
AN INTRODUCTION TO VENTNOR



& ITS TOWN COUNCIL



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PREAMBLE

During the last three years Ventnor Town Council has vigorously progressed a unanimously agreed agenda to address the deprivation and decline affecting the lives of half of the town's residents by building on the strengths of its communities and developing its economy through the involvement of agencies and partners.

The strategic direction set by this commitment engaged enthusiastically with the Localism Agenda and specifically with the Department for Communities and Local Government's Our Place programme.

This document provides a brief summary of the developments that have followed to date.



VENTNOR ON THE ISLE OF WIGHT

Ventnor, a town of 6,045 residents, is – and feels itself to be – isolated from the rest of the Island: it's a 7-mile, thin, coastal-edge strip between cliff edge and the highest Island Down, 10 miles from the County Town of Newport, the centre for governance, service provision and support agencies, a 75 minute, £9 return bus journey away for the many without their own transport.

Its more prestigious past and relative affluence of the two Lower Super Output Areas (LSOAs) at its western and eastern ends leads many to overlook the very significant deprivation of its two core LSOAs, home for half of its resident population.

These two areas are in the most deprived 25% nationally on the Index of Multiple Deprivation 2010. The central area (ED1017363) is ranked at 5,839 of England's 32,482 and is the 4th most deprived of the Island's 89 LSOAs and the second most deprived on the Employment domain – where it is within the 10% most deprived nationally – and on Health its 8.7% long term sick or disabled is three times the South East rate.

Its adjacent LSOA (E1017366) is ranked at 8,486 on the IMD 2010 but is within the most deprived 20% on the income, education and children in poverty domains, with 36% of its children in income deprived families: by far the highest on the Island.

Both areas have 25% of their residents in income deprivation and over 20% of their working age populations qualifying for out-of-work benefits. The central area has the highest Island concentration of children living in out-of-work households, at 28%.

As at May 2013, DWP figures showed 25.8% of its 16–24 year olds and 20.8% of its post-16 population on out-of-work benefits closely followed by its adjacent LSOA (ED1017366) at 20.6% and 19.9%

respectively. The income poverty of the central area is reflected in and reinforced by the quality and tenure of its housing stock: 73% of its 1,097 dwellings are in Council Tax Bands A & B compared to an Island average of 40% and the South East's 25%; 49% are either social or private rented, compared to 28% and 30% for the Island and the South East Region; 58% of the area's households are accommodated in flats, almost 3-times the Island, South East and England averages of around 20%; one third of the population live in multi-occupancy houses with another 15% in flats within commercial buildings. The eastern LSOA (ED1017364), covering the village of Bonchurch, ranks at 13,342 nationally and 37 on the Island's 89 listing. The western one (ED1017365) is the village of St Lawrence and ranks at 15,321 nationally and 61 on the Island; it is the only one to have more than 50% of its population over retirement age, ranking top of Ventnor's four LSOA's on this measure and contributing substantially to Ventnor's town level of 32%.

The Town's strengths are its sheltered climate, wonderful views, lovely beaches, local ecology, fascinating history, arts and crafts culture and remarkable literary connections, making it a vibrant place to live or visit, well served with restaurants, pubs, shops and hotels.

The town has a wonderfully rich and varied community life with over 70 voluntary and community organisations as well as an attractive variety among its 100 town centre shops – none of which are vacant – serving the needs from basic to niche of residents and visitors alike.

VENTNOR TOWN COUNCIL

Ventnor Town Council is a Quality Council with a full complement of 11 elected Members working as an effective team with a wide range of professional experience in business, contracting, marketing, the hospitality industry, the law, town planning, higher education, management consultancy and regeneration.

It employs a full-time Town Clerk and Assistant Town Clerk and both a Community Development Officer and Economic Development Officer. It raises a precept of £189,700 boosted by over £255k of external funding since 1 April 2013.

The Town Clerk's background includes roles as Sociology Lecturer, Chair of a large FE College and Chief Officer of a third sector organisation working in regeneration across 45

Council housing estates in one of England's most deprived local authorities delivering projects with £5M of external funding.

The Assistant Town Clerk has over 20 years in secretarial/administration posts including roles in major event organisation, sales support, diary management for Group Sales Director and PA support to Reed's Publishing Director.

