

2 A PLAN FOR THE FUTURE

Introduction

2.1 Most residents regard the Isle of Wight as a special place. Whether born here, or a migrant from the mainland, the way of life, the unspoilt towns and villages, the beautiful countryside and the people, all go to make the Isle of Wight unique. The desire to live on the Island is, in large part, a reflection of these inherent attractions. Above all though, the Island is simply home to many people and they have no desire to leave. The Island's character is jealously guarded by its population, and it is essential that future growth does not destroy the very qualities which make it so special.

2.2 Growth and development however, are essential if the Island is to resolve some of the problems caused by its severance. As an Island, the county is disadvantaged economically and suffers from relatively high unemployment and low levels of investment. This is in part due to high cross-Solent transport costs and more difficult access, which creates a disincentive for companies to locate here. With a high reliance on tourism, the Island is, in common with many UK resort areas, also fighting to revitalise this sector of the economy.

2.3 In order to allow for necessary growth in the economy and to provide for housing and facilities for the growing population, the plan needs to make sufficient land allocations and contain appropriate policies for

necessary development to occur quickly and effectively. The plan sees a long-term future for the Island in which the opportunities and lifestyle of existing and future residents are improved, while the quality of the environment is maintained and enhanced.

2.4 Although over the plan period we will require development to provide new jobs and housing, it is considered that this can be absorbed on the Island quite satisfactorily without compromising the environment. Appropriate development is essential if the Island is to prosper, but if properly planned and at the right scale, it need not adversely affect the Island's overall qualities. Achieving the right balance between encouraging necessary and appropriate development and protecting the Island's environment over the long-term is the key issue being addressed by the plan.

2.5 Full employment, a vibrant economy, sufficient housing, efficient services and transportation systems, easily available leisure and sports facilities, good access to the mainland and an overall sense of community, should not be regarded as over-ambitious aims and, given the right circumstances, are considered achievable within the plan's time scale. While the plan cannot provide the means for achieving these objectives, it will be the framework which will guide other initiatives, whether these are private or public-sector led.

Rural Regeneration Strategy

Since 1984, the whole of the Isle of Wight has been designated as a Rural Development Area (RDA). The Rural Development Commission has established the Rural Development Programme (RDP) process as a strategic approach to the economic and social problems of the area through a co-ordinated programme of action. An integrated approach to development is encouraged, involving all sectors of the rural community where strategies are proactive programmes of action, not a loose collection of projects. Partnerships with both public and private bodies and a new approach to regional and local level working are essential to the RDP process and form the core of the RDA management structure.

There are a number of principles which underlie the strategy. These are:

- 1 To achieve a unity of vision for the Island's rural areas that integrates their economic, social and environmental characteristics;
- 1 To promote community involvement and ownership of the strategy and projects;
- 1 To promote greater access to resources by rural people, especially those who are disadvantaged;
- 1 To justify each project in terms of its economic, social and environmental sustainability;
- 1 To promote individual and community health and well being, as well as environmental quality;
- 1 To build on strengths and try to resolve weaknesses, promoting the Isle of Wight economy, society and environment to their best advantage.

2.6 Above all, the plan should provide the community with a guarantee that the essential qualities which make the Island so special are not destroyed. Necessary and desirable growth will be encouraged and provided for, but only in appropriate locations. Excessive or undesirable development will not be permitted. The environment of the Island will be protected for its own sake and for the benefit of present and future generations.

The Island Context

2.7 The preparation of the Unitary Development Plan has taken account of the current issues facing the Isle of Wight and the following is a brief summary. More detailed information can be found in the background papers listed in Appendix K.

Population Change

2.8 The population of the Isle of Wight has grown steadily since the Second World War. Information from the census of population shows a rate of growth between 1981 and 1991 of 7.5%, which is the equivalent of about 900 people per annum. The 1995 mid-year estimate produced by the Office of National Statistics (ONS) gives a figure of 125,111 people living on the Island. ONS also project population into the future and estimate that by mid-year at the end of

the plan period (2011), the population of the Isle of Wight will have risen to 129,900.

