

Island Plan

The Isle of Wight Today

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1 Introduction

- 1.1 This document has been produced in parallel with the Core Strategy and aims to provide background evidence for the development of the Core Strategy spatial approach and core policies.
- 1.2 People have been able to comment on its contents during both the Issues and Options and Preferred Option Core Strategy consultation.

2 The Isle of Wight Today

A Spatial Portrait of the Isle of Wight

- 2.1 The Isle of Wight is a unitary local authority. The Island is separated from the mainland by the Solent and connected to the south coast of England by passenger and vehicle ferries to the ports of Portsmouth, Southampton and Lymington.
- 2.2 The Island is 380 square kilometres in area and stretches thirteen miles from Ventnor in the South to Cowes in the North and twenty-three miles from St Helens in the east to the Needles in the west. The largest towns are Newport, Cowes and East Cowes, Ryde and Sandown and Shanklin. Most of the Island's 136, 250 residents live in these towns in the centre, north and east of the Island. Totland, Yarmouth and Freshwater, are the significant settlements in the west of the Island.
- 2.3 Within its boundaries, the Isle of Wight contains a wide variety of natural, rural and urban landscapes. The Medina Valley runs from the centre of the Island and contains the Medina River. A range of chalk downs extends east from the Needles to Culver Cliff. The Island is home to a rich variety of important habitats and species. This is reflected in the fact that UK or European environmental designations protect 70% of the Island and there are sites of internationally and nationally important geology and geomorphology.
- 2.4 The rich natural and historic environment is one of the main attractions drawing tourists and enthusiasts to the Island. Tourism is one of the main industries on the Island with the population more than doubling during the busy summer holiday season between July and August. The unique nature of the Island has also drawn many retirees and second home owners.
- 2.5 This following summary of the issues faced by the Isle of Wight sets the stage for the policies outlined in subsequent chapters of the Preferred Core Strategy.

A Changing Economic Profile

- 2.6 The Isle of Wight shares some characteristics with the South East of England region, such as a growing population and an increasing reliance on the service sector. Beneath the headline statistics differences are evident. Characteristics of the Island, which distinguish it from the mainland, include:
- A large retired population

- Health, retailing, education and tourism dominate the service sector far more on the Island than in the rest of the South East
 - Based on measures such as wages, productivity, educational attainment, GVA per head and unemployment, the Island ranks below the regional average.
- 2.7 Recent data suggests the Isle of Wight has performed well relative to the Southeast and the rest of the UK. GVA growth averaged 4.5% a year between 1999 and 2004 compared with 2.9% a year in the South East and 2.5% for the UK. (Source: Experian: 2004). Sectors such as construction and financial and business services provided a significant boost to the Island economy during this period. Gross Value Added (GVA) measures the contribution to the economy of each individual producer, industry or sector in the UK.
- 2.8 Employment growth in the past half decade has also been impressive on the Isle of Wight, achieving growth well in excess of the South East and UK average. Considering the 1994 to 2004 period, the number Full Time Equivalent employees increased from approximately 38,000 to 49,000, an increase of 28%. The South East region as a whole saw an 18% increase in employment over the same period.
- 2.9 A consequence of this growth is a changing sectoral composition on the Island. The non-manufacturing sector provided the bulk of job creation, with construction, financial and business services and other (mainly public) services performing particularly well. In 2004, the service sector was a similar size compared to what it was in 1999, but changes have occurred within the sector as a whole. The Island has witnessed a growing importance of financial and business services, while distribution, hotels and catering now accounting for a smaller proportion of the economy.
- 2.10 Historically the Isle of Wight's economy was based on tourism, manufacturing and farming.
- 2.11 Today tourism still plays a significant role in the economy hotels and catering employing 8% of the working population (Source: Experian 2004) and related employment means that the tourism economy employs around 15% of the Island's population. Both figures represent a higher proportion of employment than that found in the UK as a whole. However, the Hotels and Catering sector, an important part of the tourism market, saw GVA output decline from £88.19million in 2000 to £78.17million in 2004. The number of jobs in this sector also fell by 1,600 (FTE) between 1999 and 2004 (Source: Experian, October 2005).
- 2.12 The Island is home to niche manufacturing industries including aerospace, electronics, composites, renewable energy and marine technology. Manufacturing

