of a High Street in trouble.

5.2 The town centre

5.2.1 Ryde's principal thoroughfare, Union Street, is remarkable both for the quality of its buildings and, not least, because of the fine seaward views it provides over the Solent. The Panel was pleased to see many of the shopfronts had been restored and that almost all the retail units were occupied by good-quality independent businesses. Aside from the traffic, parked cars and a public realm in need of some attention – all of which detract from the quality of the buildings and one's experience this section of the town centre did seem to be doing reasonably well. However, there is no avoiding the fact that the shopping/food offer along the whole of the High Street/Union Street is pretty variable. This seemed to bear out what the Panel had been told by Michael Lilley (the Mayor of Ryde) that there is acute poverty and deprivation in significant parts of the town and, by the members of Ryde Society, that the wealthy residents of 'Outer Ryde' do not use their town centre.

5.2.2 Despite the large number of independents (which has probably enabled the town to weather the worst of the retail recession better than many), the middle and upper sections of the High Street are beginning to exhibit all the typical signs of a commercial area on a downward trajectory – vacant shop units, underused upper floors, a preponderance of charity shops, units in more marginal uses, poorly maintained properties and historic properties disfigured by over-dominant and poorly-designed signage. The Panel was informed that it was virtually impossible to develop separate residential accommodation in the upper part of High Street (because the upper floors are accessed through the ground-floor shops), and in the middle section (because of the large-floorplate properties and landlords reluctant to consider leases of less than 4 to 5 years) it is very difficult for smaller businesses to become established. In the current retail climate, creating a vibrant and sustainable retail street on a thoroughfare which stretches the best part of half-a-mile, uphill, from the Esplanade is going

to be a huge challenge. In all probability the town is going to have to accept (and plan for) the fact that there not only appears to be a surplus of retail space, but that it is extremely unlikely that, in the future, there will ever be sufficient town centre businesses to fill it. This is a trend seen nationally.

- 5.2.3 The plight of the commercial core is not assisted by what is, in places, an absolutely dire public realm (especially in the middle section of the High Street which, with its patched green tarmac, exhibits perhaps some of the worst examples seen on any Panel visit). This detracts both from the shoppers' experience and from the character of its surrounding built form. The poor condition of many buildings is made more noticeable than it otherwise might be by the fact that, as one proceeds southwards, the High Street rises so steeply that the ground is in one's line of vision. The Panel had been told that there was a Public Realm Strategy produced in 2004 (the results of which were evident in several places around the town). However, even in areas where improvements were made, such as St Thomas's Square, whilst these works have undoubtedly created an attractive, open space where pedestrians do stop and linger, the quality of some of the design and the use of alien materials leaves much to be desired, whilst it was noted that street furniture in particular was poorly co-ordinated.
- 5.2.4 Ryde is a townscape which is just beginning to fall apart. The Panel considered that, if nothing is done for the town centre soon, then its problems are likely to worsen considerably. With the limited resources the Isle of Wight Council have, the Panel considered that Ryde would be another clear candidate for a High Streets HAZ. This should focus on addressing the alarmingly-poor public realm, repairing and reinstating shop fronts and tackling inappropriate signage. This has been shown to attract higher value retail businesses and high-quality restaurants, which could be an engine for growth for the remainder of the retail area. The High Street HAZ should also seek to encourage residential reuse of some of the vacant upper floors, particularly in the middle section of the High Street (and, thereby help provide some of the 1 and 2-bedroom properties suitable for young professionals that Cllr Michael Lilley considered was much needed in the town). However, the Isle of Wight Council cannot simply rely on grant aid, alone, to deliver the regeneration of the commercial core of the town. Addressing the problems of the town centre will require the Council not only to make effective use of its powers under the Planning Acts (such as Urgent Works, Repairs and S215 Notices) but also to ensure that it has a well-resourced conservation team.
- 5.2.5 If the above were not challenging enough, the Panel was concerned by the high-profile problem buildings within town centre – the Grade II listed Roman Catholic Church of St Mary (with its derelict convent) at the top of the High Street; Harrison and Gilke's modernistic Royal York Hotel on Cross Street/George Street (listed Grade II); and one of Ryde's most important landmark buildings the Town Hall, also listed Grade II. These have a disproportionately negative impact upon the town centre. However, the Panel feared that, because of the complexity and cost, there is a potential danger that in trying to tackle these problems the town may find itself embarking on a series of unsustainable community projects. In terms of the Town Hall, the Panel