2.9 The Island has an ageing demographic structure, with a high proportion of elderly and retired people. Figures from ONS suggest that at mid-year 1995, 29% of the population was 60 or over. Those aged 16 or under are predicted to make up about 19% of the Island's population throughout the plan period.

Migration

2.10 Population projections are dependent on a range of assumptions. One of the most important of these assumptions and one of the most difficult to predict accurately is migration. Deaths constantly exceed births on the Island and this would lead to a declining population if there was not net immigration. Migration to the Isle of Wight is traditionally high, but as it is very dependent on the state of the national economy, it is liable to wide fluctuations. The 1995 net migration figure was 957, the highest since 1989, possibly indicating a degree of economic recovery.

2.11 Migration both in and out of the Isle of Wight is dominated by the younger age groups and there is normally a net loss of 15-29 year olds. Young people tend to leave the Island for higher education and job opportunities and many do not return. The

Island lacks the range of high quality jobs necessary to attract its young people back from the mainland. In middle and older age groups the Island gains population, another factor which contributes to the elderly population structure.

2.12 The high reliance on net migration for population growth means that forecasting change is more difficult than in other areas of the country. It also means that much of the increase in population is from already formed households who come to the Island needing accommodation.

Households

2.13 At the time of the 1991 Census, there were 51,253 private households on the Isle of Wight. The 1992-based Department of the Environment household projections (published in March 1995) suggest that the number of households on the Island is set to increase by 11.5% (6000), from 52000 in 1992 to 58000 in 2011. The housing needs survey has also identified a large number of hidden households in the population.

Mobility of the Population

2.14 The population of the Island has to rely largely on the Island itself to provide jobs, homes and services. There is relatively little commuting to and from the Island and neighbouring areas cannot provide opportunities in the same way as on the mainland. A shortage of job opportunities can have a severe effect on population flows with people leaving to find work on the mainland. Migration to the Island may still continue under these circumstances, but this is more likely to be retirement migration. The fact that average wage rates are much lower than most of the rest of the United Kingdom can also work as a push factor in encouraging out-migration.

Severance

2.15 Although the Isle of Wight is regarded as part of the relatively prosperous South East, it is physically and economically separated from the rest of the region. Although the ferry crossings are fairly short they are among the most expensive in the UK, and studies have demonstrated that this has a negative impact on the socio-economic development of the Island. The cross-Solent ferry services provide almost the sole means of transport for passengers, cars, coaches

and commercial vehicles to and from the Isle of Wight. Supplies and materials for agriculture, manufacturing and services have to be transported to the Island at considerable cost and the situation is the same for exports. As well as being costly, the time involved is disruptive to business and tourist demand in peak months disrupts business travel as the ferries are often full.

2.16 The cost of travel may also act as a disincentive to the day/short break visitor market. However, conversely, severance may also be a key factor in the existence of the tourist trade. It is the reason why the Island has not suffered some of the pressures and over-development experienced on the mainland.

Investment and Infrastructure

2.17 One of the major problems for the economy of the Isle of Wight is the lack of investment. There have been no new hotels built since the Second World War, industrial development has generally had to be subsidised by the public sector and the level of population has been too low for the provision of some services and facilities. The costs of maintaining the large infrastructure of the Island on limited budgets can lead to an air of neglect. This can have an impact on the Island's image, which in turn, can affect investment and tourism.

2.18 In recent years however, there has been some considerable investment in shopping facilities, with several of the big multiples developing on the Island - for example Marks and Spencers, British Home Stores and Currys. Recent investment has been concentrated in Newport, with a corresponding decline of some of the traditional High Street shopping areas in other towns. There has been considerable upgrading of tourism facilities, particularly holiday centres and attractions.