employment has fluctuated in recent years reflecting changes in aerospace and engineering sectors. It currently accounts for 13% of employment on the Island. Manufacturing is expected to recover and record healthy growth over the next decade (Source: Experian, October 2005). However, this growth is expected to be driven by growth in the metals, minerals and chemicals sector – mostly accounted for by the composites industries on the Island.

- 2.13 While agriculture accounts for 80% of the land use, it only employs only 1% of the population.
- 2.14 The public sector is the largest employer on the Island, with the Isle of Wight Council, NHS, HM Prison Service and Hampshire Constabulary providing a significant number of jobs. Over 14,000 people work in the public sector, with the majority employed in education and health. The public sector has generated 1,900 additional jobs over the 1999 to 2004 period (Source: Experian, October 2005).
- 2.15 Health remains an important sector. In 2004 the health sector had a GVA output of £103.3million making it the third most productive sector. However, health remains the second largest sector in terms of employment, accounting for 13% of the Island's jobs. This is higher than the UK average of 11% and reflected the health needs of the Island's older population.
- 2.16 In 2004, retailing was the strongest sector on the Island, with a total Gross Value Added (GVA) output of just under £155million. In 2004, the retail sector accounted for the single greatest proportion of employment on the Isle of Wight (18%), a significantly greater proportion than in the UK as a whole. The retail sector has increased significantly in recent years, at 9% per year, and its growth is set to continue.
- 2.17 However, both retailing and health sectors generate little value per employee as compared with other sectors.
- 2.18 The construction industry has become the second strongest economic sector on the Island in terms of output. Construction also generated 2,800 extra jobs on the Island between 1999 and 2004. This sector is expected to grow substantially throughout the lifetime of the *Island Plan*.
- 2.19 Business Services have also increased their GVA output significantly with an output of £46million in 2000 increasing to £106million in 2004. This has been the fastest growing sector on the Island in recent years, creating 2,500 additional (FTE) jobs. However, this sector is still under-represented in terms of the proportion of people employed compared to the UK as a whole, where it is a significant growth sector.

The table below shows the top 5 performing sectors for 2000 and 2004, and estimates the likely top 5 sectors for 2016, based upon existing trends in growth.

2000		2004		2016	
Sector	GVA £m	Sector	GVA £m	Sector	GVA £m
Health	93.17	Retailing	154.93	Retailing	231.62
Hotels & Catering	88.19	Construction	131.47	Construction	194.24
Retailing	82.83	Business Services	106.30	Business Services	174.75
Public Admin & Defence	81.52	Health	103.30	Health	151.70
Transport Equipment	76.07	Other Services	86.88	Other Services	138.20

Source: Experian

- 2.20 Since 1999, the Isle of Wight Economic Partnership has assisted twenty-six companies to invest in the Isle of Wight, resulting in 900 new jobs. The largest investment was from NEG Micon Rotors (now known as Vestas Wind Systems), wind turbine manufacturers, which now employs around 550 people in the Medina Valley.
- 2.21 Over the same period, there have also been significant levels of redundancies on the Island due to restructuring and plant closures, largely in the manufacturing sector. The loss of nine major manufacturing firms alone accounted for over 1,300 jobs.
- 2.22 At the time of the 2001 Census there were 58,141 economically active residents on the Isle of Wight. Of this, 43,357 residents were employees (29,880 full-time and 13,477 part time) and 9,555 were self-employed. Of the remaining 5,229 economically active residents, 3,375 residents were unemployed and 1,854 residents were full-time students.
- 2.23 The 2001 Census showed that the proportion of economically active males on the Isle of Wight (78.8%) was slightly below the average for England and Wales (81.5%). Economic activity and inactivity for females on the Isle of Wight is in line with trends throughout England and Wales.
- 2.24 The proportion of households in higher socio-economic classification groups such as higher and lower managerial and professional occupations is consistently lower in the Isle of Wight than in England and Wales. The Isle of Wight has greater proportions of households engaged as small employers or as lower supervisory and technical occupations than England and Wales.