considered that there will be a need to bring in developers from outside the Island who are experienced in mixed-use developments (rather than ones who deal with just cultural developments) to deliver a successful scheme for the reuse of this landmark building (such as, for example Igloo or Urban Splash). A project worth looking at is the Chester Storyhouse which reused an empty 1930s Odeon Cinema for a large, mixed-use cultural project and now has some 130 groups working out of it. As for the Royal York Hotel, the Panel felt that Ryde ought to look at Urban Splash's refurbishment of The Midland Hotel in Morecambe. Despite their complexity, such projects have the potential to have a catalytic effect on the regeneration of town centres.

5.3 The Esplanade

- 5.3.1 For those arriving at Ryde by ferry who either walk the length of Ryde's half-mile-long pier or travel by means of the rather quaint (and totally unexpected) London Underground train, apart from the car park at the pier end, the sense of arrival is delightful. However, as soon as one steps off the pier itself, the pedestrian experience turns into something that is actually quite challenging. The rail and bus interchange, where all ferry passengers ultimately arrive, is an unwelcoming, dreary little building. With its four lanes of traffic and manoeuvring buses, the Esplanade, itself a transport-dominated space, is not helped by a rather dated and tired-looking paving scheme. Those arriving by hovercraft (a service that practically justifies a visit in itself!) have the added obstacle of having to cross a railway line.
- 5.3.2 The need to do something to improve the visitor's first experience of the Island and to lessen the severance the busy A3020 causes between the pier head and the town centre is something which both the Council and the local community have long-realised needed to be tackled. However with five separate owners each, seemingly, with their own ambitions regarding their land, despite several attempts, tackling the problems of the Esplanade seems as intractable as ever.
- 5.3.3 The Panel recognised the huge challenges that the Esplanade presents. Nevertheless, tackling these, admittedly, highly-technical and complex issues ought to be one of the Council's key priorities. Not simply because it is an important strategic issue for the town of Ryde but, rather, because it is one which affects the whole Island and people's perceptions of it. Whilst the Panel can well-understand the Council's reluctance to produce yet another strategy for the Esplanade, members considered that it was essential that there is a clear vision for this area which sets out just what it is that you want to achieve for the area and how the vision will be realised. Rather than starting completely afresh, the Panel felt that the Council might begin by reviewing the previous strategies for this area.
- 5.3.4 The Panel had been told that Island Line Trains are waiting to hear from the Department for Transport about potential funding towards improvements to the rail infrastructure. Assuming they are successful, what impact will this have on the remainder of the Esplanade? Similarly, should Portsmouth and

Southampton City Region in the future consider making a bid to fund improvements to the Interchange, how will these fit into what everybody else is doing? Piecemeal interventions will not deliver the radical changes necessary for this part of the town. It may well be the case that in the current financial climate such a major project can only be delivered incrementally, as funding becomes available. Nevertheless, it needs an overarching Masterplan to ensure all the component parts integrate effectively with one another. Members felt it essential that the Council continues its dialogue with the landowners, transport operators and critical stakeholders to move this process on.