Investment for Development

2.19 Major growth in the Island's economy is more likely to take place with some form of direct intervention from the Government or Europe. In 1993 the Island was awarded Intermediate Area Status by the Government. This allows for a certain level of grant aid to help in funding the development of plant or buildings by employers. Application for Objective 2 European Funding was however rejected in 1994. The Island remains a Rural

Development Area, with opportunities for grant funding of social and economic projects, despite the area being reduced in size from 1994. It is hoped that the Island may qualify for EU Structural Funding when the current regime is reviewed in 1999. The plan makes provision for the rates of growth which will be necessary for the effective regeneration of the Island economy. The planning framework has to take into account the possibility of outside assistance leading to increased development pressure and what can be considered a sustainable level of growth.

Economic Structure

2.20 Data from the 1993 Census of Employment (a large-scale postal questionnaire of employers), shows that the Island's economy continues to be primarily supported by the service industry, with almost 50% of employment concentrated in this sector. Distribution, hotels and restaurants employ a further 30%, with 16% employed in the manufacturing industry. The service sector includes education, health and public administration as well as financial, recreational and cultural activities. Manufacturing, which accounts for 16% of the workforce, shows an overall decline in employment as it has traditionally been dependent on the shipbuilding and repair industries which have been suffering badly from the effects of the recession.

Tourism

2.21 Tourism is a major industry on the Island and a significant employer. In 1993 the tourism industry employed more than 7000 people directly or indirectly in hotels, guest houses, holiday camps, catering, entertainment, recreation and leisure. In the past, tourism on the Island has suffered from a relatively short season with a high level of seasonal, low-paid employment. Despite recent investment by some sectors, there remains a need to substantially increase investment in new facilities, including infrastructure, and to improve training. There is a lack of top quality accommodation throughout the Island, which has to compete with other mainland resorts for its share of the market. At the same time, considerable strains can be put on the Island's infrastructure at peak times. The tourism industry only operates at full capacity over a limited season and the cost of travelling to the Island is a major hindrance in developing the

key business conference market (which could sustain hotel trade through the winter months). In terms of specific activities, yachting plays an important part in tourism throughout the Island, but in particular for the Cowes area, during Cowes Week.

Countryside, Environment and Agenda 21

2.22 Environmental issues were placed firmly on the international agenda in 1992 when the Earth Summit was held in Rio de Janeiro. This addressed many of the key issues involved in balancing development needs with the care and protection of the environment. The summit agreed to Agenda 21, which is an attempt to specify what actions will be needed to reconcile development with environmental concerns. Agenda 21 should guide and drive action towards sustainable development for years to come and gives political commitment to realistic goals for integrating environmental concerns into a broad range of activities, including agriculture, land-use and water resources. White Papers produced by the government have committed them to action and many new initiatives have been suggested aimed at maintaining a prosperous rural economy and a thriving countryside.

2.23 The Island's environment and countryside is a key resource which must be protected and enhanced. The countryside is changing - new farming practices have altered the look of the countryside and it is also becoming an increasingly well-utilised resource with the growth of public recreation and access. Increasing levels of car ownership have brought the countryside within easy reach of most people, for informal types of recreation as well as active sports. At the same time the need for effective nature conservation has led to a framework of international, national and local designations to protect the environment.

2.24 As diverse economies and thriving communities can help to protect and improve the countryside, a balance needs to be struck between conservation and growth. It is important to resolve conflicts between pressure for development, tourism and recreation and the protection of what is best in our countryside.

Starting the Plan Process

2.25 In preparing up the Unitary Development Plan, the Council have taken

into account a number of key factors about the past and future development of the Island. These key factors are:

- o that previous Development Plans have attempted to provide an appropriate balance between development and conservation of the environment.
- o that the plan must make appropriate provision for the needs of the population, both now and in the future.
- o that there is a strong desire amongst Islanders, not only to improve employment opportunities, infrastructure and services on the Island, but also to maintain and improve the Island's environment and quality of life.
- o that future development should be considered on the basis of its impact on the Island Community as a whole, and should be sustainable.
- o that no fixed link will be established with the mainland over the plan period. It is considered that any such scheme will require a fundamental reassessment of the aims and objectives of this plan.