Economic Strengths

- Composites and materials, marine technologies, rural industries and tourism and hospitality have all been identified by the South East England Development Agency (SEEDA) as significant business concentrations and networks on the Island.
- The Isle of Wight has also been identified by SEEDA as a Priority Area for Economic Regeneration (PAER).
- There is an emerging high-tech, niche manufacturing and advanced engineering economy linked to the wind energy, marine, automotive and aerospace sectors.
- There is a good supply of potential employment land, a large proportion of which is understood to benefit from a lack of physical or planning constraint. (Employment Land Study: 1999). There is also an availability of employment sites with deep-water frontage suitable for marine related activities.
- Significant environmental qualities such as natural habitats, landscapes, coastlines including beaches, marinas and deep water quays, a high quality built environment, enhance the potential of a number of key sectors such as marine related industries and tourism. The Island also has a good reputation as a location for major international and national sporting events and festivals.
- Attractiveness and ease of access to a high quality environment and a high quality of life that is appealing for managers and business people who own or set up businesses on the Island.

Economic Weaknesses

- A narrow but recently diversifying employment base limited to a small number of sectors: 60% of the workforce is concentrated in five sectors.
- Perceived deficit between supply of skilled local labour and the requirements of industry.
- Below average earnings, especially among males
- Low representation of households classified as higher and lower managerial occupations

- The Island's poorest people suffer from a combination of high unemployment, seasonal work and low wages, which commonly traps them into benefit dependency.
- The 'island factor' weakens the Island's competitive position in attracting and retaining business investment because of higher costs in delivering goods and services.

A Growing Tourism Sector

- 2.25 Historically, the first tourists to the Isle of Wight were the gentry who started to arrive in the second half of the 18th century. This arrival was the result of improvements to mainland roads, better-designed coaches and a more frequent ferry service across the Solent. With these improvements, travellers started to include the Isle of Wight in their tours of the southern half of England in search of 'picturesque' and romantic scenery. The railway from London reached Southampton in 1840. By 1849, there were organised day trips, which allowed six hours on the Island. Queen Victoria's residence at Osborne established the Isle of Wight as a fashionable holiday resort and thousands followed in her footsteps. Tourist and visitor interest in the Island has continued ever since.
- 2.26 The Hotels and Catering sector produced a GVA output of £78.17million and employ 8% of the population (Experian: 2004). The Island attracts over two million visitors a year who come to visit a total of around 380 different leisure and visitor centres and attractions. Visitors spend over £300 million, which underpins the employment, directly and indirectly, of around 13,000 people. The multiplier effects of this income throughout the economy have been estimated as generating a further £100 million.
- 2.27 Tourism remains highly seasonal, with a summer peak. During the summer months the Island is particularly popular. Off peak the tourism sector generates limited business with the main market now being low value coaching and group business. However, short breaks and special interest holidays are growing in importance and there is scope to increase overseas visits on this basis.
- 2.28 International and national events draw visitors to the Island, particularly those related to yachting and watersports. Cowes Week alone is thought to attract in excess of 42,000 visitors and 6,000 yachtsmen and overall contributes £4.6 million to the Island's economy. The Island's music festivals are now well established and draw tens of thousands of people each year. The Nokia Music Festival is worth £9million and draws approximately 35,000 people a day.