- 5.3.5 The public realm challenges of the Esplanade are secondary to the huge infrastructure problems of the interface between the sea, the town and the traffic and, really, the infrastructure needs to be tackled first. However, the Panel considered that it would be a disaster if the design of the Esplanade was based on traffic-engineering considerations without regard to its other important functions as one of the town's key anchors for attracting visitors and investment and facilitating the town's communal life.
- 5.3.6 Members felt that consideration should be given to the possibility of relocating the bus interchange away from the seafront to a new site elsewhere in the town. Buses could still drop off at the Esplanade but they would stand elsewhere. Such a project was implemented extremely successfully in Hastings despite local people saying it could not be done. Reducing the severance between the seafront and the town that is currently caused by the railway, again, is a matter any strategy needs to tackle. Given the relative height difference between the railway line and the surrounding road system, creating an at-grade, wide, pedestrian route across it to the hovercraft terminal and the other parts of the Esplanade would not seem an intractable problem. Finally, in view of the successful UNESCO Biosphere Reserve bid for the Isle of Wight, the strategy should be seeking to promote walking and cycling (perhaps using the station as a launching point for cross-island cycling routes with business opportunities for cycle-hire and innovation potential for establishing an electric bike as well as other electric transport infrastructure).

5.4 Traffic

- 5.4.1 In order to begin to resolve the problems facing both the Esplanade and the High Street/Union Street areas (and the interface between them), the Panel considered that a town-wide traffic review will be necessary. As is the case for Newport, the Council might experiment with temporary road closures or narrowing on certain parts of High Street/Union Street and Lind Street to test the impact which pedestrianisation might have upon vehicular movement, the retail economy and people's perceptions about the quality of their shopping experience.

6 **Wider Issues**

- 6.1 The need for the towns to work together rather than in competition

- 6.1.1 Whilst each of the towns has its own distinct identity and its own particular set of challenges, trying to resolve the problems of each town in isolation may not necessarily be in the best interests of the Island as a whole or for those who live and work there. The communities of each of the three towns seem intent on driving forward their own vision for their town without a common sense of direction for the island. The overriding aim should be that whatever happens should not simply be in the best interests of each town, but should achieve a greater culminative outcome for the Island. So, for example, if there is to be a new National Museum on the Island (and the communities of both Ryde and East Cowes told the Panel that they would like to attract something as transformational as the Turner Contemporary at Margate), the location of such a development should not be simply because the local community has made a successful pitch for it but, rather, that it is the best strategic location and the one which will deliver the most successful outcomes for the Isle of Wight.
- 6.1.2 One might reasonably expect that this is also happening elsewhere around the Island. The Isle of Wight Council have the opportunity to co-ordinate these local initiatives so that what each town is doing is complementary to the other settlements and, together, will achieve the longer-term collective vision for the Island. This should also give communities comfort that their efforts will be supported by the administration and provide a road map for them to bring projects forward. To this end, the Panel felt that a high-level facilitator might need to be brought in to help the Island Councillors to work more closely together and raise the scale of ambition for the Island as a whole.
- 6.1.3 One way in which the towns might begin to work more closely together is to get them thinking in terms of 'river catchments'. The landscape setting of all three of the towns visited is very strong and there are very quick connections from these settlements to stunning landscapes. If dealt with in landscape terms, rather than as individual settlements, using a strategic approach based upon river valleys would also start to dissolve the idea of town/country, and such an approach also links in which the increasing interest in the biosphere and ecosystems - which are incredibly important to wellbeing.

6.2 Isle of Wight Regeneration Strategy

- 6.2.1 The Council is to be applauded for setting up a dedicated Regeneration Team, and the Isle of Wight Regeneration Strategy is an impressive document that has built on wide-ranging consultation with key interest groups. The Panel believes, however, that the strategy could perhaps be clearer in how its aims will be achieved on the ground, and how the island's unique heritage can contribute to its success. For instance it would be helpful to better understand how the actions in each Area Regeneration Plan will contribute to the overall strategic objectives for the island.
- 6.2.2 The Panel felt that some of the strategic objectives could also be more clearly expressed. For example, it might be better to express the key challenge of 're-balancing the population' as 'attracting and retaining skilled 18-40 year olds'. The strategy could then be clearer about why development to attract this demographic is most suitably delivered in particular locations, both in

terms of what unique features those places offer and what this will deliver for local and wider regeneration. The strategy should perhaps make a greater distinction between the conditions necessary for regeneration to happen (e.g. support for key sectors, excellent quality of life, fast and reliable connectivity etc), and the direct benefits that will follow (such as an increase in the proportion of economically active residents, opportunities for entrepreneurs, easier entry to the workforce for younger people, increases in household income and greater council revenues, etc).

