



# VENTNOR TOWN COUNCIL

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## PROJECT PROPOSAL

## ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

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### 1) PURPOSES

- a) To collate all data relevant to the local economy, town centre trading and tourism services and develop a set of indicators for each area that will track trends over time.
- b) To facilitate and support the engagement of all key players and stakeholders in each of those areas in working with each other and the town council to stimulate sustained through sustainable and effective umbrella organisations.
- c) To act as a catalyst for shared agreement on and commitment to a Marketing Strategy reflecting the town's unique character and capable of confirmation in the visitor experience.

### 2) CONTEXT

- a) The recent publication of the *English Indices of Deprivation 2010* (IMD 2010) and the *Joint Strategic Needs Assessment 2011* (JSNA) have revealed that the town's two central Lower Level Super Output Areas are significantly deprived.
- b) The area around the town centre (LSOA Isle of Wight 018A) is identified by the JSNA as being in the most deprived 20% nationally with Upper Ventnor's Lowtherville (018C) close behind.
- c) The figures show that 33% of the children in the first of these two areas live in income deprived families with an even higher 36% of the second area.
- d) Within the Island, Ventnor's central area is the 4<sup>th</sup> most deprived of its 89 LSOAs and the Lowtherville area the 17<sup>th</sup>. This brackets them with Ryde North East, St John's West, Pan, Newport North and South, Osborne, Sandown South and St John's East; not where Ventnor has generally been seen as belonging.
- e) Both Ventnor areas, home to half the town's population, are recorded within the IMD as having become more deprived within the national rankings from 2007 to 2010, indicating that a deprivation downward spiral is active.
- f) Two other factors exacerbate this situation: the town's real and perceived geographic isolation and its exclusion from the Key Regeneration Area status in the *Island Plan* enjoyed by the areas of comparative deprivation.

### 3) REGENERATION & THE ECONOMY

- a) The significance of economic development for regeneration is recognised in the Isle of Wight Council's inclusion of Regeneration & the Economy as one of its eight key corporate objectives.
- b) That recognition is shared by Ventnor Town Council and it consequently welcomes the opportunity to invest in a related project, stimulated by the Isle of Wight Council's offer of a £12,477 contribution from its Economic Improvement Fund that with Ventnor Town Council's matching contribution provides a total of £24,954 to fund such a project.

- c) The impact of the funding will be enhanced by an extension of the Town Council's recently launched Community Engagement Strategy. In four meetings on successive Mondays between 16 January and 6 February the Town Council met with senior staff from the professional agencies working in the town (20), senior officers of the national trading organisations with local outlets (5) and representatives from local third sector organisations (90) for detailed discussions of the deprivation data and responses to it.
- d) These have already opened up an encouraging range of developments as well as providing a firm foundation of community support for moving forward.
- e) The next stage – which this project will make both productive and effective – is to engage with three aspects of the town's activity: its employment opportunities, town centre development and tourism potential.
- f) From that engagement will develop an agreed marketing strategy specifically for the town – a serious absence at present – based on full engagement with all key stakeholders in the town's economic future and agreed by them.
- g) The following four sections summarise the issues in each of these aspects.

#### 4) EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITIES

- a) The Isle of Wight Council's *Local Economic Assessment 2010* shows that only just over half (52%) of Ventnor residents in work – a total of 2,216 - are actually working in the town (table 10.6 p98) with the major work places for the others being in Newport (530), Sandown/Shanklin (266) and Ryde (123). Although the table is based on 2001 figures, there is no evidence to indicate the pattern has changed significantly.
- b) The distribution of Ventnor-based employment is shown by the same publication (Figure A7), using 2008 data for numbers of people in each sector, to be:

Primary industries	10	Hotels & restaurants	561	Public Admin.	583
Manufacturing	47	Transport & Comms	83	Other Services	82
Construction	48	Banking, Finance	130	<b>Total</b>	<b>1,544</b>

- c) The *Local Economic Assessment's* Local labour market characteristics analysis (Figure 10.20, p107) registers Ventnor in the *Structural Problem* quartile – high unemployment, low job vacancies – that it shares with Ryde and the Bay.
- d) Evidence of the social consequences – and the link back to the very high percentages of children in income poverty referenced in 1c) above – is also recorded in the *Assessment* in noting (page 105) that *Ventnor has the highest concentration of children living in out-of-work households, driven largely by lone parents. Around 28 per cent of children in the area live in a household where no parent is in work, with Bay and Ryde both having a figure of around 26 per cent.*
- e) It also records that *Ventnor has the highest incidence of Incapacity Benefit Claimants [on the Island], around 10% of the working age population.*
- f) The criticality of economic development is also clearly understood by Ventnor residents. Of the 17 categories into which their 170 recorded responses were sorted following the recent engagement meetings referred to in 2c) above, Employment/Economy was the largest at 16.5% of the total.