Tourism Strengths

- The “Island” factor creates a perception of a unique, distinct but still British environment.
- Growing interest in special interest holidays and the overseas market.
- The natural, historic and built environment of the Isle of Wight is a major asset for the tourism sector. More than half of the Island is designated as an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (51%), whilst most of the coastline is designated Heritage Coast. The Island benefits from high-quality scenery with thirteen award-winning beaches and iconic landmarks and landscapes such as the Needles. The importance of the Island’s natural environment is reflected in the number of international, national and local nature conservation designations.
- The geology and coastal scenery of the Island is of international significance, particularly with regards to fossil and dinosaur finds, drawing scientists and enthusiasts from far and wide. This also makes for an unusual variety of landforms and landscapes, soils, plants and wildlife and microclimates.
- The Island has a reputation as the “Garden Isle”
- The Island has a wealth of separate attractions e.g. Isle of Wight Zoo, Dinosaur Isle, Brading Roman Villa, Ventnor Botanical Gardens and many others. There is also a strong heritage sector including several important English Heritage properties such as Osborne house and gardens and Carisbrooke Castle.
- There are over a hundred events on the Island each year, ranging from big strategically important events such as Cowes Week, the Nokia Music Festival, and Cycling Festival, to small parish events.
- The Isle of Wight has a wide variety of accommodation, including bed & breakfast, hotels, self catering, caravans, seaside guest houses, farm houses and holiday parks, and camping sites.
- The Island has a comprehensive and well-maintained network of footpaths, bridleways and cycle routes.
- All year provision and opportunities for a wide array of outdoor activities such as walking, cycling, sailing, watersports, horse-riding, country sports and golf.

Tourism Weaknesses

- The Island remains over-reliant on a declining traditional family holiday market and low spend coach and school groups.
- The quality and range of accommodation, while improving is not considered adequate to meet the needs of new, short break markets.
- There is a general lack of recent investment in tourist accommodation on the Island.
- There is a significant demand for improvements to cultural assets such as museums.
- During the peak season, the volume of visitors' causes significant strain on the Island's infrastructure and environment.

Housing: A Buoyant Housing Market & an Affordability Gap

- 2.29 2005 Housing Investment Programme (HIP) figures show that in April 2005 there were 6,4184 dwellings on the Island – just under 3,000 more than there were in 2000. An average of 580 new properties have been built per year in the last ten years. Despite this growth, an increasing demand for second homes on the Island and a trend towards smaller households has meant that supply has not kept pace with demand. The affordability of local homes is an increasing problem and the affordable housing delivered has failed to keep pace with demand, with just 220 affordable dwellings constructed between 1999 and 2005.
- 2.30 A large proportion of homes on the Island are detached houses or bungalows, followed closely by semi-detached properties. The Island has a skewed housing stock with a relatively low proportion of smaller dwellings and cheaper accommodation. The income to housing cost ratio for the UK, South East Region, and the Isle of Wight is:
2.44 UK: 6, SE: 7, Isle of Wight: 7.3.
- 2.31 In keeping with national house prices, average house price trends have increased dramatically over the last 10 years. In June 2005 Land Registry figures showed that the average house price on the Island was just under £176,000 in comparison with £182,500 nationally.
- 2.32 Over 76% of households on the Island are owner occupied compared to 68% in England and Wales (Census: 2001). 10% rent from a private landlord/agency (9% in England and Wales) whilst 11% of households are rented from a Housing

Association/RSLs (20% in England and Wales). The lack of social housing on the Island is a significant contrast with the mainland. In April 2005 there were 3,967 households on the Statutory Housing Register, whilst 317 families households were accepted as homeless.

- 2.33 The Isle of Wight also has a large proportion (5%) of second homes or holiday accommodation, compared with the whole of England and Wales (0.7%)(Source: 2001 Census). These homes are concentrated in the Island's coastal areas. The Island also has some 1,152 empty properties across all tenures.

Housing Strengths

- High quality of life on the Island afforded by high environmental amenities.
- Strong residential property market with accordingly high and increasing values.
- Sufficient residential land sites have been identified to meet current requirements through to at least 2011.