In November 2011 the Town Council formally committed to a proactive agenda prompted by the challenges for the town revealed in the Index of Multiple Deprivation 2010 and the local Joint Strategic Needs Assessment 2011.

Community engagement and partnership working were understood to be central to that agenda: the foundations for both were laid in January 2012.

The town's remarkable third sector provided connections for the initial consultation meeting. An invitation from the Mayor to all 70 voluntary

organisations resulted in 85 representatives of voluntary organisations with Town Councillors and Clerks.

Following a presentation identifying the town's deprivation, table-based discussions identified priorities and produced 170 post-it note proposals for implementing them that fell into 15 clearly identifiable categories. These provided a very significant guide for the Town Council's actions since.

Particularly important was a commitment to the appointment of both a Community Development Officer and an Economic Development Officer who each took up their posts in May 2012 with briefs centred around the two clusters of the categories that covered 125 (74%) of the individual items.

The basis for the subsequent partnership working was provided by a breakfast meeting to which the Mayor invited all the agencies active in the town.

Twenty senior staff members from 15 Agencies attended: the Head Teachers of both the town's schools, the Island's Commissioning Manager for Adult & Community Learning, the Director of Public Health, the Regional Director of Southern Housing Group, Job Centre Plus's Partnership Manager, Head of the Library Service, Youth Centre Leader, the IoWC's Deputy Director Economy, Leisure & Tourism, Head of Children's Centres, Early Years Leaders, both local Surgeries and the Assistant Principal of the Isle of Wight College.

Lively networking followed the same presentation as used with the third sector organisations and the session concluded with positive commitments to partnership working that have proved highly productive and remain central to the Town Council's work.

COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

The Town Council has developed a range of engagement and capacity building processes led by its Community Development Officer supported by the Clerks and the Community Development Working Group.

ANNUAL CONSULTATION EVENT

An annual open meeting for the Town Council to consult and discuss with residents is now held each January, building on the success of the initial event in 2012.

In the January event of 2013, around 90 representatives of the town's voluntary and community organisations and others interested in contributing to present practice and future developments gathered in the Hall of the just opened new Primary School to receive reports on progress over the last year in relation to the priorities identified at the previous event.

This year's occasion, on 27 January, focused on the impact of the substantial cuts in services following the Isle of Wight Council's planned major budget cuts of the next three years with, again, table based discussions to prioritise those to be retained and establish the acceptable precept increase to fund the – a 51% increase.

VENTNOR TIMEBANK

During planning for the Community Development Officer post, Southern Housing Group committed a £5,000 grant towards the development of a Timebank for the town.

The Town Council funded the remaining costs of the project and provided the core resources to establish one: it was launched in September 2012 and currently has 125 members who have exchanged 1,150 hours in transactions including

baking and bread making partners, DIY, gardening support, CV writing, walks and Reiki. It is currently running cooking workshops and a training programme and has its own [website](#).

9-5 PROJECT

One of several specific projects made possible by Timebank is the weekly Thursday morning session of informal advice and support for local jobseekers run by a team of six Timebank volunteers at Ventnor Library. At least a dozen people found employment as a result and significant numbers now have presentable CVs and are able to access the Job Centre Plus web site for themselves.

SOCIAL MEDIA

The Town Council's use of social media is growing. Our Community Development Officer runs a popular [Facebook](#) page and the Town Clerk runs a Twitter account at [@ventnorclerk](#).

VTC PLUS

Almost 200 residents have signed up to a Town Council initiative reflecting its commitment to a form of localism that is open, networked and democratic.

Monthly emails to the list provide updates on progress and focus on proposed developments providing links to relevant background documents and the opportunity for all to respond in what is a commitment from the Mayor to an ongoing conversation, rather than simply consultation.

COMMUNITY RIGHTS

The Town Council has successfully nominated three buildings as Assets of Community Value and expressed an interest in the local management of the town's car parks under the Right to Challenge.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

The Town Council has made significant progress in understanding the economic challenges and opportunities facing the town as well as in establishing live connections with all key individuals and organisations through activity led by its Economic Development Officer.

TRADING & TOURISM

Through one-to-one interviews with almost all the town's shopkeepers and hospitality providers over a twelve month period an in-depth qualitative analysis of the strengths and weaknesses of the two major strands of the local economy is now available in a 70,000 word document with a shorter summary document setting out the major findings and recommendations.