Sustainable Development

2.26 It has traditionally been the view that environmental protection and economic growth are incompatible and that one can only be achieved to the detriment of the other. The principles of sustainability challenge this view however, suggesting that through sustainable development, the two goals can both be achieved. In fact development can lead to conditions under which effective protection and enhancement of the environment is more likely to occur.

2.27 The concept of sustainability is now well established, and underpins not only the planning system, but also a wide range of new Government policies as well. Planning Policy Guidance notes (PPGs), sanction and encourage authorities to promote sustainability through the planning system. PPG1 states:

A key role of the planning system is to enable the provision of homes and buildings, investment and jobs in a way which is consistent with the principles of sustainable development.

2.28 This plan aims to provide a framework to encourage and guide development on the Island and to protect and enhance the environment. It embodies the objectives of sustainability and indicates the means by which it can be achieved. It is considered that the Island represents a good example of where the sustainability concept can be properly tested. This will involve not only considering the impacts both positive and negative, of new development, but also determining the overall level of growth which is necessary and desirable. This approach will involve assisting and prioritising planned and desirable development while at the same time, clearly indicating the type, location and scale of development which is undesirable and should not be permitted.

2.29 An example of sustainability principles as they affect the role and function of local authorities is found in the statement on behalf of the UK Local Government to the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED). The measures which local authorities consider should be addressed under the headings of Planning and Land Use are listed as follows:

- o to ensure no long term decline in non-renewable, natural and cultural resources;
- o to establish land-use zoning that does not increase the distance people have to travel between home, work and other amenities;
- o to fully integrate land-use and transportation infrastructure into the planning process;
- o to regenerate and manage town centres;
- o to integrate pollution and energy factors into the statutory planning process;
- o to ensure that adequate green space is provided in urban areas to improve ecological and landscape balances;
- o to re-use or rehabilitate derelict and degraded land;
- o to ensure that all major development proposals are subject to rigorous environmental assessment.

Strategy Statement and Aims

2.30 The overall concept of the plan is summed up by the following strategy statement:

The Council will seek to achieve, through appropriate planning policies and sustainable development, a viable and balanced population with better employment opportunities, improved services and a higher standard of living, while maintaining and enhancing the special qualities of the Island environment. This statement is developed in eight general aims, not in any order of priority, which explain the broad philosophy of the plan.

A To provide a framework and guidance for the future development of the Isle of Wight that is both sustainable and to the overall benefit of the population.

2.31 The Unitary Development Plan (UDP), is one of a series of documents being produced by various bodies to address the future development of the Island. The timescale of the plan and its statutory nature, however, make it the key document in determining a long-term strategy for development. As such, it is essential that any strategies produced by other bodies accord with the overall aims of the UDP. New development on the Island should not unduly prejudice opportunities for the future and should be approved only where on balance, it benefits the population. While this may be open to interpretation, the overall test should be whether or not the collective benefit of the Island is enhanced by a development.

Development in accordance with the provisions of the approved development plan will, in most cases, satisfy this test.

B To improve the economic and social viability of Island Communities by making sufficient provision for necessary development.

2.32 Development is necessary and desirable if the living standards of the population are to be maintained and improved. The plan makes provision for a level of development which can be sustained and which it is hoped will assist regeneration. Development will be directed towards existing communities where facilities can be shared and the benefits of investment felt by the largest number of people.

C To encourage and provide improved opportunities for the creation of new employment and, in particular, to safeguard and enhance the operations of existing firms.

2.33 The Island has a serious unemployment problem and needs to encourage the development of new businesses and employment. It is considered that one of the best ways to do this is to help existing Island firms to expand or to encourage the establishment of new firms by local entrepreneurs. The plan includes specific policies to help local businesses in this way. The Council considers that, in total, sufficient land has in the past been allocated for future industrial development needs, but suggests that further allocations will help to provide additional choice and opportunity. Attracting new firms to the Island has proved

difficult and there has been only limited recent success. Nevertheless, the benefits of an employer relocating to the Island would be substantial and the Council considers that efforts to encourage relocation should continue through a wide variety of measures, policies and assistance. The plan makes special provision for a new major employer to relocate to the Island, as well as identifying a range of development sites.