Housing Weaknesses

- The attractiveness of the Island results in significant levels of in-migration from wealthy households from the mainland. This serves to limit the supply of housing for local residents and artificially inflate house prices.
- Above average proportions of the Island's housing stock are large detached or bungalow type property. There is a mismatch between the oversupply of this type of housing and the increasing requirement for smaller units driven by changing trends in life-styles.
- There is currently a shortage of smaller affordable dwellings, especially those with one or two bedrooms. There are a large number of homeless families on the Island, many of whom are homed temporarily in B&B accommodation. Currently it is difficult to find accommodation for them to move to which is both affordable and available.
- Many of the Island's housing sites are relatively small and fall below the existing thresholds for securing new affordable housing.

Transport: A Developed Transport System with Gaps and Barriers to Overcome

- 2.34 The rural nature of the Island means there is strong dependence on the private car to travel to key facilities such as employment, healthcare, education and shopping as well as for general movement around the Island.. The majority of the population do however have access to the Island's public transport system, which provides a more sustainable mode of transport. In addition, the established network of cycle and pedestrian routes is helping to encourage more walking and cycling.
- 2.35 When compared with England and Wales, the Island has a higher overall level of car ownership and since the 1991 Census, the number of households on the Island with more than one car has increased. Approximately half (6,359) of non-car owners are single pensioners and 1,992 families with dependent children do not have a car. Such sectors of the population require easily accessible and frequent public transport if car reliance and social exclusion are to be reduced
- 2.36 The Island has a 492 mile (791.8km) road network, with the majority of the main roads converging in Newport where congestion is a significant problem at peak times, notably at the Coppins Bridge intersection. The layout of the Island's road network is such that many everyday journeys use a limited number of routes, some of which are inadequate in terms and width and standard. Keeping the roads maintained is thus an essential part of ensuring access to and between centres of population. Many of the existing road stability problems are a direct result of the geology of the Island.
- 2.37 On weekdays, the urban areas are busy during peak periods with traffic congestion forming at bottlenecks in the road network. During the holiday season, the transport infrastructure is stretched to capacity, particularly around the ports, with thousands of visitors arriving on the Island.
- 2.38 The Island's 517 mile (827km) network of public rights of way allows urban access, links settlements and gives access to the countryside. These sustainable transport routes allow additional opportunities for those who wish to walk, cycle and travel by horse, both as means of sustainable transport and for recreation and tourism.
- 2.39 The Island 's main bus operator annually completes some 6 million passenger journeys with commuters and shoppers accounting for over a third of all journeys, tourists 11% and senior citizens 19%. The 2001 Census showed that 3.9% of Islanders used the bus to travel to work, compared to 7.4% in England and Wales. In recent years the Island, like many other areas, has seen a decline in the number of bus passenger journeys. However the decline was halted in 2002/3 and a 0.6% increase was recorded in 2003/04.

- 2.40 The Island Line railway runs along the eastern side of the Island from Ryde, through Brading and Sandown to Shanklin. It carries in the region of 1.2 million passengers per year and the operators, Stagecoach, have reported recent increases in train usage. Around 1.4% of Islanders use rail to travel to work (2001 Census) and the Island Line is particularly well used by those living on the south eastern side of the Island along with tourists during the summer months. The railway provides an important connection between the fast ferry service at Ryde and the eastern coastal resort towns.
- 2.41 Commuters and visitors to the Island use the cross-Solent ferries arriving at Ryde, Yarmouth, East Cowes and Fishbourne. In 2005 the ferries carried approximately 9.4m passengers, together with 1.7m cars and 25,000 coaches. The majority of the Island's freight also arrives by ferry generating over 260,000 cross Solent commercial vehicle movements per year. The impact of this freight movement is significant in terms of the increasing noise, pollution and road deterioration that is attributable to greater numbers of larger and heavier vehicles. Improving the Island's ability to handle bulk freight, possibly through the creation of dedicated freight holding areas is a key issue.