- 6.2.3 There was a feeling amongst Panel members that the Isle of Wight could be making much more of the potential role it can play in demonstrating models of sustainable living. In the week following the Panel visit the Island's bid to become a UNESCO Biosphere Reserve was confirmed, and this could be very important, linking into the green agenda and underpinning everything that the Council is doing. This ought to be a key theme within the Regeneration strategy. One Panel member suggested that, rather than 'Inspiration Island', perhaps the strapline of the vision should be 'Wight - the New Green'!

6.3 Design

- 6.3.1 The Panel was disappointed by the design quality of much of the more-recent development they had seen on the Island. Newport, East Cowes and Ryde each have their own distinctive character and, certainly in their historic cores, use a palette of materials that are, in some cases, distinctive to the Island (one thinks of the lavender-coloured bricks used in Newport, for example). However, much of the new housing developments they had seen were soulless, lacking any local distinctiveness in terms of the design of the individual dwellings, their detailing, the materials used or the relationship of the buildings to the street. Many of the infill schemes in the three historic cores had taken little account of their context and used, presumably, imported materials which bore little resemblance to those used anywhere else in the settlements. Whilst the new Waitrose may have been a boon for the local population, its design was wholly alien to East Cowes. The Panel found this lack of design quality worrying and a matter that needs to be addressed as a matter of some urgency in all three settlements.
- 6.3.2 In order to begin to address this, Members considered that the Council, in conjunction with the local communities, should start by defining what they consider to be the elements that help to define the Island's character and that of its individual settlements. Such an assessment should look at built form, the urban morphology, how the built form relates to its landscape, and the types of materials that have been used - brick, stone, stucco etc. (Incidentally, it was reported to the Panel that there is in existence a study by a former Historic England Inspector, which details all the various building stones found across the Island). Within the historic cores of the three towns, the Conservation Area Appraisals provide a good amount of information already.
- 6.3.3 Having done this, the Isle of Wight Council needs to develop Design Guides for each of the towns and develop specific design standards for future infill developments (defining such things as texture, colours and patterns of brick-

work etc). Armed with these, the council will have the tools to promote and demand high-quality design.

- 6.3.4 With several major regeneration schemes likely in the three towns that they visited, Members also considered that it is essential that a Design Review Panel is established on the Island, perhaps composed of 50% Islanders and 50% from the mainland (possibly from Design South East).

6.4 Archaeology

- 6.4.1 In respect of Newport, mention has been made, above, of the need for future redevelopment proposals to take into account the potential impact upon the town's archaeological remains. As a general point, the Panel considered that regeneration schemes could gain much from integrating archaeology (both above and below ground) more comprehensively. For example, recording standing buildings and archaeological excavations can offer positive, social benefits, they can engage the community through volunteer schemes, broaden awareness of local history and provide valuable new knowledge in the process. Archaeological work has a strong track record of positively-engaging with disparate groups and can be particularly successful with educationally or socially marginalised constituencies.

6.5 Community Engagement

- 6.5.1 The Panel was really interested and impressed by the amount of positive engagement that the Isle of Wight Council has already undertaken with local community groups, particularly the 'Shaping Newport' initiative. It seems that a lot of good ideas are coming out from these consultation exercises. However, what seemed to be missing was evidence of how these ideas had been harnessed and integrated into the strategies in terms of actions. There are, in addition, clearly some very disadvantaged groups living on the Island. Engaging such groups is often a challenge, and the Panel are aware of the council's efforts in this regard, but could more be done? Perhaps working with school parent groups in a disadvantaged community to develop the vision for the arts or education offers within the harbour area could be a start.