D To recognise the distinctive natural and cultural environment and lifestyle of the Island and to ensure that development does not adversely affect these attributes.

2.34 The Island has a character and environment which most people like and want to be maintained. The plan proposes that new development which might adversely affect these features should be resisted unless there are exceptional reasons why it should be allowed.

E To provide an adequate supply of land for housing for the needs of the population both now and in the future.

2.35 Housing is a basic human right. Enough housing must be provided for the needs of our existing population and for future growth. Allocations in the plan and opportunities for redevelopment will make available sufficient land to meet likely housing needs over the plan period. Measures are proposed to help provide housing that is both affordable and accessible.

F To ensure the protection and enhancement of the Island's countryside and coast.

2.36 There is great pressure on the countryside and coast, not only from development, but also from recreation and leisure uses. The pressure has increased as farmers have diversified their operations into non-farming uses. Some changes in the countryside are not only unavoidable, but also may, in themselves, be desirable. The countryside is, however, such an important asset to the Island that its continued protection is vital. The plan maintains the strict control over development in the countryside that has evolved from previous plans, it is conscious of the need to ensure rural areas and their communities remain viable.

G To make the best use of land and other resources of the countryside in a sustainable way, without unduly compromising the environment.

2.37 The policies in this plan will help to ensure that, when development does take place, it is directed towards the most appropriate locations and that it is designed to have the minimum detrimental impact on the environment. In every case, the benefits of development will be considered and balanced against the possible adverse impact on the Island's environmental, social and economic fabric.

H To encourage the efficient movement of people and goods by the most effective use of the existing transportation network and the promotion of alternative methods of transport.

2.38 Like most areas, the Island has come under increasing pressure in recent years from dramatic growth in car usage. Given the rural nature of much of the Island and the relatively low levels of public transport provision, it is likely that reliance on the car will continue. Current Government advice and the policies in this plan will, however, attempt to reduce this dependence on private vehicles. Major additions and improvements to the road network could be environmentally unacceptable and counter-productive, and consideration will be given to encouraging the use of alternative methods of transport.

An Island Overview

2.39 The Isle of Wight has its own identity, character and clearly defined boundaries. The Island can be likened to a jigsaw where each piece represents a different facet of Island life. The major elements would be represented by large pieces but each of these in turn would be made up of smaller component parts. Overall the number of elements and issues leads to a highly complex puzzle where each piece is important in building up the complete picture.

2.40 The future of the Island is partly in the hands of influences beyond its shores but the planning process is intended to provide a framework capable of attracting beneficial investment whether this is for employment, tourism, education or culture, whilst resisting influences which would harm the valued historic and natural features and character of

the Island's heritage.

2.41 The Island cannot be considered in isolation from mainland England and the ferries provide the lifeline for goods, services and visitors. Improvements to the ferry services, in terms of cost, time, frequency and comfort, are encouraged and welcomed and the need to ensure efficient connections and transport interchange facilities both on the Island and mainland is recognised. The current level of ferry service, where vehicular traffic now has fast connections to the motorway network, and central London is only two hours away for passengers using high speed ferries and trains, means that the Island is in a good position to participate fully as part of the South East region.

2.42 Most development is directed to the existing main centres of population to maximise the benefits of existing services and infrastructure and reduce the need to travel, but the special needs of the rural economy are also addressed. The diversification of rural businesses and the reuse of agricultural buildings for business purposes to support farms are allowed as exceptions to general policies of constraint in the countryside. The countryside is an asset for many aspects of the Island's tourism industry, as well as being important in its own right, so the protection and enhancement of the character and features of rural areas are vitally important.

2.43 In simple terms, the Island can be divided into three broad regions. The Ryde, Cowes, Newport area has been the main location for residential and commercial development on the Island. The area has an important function in the provision of jobs, houses and communication links with the mainland and has the greatest concentration of services, infrastructure and facilities.