Transport Strengths

- Developed road system with easy access to the main town of Newport.
- Over 500 miles of public rights of way providing access across the Island on foot, bike or horse.
- High quality, frequent, and convenient cross-Solent ferry crossings from a number of passenger, car and freight facilities.
- Public transport system is in place across the Island, including rural areas. The majority of the Island's rural households are covered by an hourly or better bus service
- Railway link between Ryde and Shanklin which takes pressure off the roads, especially during the holiday season

Transport Weaknesses

- Over reliance on private cars by residents
- One main bus operator means little fare competition;

- At peak times many local buses are used to transport children to school;
- High number of short trips (under 2 miles) by drivers travelling alone
- Peak period traffic congestion in urban areas, most severe in Newport
- Perceived high cost of cross-Solent ferries and hovercraft. This is a particular deterrent for many seeking employment/education opportunities, or those requiring access to secondary health facilities currently not provided on the Island.
- Staging conflicts among freight, commuters and visitors at ferry points.
- Congestion around ports during peak tourist season
- Limited highway network means problems occur when roads have to be temporarily closed;
- Some major roads are in locations which may not be sustainable in the long-term, , as they are vulnerable to the effects of coastal erosion, instability and the impacts of climate change, e.g. along the top of cliffs or within coastal flood plains.
- Lack of funding has led to poorly maintained minor roads.
- Impact of increasing freight movement

Education

- 2.42 The Local Education Authority operates a three-tier education system and maintains 69 schools . The Isle of Wight College is based in Newport and provides a wide variety of courses. There are a small number of private schools on the Island and a few pupils are educated on the mainland.
- 2.43 Educational attainment on the Island remains on or just below the national average. In the academic year 2003/04, 43.9 percent of pupils in Isle of Wight achieved 5 or more GCSE's graded A* to C, compared to an average for England of 53.7. However, the proportion of pupils achieving at least level 4 at Key stage 3 has changed from 64 percent in 1999 to 70 percent in 2004 for Mathematics and from 68 percent to 75 percent in English.

- 2.44 In 2001, 15% of the Island population aged 16-74 had attained level 4/5 (degree level) education. This compared with 22% for the South East and 20% for England and Wales. The Island suffers from a brain-drain with many well-education young people leaving the Island for further or higher education, or for greater employment opportunities. The Island suffers from a poorly skilled workforce, with 33% of the adult population lacking basic numeracy skills and 15% lacking basic literacy skills. A poorly skilled workforce is a deterrent for employers seeking to set up business on the Island and is one of the main concerns of the Learning Skills Partnership.

Education Strengths

- 69 LEA maintained schools spread throughout the Island with several primary schools in rural areas
- Year-on-year educational improvements
- An active Learning Skills Partnership working to improve adult skills and the transition from schools into employment
- A college which has significantly improved in recent years.

Education Weaknesses

- Lower than average GCSE results
- Low proportion of the population with level 4/5 educational attainment
- Those seeking or with higher educational qualifications tend to leave the Island

Health

- 2.45 Generally, the Island enjoys better health than the average for England and Wales but it is not as good as elsewhere in the South East. Within the Island itself, there are health inequalities between different neighbourhoods. There are significant differences in life expectancy between different wards, with some ward-level correlation between lower life expectancy and higher deprivation.

Health Strengths

- There are 18 GP practices on the Island with secondary healthcare provided at St Mary's District General Hospital in Newport.

- The quality of the Island's environment is a factor local people rate highly in relation to their health.
- The Island has an established, public health department
- The Island has a successful healthy schools programme
- The Island is consulting on a proposal to integrate health and adult social services

Health Weaknesses

- A relatively high proportion of residents report that their health is 'not good'.
- Life expectancy of men of working age is not as good as might be expected.
- High suicide rates
- Many hospital treatments are not available on the Island, and need to be carried out on the mainland
- Residents can find travel to mainland hospital difficult
- The unit cost of providing some services (e.g. maternity) is high because of the relatively small population of the Island
- There is difficulty in recruiting to some specialist posts (e.g. mental health)
- Only 34,000 residents are registered with an NHS dentist, despite 14 new dentists being appointed in 12 months.