6.6 Other observations about the Island

- 6.6.1 In an Island with such a huge potential for green living, the car still seems to be the key. One of the basic practical problems for both Ryde and Newport is traffic management which, one suspects, needs to be more or less completely redesigned before any meaningful public realm improvements and enhanced connectivity can be made in either place. The Panel thought that the Island ought to rethink its approach to the car (particularly when there appears to be such a good bus service) and start to champion electric vehicles - something which would be complementary to both the hi-tech manufacturing and biosphere credentials of the island. Electric-transport-only zones could also serve

to radically-diminish urban traffic noise and improve local air quality, even if routes were not substantially modified.

- 6.6.2 The Panel was told that electricity is supplied to the Island by a single electric cable from the mainland. Despite the stand-by support of the Kingston Power Station, potentially, this leaves it at some risk. Members felt that there seemed considerable potential (especially in a place this sunny) for the Island to become a lot more self-sufficient in terms of energy production by greatly increasing the amount of renewable energy generated. Given the high-tech skills in the Island, this may also help to encourage the development of new businesses in this area. Moreover, this is an area of research in which a lot of Universities are currently very interested. Whilst this may not, necessarily, lead to the creation of a new Higher Education Campus, it could lead to the establishment of courses and residential field trips being run from the Island and it could, perhaps, result in joint research by the Universities to help to address some of the particular challenges associated with this technology.
- 6.6.3 For this, the Island might have to look further afield than the Universities on the other side of the Solent, to those such as Cranfield who are involved in high-tech developments in academic research, including aviation engineering, for which there are opportunities for businesses such as GKN to develop partnerships, with opportunities for spin-off businesses. Indeed opportunities of alternative or meanwhile uses of buildings in East Cowes that have not been redeveloped through the HCAs programme could be explored as a way of providing opportunities for high tech or marine research within the vicinity of the harbour and the well-established businesses that surround it. The Island is also likely to be very interesting to higher educational establishments simply because it is a 'closed system'.
- 6.6.4 If the economic fortunes of the town centres of places like Ryde and Newport are to be turned around, their future will almost certainly lie in having a thriving independent sector. In both places, the Panel had been told that people are often reluctant to risk setting-up a business (particularly in areas where there are currently none on the Island) because they do not know what is involved, how they go about it or are unsure about the 'red tape' and regulations they may need to overcome. The Panel considered that the Isle of Wight Council is in a position to enable people to try things out and to experiment. In those cases where a person is considering establishing a business venture which is currently unrepresented in the Island, perhaps people from the mainland could be brought in who have done similar things before to guide them or, alternatively, those thinking of establishing such a business could have a contribution to the costs of visiting similar establishments on the mainland.

7 Conclusions and Recommendations

- 7.1 Despite all that it has to offer in terms of climate, its environment and quality of life, the Isle of Wight is a place that is facing some extremely challenging underlying problems, problems made all the more difficult because of the physical separation from the rest of the Country.