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- g) Ventnor town council is keen to engage with the Isle of Wight Council's support programme and related funding for the establishment of new apprenticeships and have already registered that interest with the officer responsible.

## 5) TOWN CENTRE

- a) As the recent *Portas Review* has highlighted, the centre of any town is clearly crucial to its economy, providing employment opportunities in its own right, servicing and attracting residents, generating income and, in Ventnor's case particularly, supporting town's tourism business.
- b) The Isle of Wight Council's *Town Centres Health Check Study* produced by Halcrow Group Ltd in 2009 classified the 97 trading units in the Pier Street/High Street central areas:

Comparison retail	37	Leisure	17	Vacant	11
Convenience retail	12	Finance & Business	7		
Retail service	9	Miscellaneous	4	Total	97

- c) Their map of the area and retail units use categories is attached as Appendix A to this proposal.
- d) It noted the high proportion of leisure floorspace attributed to *the number of hotels, restaurants, cafes and bars that serve the tourist population* (para 5.11.1) and commented that *retailers in Ventnor are predominantly local or independent businesses*.
- e) Its SWOT analysis listed the town centre's major Weaknesses/Threats as:
- the peripheral location makes the town less accessible than other coastal locations;
  - high level of vacant units and charity shops giving the impression of a poor quality of retail provision;
  - lack of general comparison retail;
  - street cleanliness; and
  - poor public transport.
- f) Among its strengths, it included the fact that *niche marketing is well represented in the town centre and includes a diverse range of specialist shops* and well as *the town contains a strong presence of retail services including hairdressers, tattoo parlour and laundrette*.
- g) Yet the fact remains that the overall impact of the town centre environment is tired, untidy and inconvenient, bordering on the depressing. It certainly does not reflect the achievements of the town's past or the creativity of many of its current residents, including that of some of its town centre business operators.
- h) Concern about the quality and state of the Town Centre registered significantly in the community engagement meetings with recorded comments ranging from *make the town welcoming and friendly*, through *clean up the town's buildings*, *make the town centre more attractive* to *pedestrianisation in Central Ventnor*.
- i) The project will aim to identify the ownership of the town centre premises with a view to open negotiations with them about development potential and rent levels.
- j) It would clearly benefit from the Portas equivalent of a *Town Team*, yet the Ventnor Business Association has recently become defunct with only one member attending for its scheduled Annual General Meeting.

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## 6) TOURISM POTENTIAL

- a) Unsurprisingly, given its remarkable geographical features, intriguing geology, attractive micro-climate and unique bio-diversity, Ventnor has been a significant tourist destination for nearly two centuries.
- b) The influence of that is evident in every aspect of its life. The Halcrow Group study, for example, notes of the town centre that its range of goods on offer is geared towards the tourist market.
- c) The Market Towns Initiative Health Check report of 2002 recorded the presence in the town of 30 Hotel and Guest Houses, 20 Self-catering establishments and 3 camping facilities (EC5.3), and stated that the local economy is totally reliant on the tourist industry (EC 5.2).
- d) The Isle of Wight Council's Local Economic Assessment shows (Figure A7) that 561 (36%) of Ventnor's 1,544 jobs in 2008 were in Distribution, Hotels & Restaurants while also stating that Ventnor accounted for 6% of [the Island's] hotel and restaurant employment.
- e) If that 6% contribution was reflected in Ventnor's share of the income from Island tourism, then given that the government's statistics for national tourism spend show the Island getting a total of £433 million in 2008, then Ventnor's hotels and other holiday accommodation could have received a total of £5.4 million in that year with the providers of food and beverages receiving £5.9M.
- f) More recent absolute levels and, importantly, trends, of local tourism spend are not known: and need to be both established and tracked.
- g) In this area, as in that of the town centre, the umbrella group broke down some time ago. An initial meeting aimed at the formation of a new one has just been held, but building effective structures and recruiting key players will require significant external support.
- h) There is substantial potential for growth here, significantly assisted by the soon to come on line restored Winter Gardens with quality hotel accommodation attached and a revitalised Ventnor Botanic Gardens with an exciting vision for its development; in both cases, the human and financial resources necessary for delivery are in place.