Communities

2.46 The Islands Settlement profile is of a number of main towns and then scattered villages with 52% of residents living in rural areas, younger age groups living in the main urban areas, while rural and coastal areas are used, integrating the economic and social objectives with the Council's duty to conserve the environment. Within this settlement profile are a range of thriving communities and neighbourhoods that are key to the future of the Island.

Communities Strengths

- A strong sense of local identity in the Island population

- A strong network of town and parish councils
- Parish plans in place for many areas

Communities Weaknesses:

- Rural isolation affecting access to public and community services
- The lower per capita income, compared to other parts of the region, leading to relative deprivation, especially concentrated in some communities
- Limited access to regular affordable and accessible transport for many Island residents affecting access to services, to affordable healthy food and to networks of social support.

Environment: A Beautiful and Sensitive Island

2.47 The Isle of Wight has a unique and important natural environment, which is protected by European, National and local designations. These designations cover both landscape beauty geology and geomorphology and help protect the character of the Island. 51% of the Island is an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty whilst the Heritage Coast covers some 34km - half of the Island's coastline. The natural environment is seen as one of the Island's most valuable assets and the protection and enhancement of this resource is paramount. Issues such as coastal erosion, risk of flooding, and the detrimental effects of tourism on the landscape and biodiversity are real concerns for the future. The aim of sustainable development is to aim for net benefit for social, environmental and economic interests with no significant loss to the natural environment.

2.48 There are many ecological land designations on the Island these include:

Internationally important sites:

- Special Areas of Conservation – 22,305Ha
- Special Protection Areas – 1,736/4.57%
- Ramsar Sites – 1620Ha/4.26%

Nationally important sites:

- Sites of Special Scientific Interest – 4,220Ha/11.1%

- National Nature Reserves – 286Ha/0.75%

Locally important sites:

- Local Nature Reserves – 79 a/0.2%
- Sites of Importance for Nature Conservation – 4,295Ha/11.3%

2.49 A number of priorities have been identified for flora and fauna conservation on the Island through bio-diversity action plans. These include the following:

- Farmland;
- Lowland heathland, lowland meadows, lowland wood pasture and parkland, lowland calcareous grasslands, lowland dry acid grassland;
- Red squirrels;
- Woodland bats, including Bechstein and Barbastelle species;
- Freshwater systems and wetlands;
- Woodlands;
- Maritime cliffs and slopes, coastal salt marsh, coastal sand dunes, coastal and floodplain grazing marsh, saline lagoons, Sea grass beds, mudflats and Solent Coastal Habitat.

2.50 The Island is home to at least 72 national BAP priority species. These include Dormouse, Bechstein's Bat, Grey Partridge, Skylark, Starlet Sea Anemone and Early Gentian. Several hundred additional species are classified as nationally scarce or rare, including butterflies such as the Chalkhill Blue and Small Pearl-bordered Fritillary, freshwater fish such as Bullhead and Brook Lamprey, wild flowers such as Chamomile, Burnt Orchid and Eel-grass, and birds such as Barn Owl and Nightingale. An extra 457 species which are locally distinctive have been identified by local experts and enthusiasts. Collectively, they represent a suite of species requiring conservation action which can be protected from the adverse effects of development through appropriate planning policies. The Island has several zones of Grade 2 agricultural land, notably around Arreton and Atherfield. The highest proportion of agricultural land is Grade 3 which is valuable for a wide range of agricultural uses.