- 7.2 At the time of the Panel visit, the Council had just finalised the framework by which it envisaged that many of these challenges might be resolved and, in addition, had either begun, or was beginning, to draw up more-detailed proposals for a number of the key regeneration sites in the each of three towns. As part of this work, the Council had undertaken an extremely impressive community engagement programme with the residents and businesses of these settlements for which they should be greatly commended. The sheer enthusiasm that the communities of Newport, East Cowes and Ryde showed for their towns during the visit and the willingness they obviously have to get actively engaged in not simply commenting on what should happen to their town but in driving-forward projects to help realise it was hugely impressive.
- 7.3 However, community drive alone is not going to turn around the fortunes of the three towns. Certainly for two of them, it will need the Isle of Wight Council to make some challenging and, in all likelihood, unpopular (at least in the short term) decisions about traffic management and parking before the other problems of the town can be effectively addressed. In Ryde, it will also require the whole transport infrastructure around the Esplanade to be reviewed.
- 7.4 The key regeneration sites in the three towns each provide a real opportunity to transform those settlements. Even though they may be developed incrementally over a number of years, to maximise their potential all these individual actions need to work towards the delivery of a common vision. To achieve this, the Panel consider it imperative that the redevelopment of each is guided by an overarching strategic framework.
- 7.5 Members admired the considerable amount of work done by the Arts and Culture Group to develop an outpost of the V&A in East Cowes. However, the island has niche strengths in marine engineering, wind and tidal energy, composite materials and digital technology that provide an impressive opportunity for future investment. All of these will need space to grow and a proportion of them will need waterfront sites. This is what East Cowes can, and should, in the future, provide. A creative collaboration across the island could increase the chances of attracting a museum partner, but should seek to establish it in the most appropriate location for the island as a whole.
- 7.6 The retail areas of both Newport and Ryde exhibit many of the typical signs of the retraction in the retail economy nationally – vacant shop units, underused and empty upper floors and properties beginning to show problems of lack of maintenance. In addition, both suffer from an extremely poor public realm. Given the keen community involvement in their town centres, both seemed to the Panel to be ideal candidates to benefit from the new High Streets HAZ fund. Consequently, the Panel would recommend that the Council submits a bid for both Newport and Ryde. However, it is recognised that both settlements will be competing against many other, probably equally-deserving, town centres the length and breadth of England. If only one of the two were successful, the Panel's choice would be for Ryde on the basis that this is a place which is just beginning on a downward trajectory and, with several key listed buildings clearly at risk, feel that if nothing is done for the town centre

soon, then its problems are unlikely to be addressed. Should one or more of the Island's bids not be successful, then there are a number of possible sources of funding to which the Council might bid. These are set out in Appendix A at the end of this report.

- 7.7 The communities of each of the three towns are laudably committed to driving forward their own vision of how they want their town to be. However, this is taking place seemingly without any sense of a collective direction for the Island. These efforts need to be placed within a broader strategic context that ensures that they are harnessed for the good of the island as a whole.
- 7.8 The Panel were concerned by the design quality of much of the more recent developments they had seen on the Island. In order to begin to address this, Members considered that the Council needs to identify what are the elements which define the Island's distinctive character, produce Design Guidance for new developments and future infill schemes, and establish a Design Review Panel. These should enable the Isle of Wight Council to have the confidence and adopt a far-tougher line in promoting high-quality design and refusing poor schemes.

7.9 Recommendations

A	Newport
1	<p>The Isle of Wight Council should undertake a strategic review of traffic movement and car parking in and around Newport with the intention of identifying:-</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How the amounts of traffic in and around the town centre might be reduced and pedestrians given greater priority. • Potential opportunities for increasing pedestrianisation (especially the St James's Square and the short section of the High Street between there and the Guildhall) • Opportunities to reduce the amounts of on-street parking including limiting some areas to disabled parking only. • Areas of existing surface car parking which could be removed and the sites redeveloped • The most appropriate location for any new replacement multi-storey car park for the town
2	<p>The Isle of Wight Council should submit an expression of interest in the High Streets HAZ fund, focussing on:-</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Building repairs, reinstatement of shop fronts and addressing inappropriate signage • Encouraging the reuse of vacant commercial units, and where necessary using statutory intervention. • Public Realm improvements, including the development of a revised Public Realm Strategy for the town centre • Enabling the reuse and adaptation of vacant or underused upper floors to residential use, including funding work to demonstrate viability with the potential for exemplar projects.
3	<p>The Isle of Wight Council should produce a Public Realm Strategy for the town centre and set out a programme for implementing improvements to the streetscape. Priority should be given to:-</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • St Thomas' Square • St James' Square • Quay Street outside the Guildhall

