



The purposes of this report are to provide a record of the Town Council's plans for the future of the Coastal Centre as a stimulant for the town's economy and a centre for community and the discussions with the Isle of Wight Council (IoWC) that made it impossible.

Documents referred to in the report can be accessed by clicking the highlighted links.

No.	DETAIL
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1)	COASTAL CENTRE
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| 1) | COASTAL CENTRE |
| a) | Since its building in the early 1870s by Ingrams the Coastal Centre has been part of Ventnor's skyline and served the town in a wide variety of ways: as a Sanatorium, a Boarding School, Ventnor College, Ventnor Collegiate School, Salisbury Gardens Private Hotel, Ventnor Council offices, South Wight Borough Council Offices and Isle of Wight Council Offices. |
| b) | Now it hosts just four members of the IoWC's Coastal Management Team occupying only three of its 32 rooms with another three being used by Ventnor Town Council as its offices since February 2011. |
| c) | Internally the building shows signs of neglect with some damp in the lower ground floor, unheated stairwells and poor decoration among other things. |
| d) | It is listed by IoWC as surplus to its requirements and in the potential disposals list for the next financial year 2012/13. It is likely that any potential purchaser would be planning to demolish the building and replace it with more flats to capitalise on its unique situation and views. |

2)	CONCEPT
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| 2) | CONCEPT |
| a) | The Town Council began considering an alternative future for this iconic building in February as part of its response to the high levels of deprivation within the town highlighted by the Index of Multiple Deprivation 2010 and the local Joint Strategic Needs Assessment 2011. |
| b) | These revealed that the town's central area was among the five most deprived areas on the Island. In responding, the Town Council has been clear that a stimulus to its flagging economy is essential for regeneration to take hold. |
| c) | One of the ways in which other towns with similar deprivation have responded to it has been the provision of facilities for start-up businesses; so why not here? |
| d) | The possibility of developing the Coastal Centre into an Enterprise Hub grew with investigation and came to include two other positives: the inclusion of high quality community facilities in its lower ground floor rooms and extending the building's life as one of the major new facilities alongside the Winter Gardens and the Botanic Gardens. |
| e) | Clearly, the Coastal Centre needed refurbishment and the addition of other features to make this vision a reality, at a significant cost. |

3)	FUNDING
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| 3) | FUNDING |
| a) | It was during the early discussions of this concept that the government's Coastal Communities Fund was launched with a deadline for Stage 1 applications of 27 April. A Stage 1 application was submitted by the deadline for a total of £70,000. |
| b) | The application was approved in a letter from the funders with an invitation to complete the Stage 2 application. |
| e) | With the more detailed investigation of the building's potential it became clear both that there would be an ideal space for an enhanced community facility and that additional funding would be required to meet the full costs. |

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- f) After an initial contact with the Island-based *natural enterprise*, administrators of Leader Funding, an [Expression of Interest](#) was entered for a total of £33,500. This too was accepted, with an [invitation to submit a full application](#).⁹⁹
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4) BUSINESS PLAN

- a) By the end of July [a draft Business Plan](#) had been prepared and was discussed by the Town Councillors at an informal meeting on 6 August.
- b) The original proposal was based on the proposal to purchase the Coastal Centre with funds from the Public Works Loan Board, failing a preferred agreement to match the £1 purchase agreed for the Winter Gardens and Botanic Gardens and subject to the level of the asking price.
- c) The IoWC's Deputy Leader George Brown made it clear via an email to Councillor Susan Scoccia that no purchase would be considered at this time.
- d) Consequently the Business Plan was adjusted to the basis of a 6-year lease, the minimum requirement of the funding bodies.
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5) PARTNERS

- a) The Business Plan was shared with the major potential partners together with an invitation to each of them to visit the Coastal Centre and discuss the project in more detail.
- b) All of them expressed strong support for the project. Five of them – Job Centre Plus, Southern Housing Group, the Isle of Wight College, the Isle of Wight Council's Adult & Community Learning Service and the Chair of the Island's Employment & Skills Board – provided [written support](#) and the Chamber of Commerce confirmed that they were very willing to do so.
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6) ISLE OF WIGHT COUNCIL

- a) A dateline [summary of events](#) in the discussions with IoWC about releasing the building to the Town Council covers the period from 25 May to 17 September.
- b) Ventnor Town Council had formally expressed its interest in taking over the building to IoWC by [letter to Barry Cook](#), its Strategic Manager Assets, dated 25 May 2012, to which no written response was received.
- c) Two weeks later, the Big Fund letter was received by the Town Council stating that the Stage 1 application had been approved and that the deadline for the final Stage 2 application was 21 September 2012.
- d) When informal discussions with IoWC Officers and through Councillors Susan Scoccia and Chris Welsford failed to establish a basis for substantive negotiations, [the Mayor emailed](#) Council Leader David Pugh and Deputy Leader George Brown on 27 July with a request for an urgent meeting to discuss the proposals formally.
- e) George Brown replied the same day to apologise that he would be off the Island for the whole of August and that David Pugh would progress the matter.
- f) After three weeks of waiting for the promised response from David Pugh, including phone calls and emails to him from the Mayor seeking a date to meet, the Mayor contacted Andrew Turner MP on 20 August to ask for his assistance in securing a meeting as the deadline for both funding streams was now only a month away.
- g) The meeting never did take place. David Pugh emailed the Mayor on 22 August stating: *whilst I note your efforts to secure funding to invest in the building, I have to advise you ... that we are not minded to make it available.*
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- h) On the same day, the Town Clerk emailed IoWC's Chief Executive Steve Beynon requesting his intervention in the hope of still meeting the funding deadline and preventing any deterioration in the otherwise very good relationships that had been established between the officers of the two Councils.
 - i) Steve Beynon responded almost immediately with the offer of a meeting involving him and the Director of Economy and Environment Stuart Love with the Town Clerks.
 - j) The meeting took place on 6 September with the outcome being a commitment to have the Business Plan looked at in detail before raising the matter with the Leader of the Council at their weekly business meeting on 12 September.
 - k) On 17 September an email from Steve Beynon informed the Town Council of the outcome: *I am now able to give you the council's position on the coastal centre. The current economic context does determine that we remove as many of our unwanted buildings from the council's asset list through disposal. After reconsidering the coastal centre in Ventnor this decision stands and we will move to place it on the market ASAP.*
 - l) The Town Clerk informed the potential funders and partners that the project could now not continue.
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7) ISSUES

- a) A significant contribution to the town's economy and high youth unemployment (300 18-24 year olds), strongly supported by the related professional services, has been prevented.
 - b) A potential investment of over £100,000 in the building and its uses has been lost.
 - c) In its apparent determination to sell the building on the open market the IoWC is likely to deprive the town of one of its major resources with its demolition and replacement by yet more flats the most likely outcome.
 - d) The fact that the Council Leader ignored and then refused a direct request from the Mayor for a meeting to discuss the proposals directly raised serious questions about the nature of local democracy.
 - e) The decision to sell the building on the open market without consideration of its community value is contrary to the Localism Act 2011 and the Community Right to Bid it introduced.
 - f) The decision is also contrary to the stated priorities of the IoWC that list economic development as a major commitment.
 - g) The Council Leader argues that the sale is necessary due to their budget restraints; however capital receipts (the money they get from the sale) cannot be used for filling holes in the revenue budget.
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