2.44 The south east coastal resorts stretching from Ventnor to Sandown have a character largely based on the influences of tourism. The area attracts large numbers of visitors, particularly during the summer months, and much of the employment and the services located there rely heavily upon the holiday trade.

2.45 The rest of the Island, and by far the greatest land area, is characterised by open countryside punctuated with small villages and the quieter settlements of Freshwater, Yarmouth and Bembridge. Agriculture, rural

tourism and small-scale enterprises are the important economic activities.

2.46 The plan identifies a number of issues, proposals and long-term schemes which may impact upon these areas. A more detailed assessment is provided in Appendix J. Each of the Island's settlements has its own distinct character arising from its history and modern function. Central Newport retains its medieval street pattern and market town character, while the surrounding town provides a range of residential accommodation and modern industrial and trading estates. Cowes and East Cowes grew around heavier industries and shipbuilding associated with the harbour and more recently as a ferry port.

2.47 The heavy industry is now replaced with modern high-tech industries and a highly skilled workforce based, for example, on composite materials and electronics. Ryde originally grew as a seaside resort and gateway to the Island as a result of the pier, acting with the ferry service, as an extension of the mainland railway network. It still fulfills both functions today with the additional attraction of a seafront leisure harbour. Sandown, Lake, Shanklin and Ventnor also grew as coastal resorts with the rail connection.

2.48 The greatest pressure for development and investment appears to be directed towards Newport which is naturally attractive due to its role as the Island's capital and administrative centre and because of its central location. The existing vibrant shopping streets in Newport have taken the role as the Island's main retail centre and continue to attract further retailing investment. This needs to be located where it will not harm the existing town centre as a whole, or other retail centres around the Island. The other main towns are expected to continue to meet their locally generated needs for shopping, acting as district centres, and may realistically see a contraction of their existing core areas. Each town should have its own town centre management plan setting out how the centre functions, whilst respecting the unique requirements of each in terms of access, circulation, parking, use of materials and townscape.

2.49 Land for job creation is allocated throughout the Island, and each of the main settlements offers serviced sites available for new development. The Council have carried

out advance highway improvements to assist the development of some of these sites and work closely with the Rural Development Commission in providing new employment opportunities. In addition the main Island manufacturing firms hold land for expansion.

2.50 The Island has long had a good reputation for seaside holidays and is well placed to continue to provide these and extend the holiday choice into activity holidays which are growing in popularity, either as a main holiday or short break. The extensive network of footpaths, bridleways and country lanes laced through the countryside, where half the Island is recognised as Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty, are proving to be an asset and attraction for green tourism. The proposals to realise the potential for increasing public rights of way and access through the countryside by extending the use of former railway lines will be of benefit to Island residents and visitors alike.

2.51 The Island's coastline and inshore waters provide the ideal location for many forms of water sport. The annual Round the

Island yacht race is one of the biggest participatory sporting events in the country. Building on the foundation of the historic Cowes Week regatta, new and exciting international sailing and powerboat events are being attracted and shoreside facilities being upgraded to meet modern expectations. Modern water sports (such as windsurfing), are continuing to grow in popularity, and are discovering the benefits of the Island as a venue for international competition. The coastal waters and estuaries around the Island are an asset for sport, recreation and tourism as well as nature conservation, and sensitive use and management are required to promote and allow all interests and activities to work together for their mutual benefit.

Environmental Appraisal (See Appendix I)

The local authority is legally required to consider the environmental impact of its policies and proposals contained within the UDP. Government guidance along with accompanying good practice guides suggests that each policy should be considered against a range of environmental criteria to assess its potential impact from a global through to a local scale.

This will enable the authority to assess the sustainability of the plan and ensure development takes place so that impact on the environment is minimal. The process will be particularly beneficial in assessing options for development by appraising the comparative impacts of potentially competing uses and/or sites.

The appraisal should not be viewed as a "one off" evaluation, rather as an ongoing process of testing and monitoring to ensure changes or future aspirations can be logically assessed in environmental terms.