4	<p>The Isle of Wight Council should develop a landscape-led Masterplan for the Harbour area. This should:-</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Set out a clear vision of what it is hoped to see developed here and the quality of development that is expected • Be based around the principle of the buildings being set around a green spine which runs through the heart of development, beneath the Medina Way viaduct and connects to the former warehouses at the head of the Medina estuary • Be based upon an assessment of the archaeological potential of the site. • Address green and blue infrastructure (and how it can be used to gain access to nature and routes to the open countryside).
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B East Cowes	
1	<p>East Cowes should continue in its role as the hub of the Medina Valley in terms of economic growth, and should remain a focus for marine engineering and composite technologies. Whatever goes on in East Cowes cannot prejudice the marine and ferry industries which are a key part of the functionality of this place and the Island as a whole.</p>
2	<p>The Isle of Wight Council should ensure that the Columbine Hangar is retained as a landmark building on the riverside either by removing Permitted Development Rights for its demolition through an Article 4 Direction and/or by including it on its Local List and then including it within a revised East Ryde Esplanade Conservation Area</p> <p>The Island Planning Strategy needs to include a Policy which will safeguard the future of the Columbine Building for future marine-engineering uses.</p>
3	<p>The Isle of Wight Council should develop a Masterplan for the area to the east of the Esplanade. This should:-</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Retain the open character of this part of East Cowes • Consider ways to address the issues caused by the landslip. • Ensure that tall buildings do not harm the setting or views towards the Old Barracks and coastguard cottages • Set out the design principles for how the buildings should relate to the waterfront
4	<p>The Classic Boat Museum should give consideration to working more closely with the existing marine and boat-building businesses in the area, making greater use of their considerable skill-base and providing hands-on opportunities for apprentices.</p>

5	<p>The proposal by the East Cowes Arts and Culture Group to initiate a conversation with the V&A Museum for an arts/cultural hub in East Cowes should be supported in principle, although alternative locations to the Columbine Building should be explored. The Columbine Building should only be considered for arts and cultural uses if there is no hope of its continuing in maritime industrial use.</p>
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C	Ryde
1	<p>The Isle of Wight Council should undertake a strategic review of traffic movement and car parking in and around Ryde with the intention of identifying:-</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How the amounts of traffic in and around the town centre and along the Esplanade might be reduced, with the Lind Street/Union Street junction as a focus. • Potential opportunities for increasing pedestrianisation along High Street/Union Street • Opportunities to reduce the amounts of on-street parking
2	<p>The Isle of Wight Council should submit a bid for funding from the High Streets HAZ fund focussing on:-</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Building repairs, reinstatement of shopfronts and addressing inappropriate signage • Encouraging the reuse of vacant commercial units, including diversification. • Public Realm improvements, including the development of a revised Public Realm Strategy for the town centre • Enabling the reuse and adaptation of vacant or underused upper floors to residential use
3	<p>The Isle of Wight Council should produce a Public Realm Strategy for the town centre and set out a programme for implementing improvements to the streetscape. Priority should be given to creating attractive well-designed public spaces (incorporating new tree planting) which enable pedestrians to take in the views over the town towards the Solent</p>
4	<p>The Isle of Wight Council should make more effective use of its powers under the Planning Acts (such as Enforcement, Urgent Works, Repairs and and S215 Notices) to address problem buildings</p>

5	<p>The Isle of Wight Council needs urgently to develop a strategy that specifically targets the high-profile problem buildings within town centre – the Roman Catholic Church of St Mary (with its derelict convent), the Royal York Hotel and the Town Hall. Of the three, top priority should be given to finding a solution for the Town Hall</p>
6	<p>The Isle of Wight Council should continue its dialogue with the other landowners of the Esplanade and produce a masterplan for it to guide the long-term strategy for this area. This should:-</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Seek, as its primary objective, to improve visitor’s first experience of the Island. • Reduce the amount and numbers of traffic movements along the Esplanade to create a pedestrian-friendly environment • Reduce the severance caused by the rail and highway infrastructure to better-connect the seafront to the town centre • Examine the possibility of relocating the bus interchange away from the seafront to a new site elsewhere in the town. • Explore the possibility of creating an at-grade, wide, pedestrian route across the railway line to the hovercraft terminal and the other parts of the Esplanade • Promote walking and cycling