## 7) MARKETING STRATEGY

- a) Amidst this plethora of problem and possibility, Ventnor's image, both of itself and in the wider arenas from which it needs to draw, has become blurred, to put it mildly.
- b) Lost somewhere among the stereotypes of Victorian Spa, 1950s beach holiday centre, cultural creativity and historic connectivity neither the town nor its actual and potential visitors can describe either its offer or its future concisely and clearly.
- c) The need for a marketing strategy is clear: equally clear is that to be effective it has emerge from detailed discussions with all the town's stakeholders and reflect the actual prospects and plans for the future of its economy, town centre and tourism.
- d) Fortunately, the Town Council has demonstrated evidentially, through its series of community engagement meetings, that not only can it engage the town's various communities but also that those communities are willing to engage with the Town Council.

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## 8) THE PROJECT

- a) Progressing the agenda described here will only be possible with thorough collection of data, detailed planning involving all stakeholders and careful co-ordination of the emerging strands and initiatives.
- b) The Town Council's role and current capability mean that it is uniquely placed to both stimulate and co-ordinate the necessary processes.
- c) But it will need an increased staff resource to deliver that potential. The Isle of Wight Council's initiative in making funding available for this area of work has provided the basis for that.
- d) The project, therefore, involves the establishment of a one-year, full-time temporary post of an Economic Development Officer for the financial year 2012/13 with a remit that will include:
  - the collection and collation of all relevant economic data in respect of employment, town centre development and tourism, at LSOA level where possible and Ward/Parish/Town level where not;
  - establishing structures for the routine interval-specific capture of that data;
  - agreeing an indicator set for each activity area that will allow the recording of trends;
  - initiating and sustaining contacts with individuals and organisations involved in the town's economic activity and arranging meetings between them as appropriate;
  - assisting in the establishment of effective and sustainable sponsor and support organisations for each of the activity areas.
- e) The staff member appointed will be line managed directly by the Town Clerk. The project will be developed and guided by an informal Work Group of the town council and the project will benefit from an Advisory Group of selected individuals from the relevant activity areas.

## 9) FUNDING

- a) The anticipated costs of the project are set out in the following table.

ITEM	COST (£)	NOTES
SALARY	21,403	JNC Scale pt 10 + ENI
RECRUITMENT	350	CP Advert + national
LAPTOP	600	Including Windows 7
WORK STATION	200	Desk and accessories
TRAVEL	520	10 miles a week at 40p per mile
STATIONERY + PRINT	300	£25 a month
TELECOMS	300	£25 a month
ROOM HIRE	300	£25 a month
ADMIN SUPPORT	520	Assistant Town Clerk, 1 hour/week
MISCELLANEOUS	480	£40 a month
TOTAL	24,973	

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- b) The project would be funded by a provision of £12,484 within the Town Council's 2012/13 Budget to match fund 50/50 the grant from the Isle of Wight Council.

## 10) OUTCOMES

- a) The preparation of a detailed job description, work plan and project milestones and outcomes will be progressed following project approval.
- b) The outcomes will include:
- a routine collection and collation regime for locally relevant data across the critical areas of employment, business, town centre development and tourism;
  - baseline statistics for each data category;
  - an agreed set of indicators supported by the data regime enabling trend monitoring;
  - engagement with the Isle of Wight Council's apprenticeship programme resulting in the placement of three new posts in the town.
  - the creation of at least 10 new jobs within the areas of the town's economy identified above;
  - identification of ownership of town centre properties and opening discussions with them;
  - sustainable sponsor and support structures for the local economy including business development, town centre improvement and tourism support;
  - a marketing strategy developed with and shared by local stakeholders; and
  - if funding becomes available, perhaps through the re-allocation of Economic Improvement Fund grants not taken up by others, a professionally developed rebranding for the Town and related corporate identity manual.