Both analysis and recommendations benefit from wide ranging desk-based research drawing on relevant data and documentation from predictions of the future for High Street trading through developments in tourism to academic studies of the trends and issues characteristic of seaside towns.

PARTNERSHIP WORKING

Within and alongside the investigative activity has been the development of lasting relationships with relevant organisations and individuals.

The once ineffective Ventnor Business Association (VBA) is now an active body with over 70 members from both High Street and Esplanade with partnership working established through monthly meetings of the Deputy Mayor and Town Clerk with the VBA's Chair and Vice Chair. Effective working relationships have been developed with Job Centre Plus, the Chamber of Commerce, the Isle of Wight College, Adult & Community Learning and Southern Housing Group, all of whom have committed to support of our Ventnor Enterprise Centre project.

VENTNOR ENTERPRISE CENTRE

This project, the refurbishment of one of the town's historic buildings to become an economic and community hub illustrates what is possible given a Town Council's willingness to take on the challenges of a seaside town with a commitment – matched by that of its principal authority – to localism, and an investment in both community and economic development. The building – Salisbury Gardens – built in 1870 has been a hospital, a school, a college and a hotel before becoming Council offices in 1945 with over 55 staff when it transferred to the Isle of Wight Council (IoWC) in 1995.

Now surplus to that Council's requirements, the IoWC has agreed a 26-year lease with an option to renew to the Town Council.

The major works programme of £250k to restore the building, ensure its compliance with modern legal requirement and equip it fully for its new purpose was greatly assisted by a £95k grant from the Coastal Communities Fund.

By the end of November the two upper floors' 12 rooms plus toilet and kitchen on each floor will have been transformed into Ventnor Enterprise Centre for business startups and enterprises in the creative industries and office based services. Eight of those rooms have already been let.

The ground floor will become the base for Hampshire Constabulary's local Safer Neighbourhoods Team – that would otherwise have moved to a neighbouring town – and the Town Council.

The Lower Ground Floor will provide a community hub with meeting rooms, a resource space and a kitchen.

ISLE OF WIGHT COUNTY COUNCIL

The Island's Principal Authority became a County Council in 1995 and now has 40 Members representing the Island's 39 electoral Wards.

The Conservative administration in place since 2005 was replaced in the elections of May 2013 by a majority grouping of 20 Independents supported by two Labour and one Liberal Member.

The Island is fully emparished with a total of 33 Town and Parish Councils.

The new administration faces major challenges with its Children's Services managed by Hampshire County Council by Ministerial directive following the serious failures identified in inspections of the Island's Schools and Child Protection; it is also required to reduce its Budget by £28M by 2016/17.

This is predicted by the IoWC to mean that they will only be able to fund the statutory services by that time.

The new administration's response is, however, positive, based on both a determination to explore every possible opportunity to deliver its current discretionary services differently and, in particular, to work closely with Town and Parish Councils in doing so.

It both understands and is fully signed up to the Localism agenda and discussions with both individual Councils and their County Association are being vigorously progressed by its Deputy Leader.

The redevelopment of Salisbury Gardens, described above, is one specific outcome of that commitment by both Councils to partnership working.

Ventnor Town Council has a vanguard role on the Island in exploring the value of localism and its Town Clerk has shared the leadership of the Community Rights Workshop at four recent Putting Communities First Conferences organised by the National Association of Local Councils.

The Town Council is fully engaged with the Our Place programme and has qualified for both the *Going Further* and *Breaking New Ground* stages of it.

Ventnor is identified in the Island Plan as one of two Smaller Regeneration Areas and the Town Council views the Our Place! programme as a remarkable opportunity to achieve positive change through co-ordinated action by agencies, third sector organisations and the private sector expressed in an Operational Plan developed with and endorsed by the town's communities. That commitment is fully supported by the IoWC's relevant service sectors at senior officer level, several of whom have already contributed to seminars with the town's residents. It also believes that the experience gained through Ventnor's participation in the programme would contribute to the ability to deliver services more effectively and more economically across the whole Island.

Alongside these developments, following the IoWC's decision to end its Island-wide Youth Service provision, the Town Council will become responsible for the management of the town's Youth Centre from 1 October and has been granted £86k over the next 2 ½ years for an innovative extension of Youth Opportunities in the town.

Discussions are also active in the new arrangements for the beach cleaning and grounds maintenance services.



Ventnor Town Council: Structure 2014



Ventnor Town Council Staff 2014