D Wider Issues	
1	<p>The Isle of Wight Council should engage with the local community initiatives in each of the three towns to broker initiatives which are complimentary with (as opposed to competition with) the other settlements.</p> <p>To this end consideration should be given to engaging a high-level facilitator to help the Island Councillors to work more closely together and have higher ambitions for the Island as a whole.</p> <p>Consideration should also be given to developing strategies in terms of river catchments as well as looking at the overall vision for the island and the role each major settlement will play in achieving that vision.</p>
2	<p>The Isle of Wight Regeneration Action Plan needs to better-articulate the dynamics of change on the island and to set out a clear hierarchy of priorities and actions.</p> <p>The Island’s designation as a UNESCO Biosphere Reserve ought to be a key theme.</p>

3	<p>The Council, in conjunction with the local communities, needs to define the Island's character and that of its individual settlements.</p> <p>The Isle of Wight Council should develop design guides for its towns and specific design standards for future infill developments.</p> <p>A Design Review Panel should be established to support the Council in its push for higher design standards, perhaps composed of 50% Islanders and 50% external experts from the mainland.</p>
4	<p>Archaeology and the potential role it can play in engaging local communities needs to be integrated into future regeneration schemes.</p>
5	<p>The Island needs to rethink its relationship with the car and consider championing greater use of electric vehicles and bicycles.</p>
6	<p>The Island should consider ways in which it could become more self-sufficient in energy production, by increasing the amount of renewable energy generated.</p>

Appendix A – Possible alternative sources of funding

From Historic England:-

Capacity Building Grants

These can help Councils and community groups prepare documentation, management plans, feasibility studies and other 'paperwork' to support preparation of later studies. Funding limits are not specified but grants are expected to be large enough to be worthwhile in terms of investment £20K - £50K and match-fund requirements are generally expected to show the applicant's commitment but can be negligible or disregarded entirely where they are for charities and 3rd sector organisations.

The Partnership Schemes in Conservation Areas (PSICA).

These are normally focused on conservation areas on the At Risk register and have an upper limit of £300K as annual installments of £100K which may be spent on repair of historic buildings, enabling works to bring vacant space into use and reinstatement of lost architectural detail, as well as public realm works and necessary studies or educational or outreach materials that contribute to addressing the area's at risk status. Public realm works are capped at 30% of the total grant budget. A match fund of 50% from the LPA is expected, although we have been flexible in recent years due to the lack of availability of local government funding.

From the Architectural Heritage Fund:-

AHF have a parallel fund to the Historic England High Streets Heritage Action Zones, which is focussed on understanding the potential and feasibility of reusing individual historic buildings. This might be appropriate for targeting individual buildings that are key sites but outside a wider HAZ project such as the Ryde Town Hall or East Cowes Barracks.

From The National Lottery Heritage Fund:-

The NLHF remain an important source of funding for projects that bring together, people, places and the past, although they are now generally focused on delivering smaller grant aid projects. Nevertheless the Heritage Enterprise Grant, which supports larger projects that generate employment through repair and reuse of historic buildings could provide a significant opportunity particularly for larger buildings, such as Ryde Town Hall.

The Historic Places Panel – previously known as the Urban Panel - provides a broad spectrum of independent expertise to help local authorities and others engage in the regeneration and revitalisation of historic places. The Members who attended the visit to the Isle of Wight on 12th - 13th June, 2019 were:-

Peter Studdert (Chair)

Sophia de Sousa

Johanna Gibbons

Julian Hill

John Lord

They were assisted by the following Members of the Historic England Advisory Committee and the London Advisory Committee:-

David Adshead (HEAC)

Nicole Crockett (LAC)

Amir Ramezani (LAC)

Copies of previous Panel Reports can be found at:-

<https://historicengland.org.uk/about/who-we-are/committees-and-panels/historic-places-panel/review-papers/>