- 2.51 The Isle of Wight Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) was designated in 1963. The total area designated was approximately 189 square kilometres, about half of the total area of the Island. The AONB is not continuous and is made up of five parcels of land across the Island.
- 2.52 Two of the largest catchments on the Isle of Wight are Eastern Yar and Medina, both flowing north - other important catchments include the Western Yar, Newtown Creek and Monktonmead Brook. Almost the whole of the southern half of the Island is located over a major aquifer. Three quarters of public water supply is derived from groundwater, accounting for 86% of all groundwater abstraction. The remaining supply is provided by pipeline from the mainland. There are also a large number of groundwater abstractions for irrigation of arable land, especially in the south of the Island. Some of the rivers on the Island, particularly the Eastern Yar are classified by the Environment Agency as being over-abstracted.
- 2.53 Regular sampling shows that the surface water quality is generally of average quality with some stretches of water showing poor overall quality. Intensive horticulture and mixed farming practices have resulted in elevated pesticide concentrations and silting in the Eastern Yar catchment. Water abstraction and low river flows can exacerbate these problems.
- 2.54 Ground water quality is generally good, however nitrate concentrations are rising and pesticide concentrations are elevated above background concentrations across much of the chalk aquifer.
- 2.55 Water resources on the Isle of Wight do not allow for self-sufficiency, due to limited groundwater yields, low flows in the Island's rivers and population increases during the summer due to tourism. This issue could be exacerbated by the predicted effects of climate change such as shorter aquifer recharge periods and drier summers. There is the potential for further reductions in water supply arising from the need to ensure continued river flows into and through internationally protected habitats along river corridors and estuaries.
- 2.56 Many areas of the Island are at flood risk from threat of the sea levels in coastal areas and increased intensity of rainfall events on many of the river catchments. Areas at risk of flooding include parts of Cowes, Newport, Gurnard, Bembridge, Ryde, Carisbrooke and settlements along the Eastern Yar Valley.
- 2.57 The Island has a wide variety of rock types and landforms within a relatively small area. The vegetation and land use is greatly influenced by the underlying geology. A key feature of the geology is the chalk ridge running from the Needles in the west to

the Culver Cliff in the east. The Island's unique geology includes the coloured cliffs of Alum Bay, created by minerals in the sand, the chalk stacks and caves, the chines and Undercliff. There is a great diversity in the Island's geology.

- 2.58 Climate change may increase risks to the Island of higher rates of erosion, associated higher sea levels and an increase in the number of storm events, as well as greater slope instability due to increased rainfall and erosion (e.g. erosion at the base of cliffs), and flooding of low-lying land particularly in coastal areas. Climate change is also likely to affect bio-diversity and habitats on a local, national, and international scale.
- 2.59 With thousands of visitors and local residents visiting the 60 miles of beautiful beaches on the Island, cleanliness and quality is an important issue. In 2004 all of the Islands 13 beaches met the most stringent standards. All beaches on the Island are Seaside Award winners. Seaside Awards are dependant on good water quality and management of the beaches. Beaches at Ryde, Sandown and Shanklin are also Blue Flag award winners. The Blue Flag requirements also include having a lifeguard at the beach.
- 2.60 No Air Quality Management Areas (AQMA) have been declared on the Island which means that air quality is generally good across the Isle of Wight. However there is a potential for exceeding some national air quality targets (from vehicle emissions and fuel storage) if traffic and ferry movements increase in the future.
- 2.61 The Island's historic environment resource is one of the most varied and important in England and attracts visitors from around the world. There are 119 scheduled monuments, and a total of 1,910 listed buildings, 31 of which are Grade I listed. The Sites and Monuments Record contains c11,000 sites, including archaeological sites & monuments, historic buildings and marine sites, most of which are undesignated. There are 8 English Heritage Registered Parks and Gardens.

Environment Strengths

- A unique and beautiful Island. The natural environment is one of the key attractions for visitors to the Island
- A rich historic environment
- The Island has a complex geology within a small land area and is considered to be of outstanding geological and earth science significance
- 13 award winning beaches

- A wealth of important flora and fauna

Environment Weaknesses

- Risks from climate change and sea level rise may lead to increased erosion, landslip and flooding and an increase in the area of undevelopable land.
- Population increases and the increasing numbers of visitors to the Island could place considerable strain on the landscape and biodiversity of the Island if not properly managed;
- Increases in the levels of car usage has led to an rise in nitrogen and CO₂ levels
- Water shortages especially during the summer months.