

# Island Planning Strategy

## Conservative Councillor Group Proposals

June 2022



Cover photo: land off Steyne Road, Bembridge, part of an allocation for 180 homes in the 2021 draft Island Planning Strategy.

*“Promoting affordable brownfield development”*

## Introduction

The Isle of Wight Council (IWC) published a draft Island Planning Strategy (IPS) in July 2021 for public consultation (“the 2021 draft”). The 2021 draft is intended to update the previous Island Plan Core Strategy 2012 which is now out of date.

The purpose of the Island Planning Strategy is to provide a strategic policy framework for the Isle of Wight, which, in turn, guides the development of local neighbourhood plans (where they are developed). Together with Neighbourhood Plans, the Island Planning Strategy forms part of a collection of policies known as the “development plan”. All planning applications will be determined in accordance with the development plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise. (Draft Island Planning Strategy, July 2021, p6.)

Following the public consultation, revisions to the 2021 draft were circulated with the papers for the Council’s Corporate Scrutiny Committee on 12th April 2022, however the Cabinet Member for Planning withdrew the revised draft and paused the process as he wanted to allow for further deliberation by the Alliance administration.

Conservative Group Leader Cllr Joe Robertson and Cllr Chris Quirk met with the Cabinet Member to set out a collective position regarding the IPS. This paper documents the proposed amendments for a greener, sustainable and more affordable plan.

### 1. Shifting emphasis from greenfield to brownfield sites

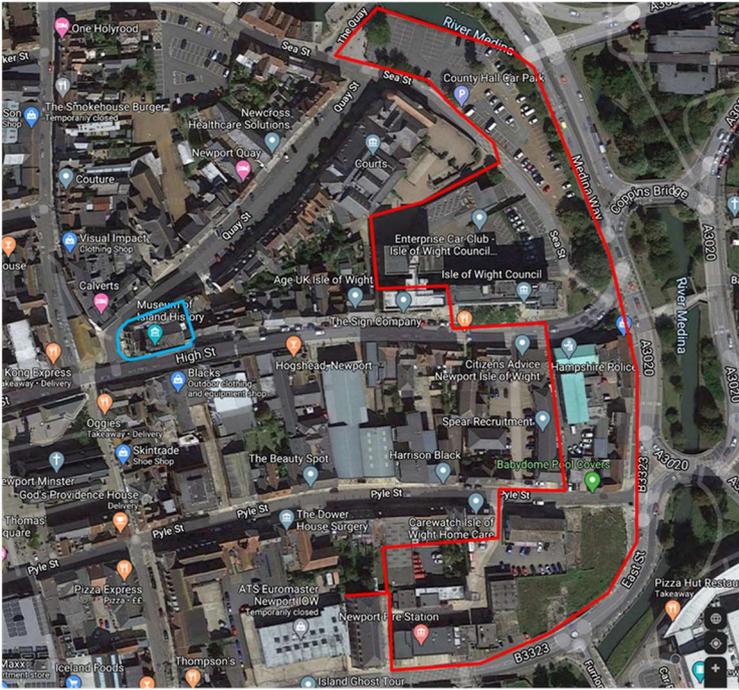
The 2021 draft proposes to reclassify certain settlements that are “rural service centres” as “secondary settlements” notwithstanding local services and amenities have reduced since the last plan in several cases (e.g. Bembridge no longer has a petrol station or bank). The 2021 draft also provides for the expansion of settlement boundaries to accommodate new development sites.

We propose to maintain the current settlement boundaries for the villages of Bembridge and Freshwater, unless or until those communities consent to proposed expansion in the 2021 draft. This would remove approximately 360 homes currently allocated for greenfield development in those villages. We have not proposed changes to the allocation for Wootton which is also set to have its boundaries expanded because Wootton:

- is better connected including regular public transport to the major towns of Newport and Ryde and the mainland;
- is closer to business and employment opportunities including the 6.2 hectare employment allocation at Kingston Marine Park; and
- has received less local opposition to appropriate development set out in the 2021 draft.

The removal of these greenfield allocations in Bembridge and Freshwater would be compensated in terms of overall housing numbers by allocating additional homes for the two key priority brownfield sites as defined in the 2021 draft, namely Camp Hill and Newport Harbour, and by creating a new third key priority site – Newport Riverside – as shown outlined in red in fig.1 below.

The additional land is currently in public ownership of several organisations including the Isle of Wight Council, Hampshire Constabulary and Homes England. The Police and Crime Commissioner has given an indication in principle that she would be prepared to see the police land released, subject to an alternative Island police HQ being secured elsewhere. The site also sits within the Solent Freeport area with the investment opportunities that should bring.



**Fig 1: proposed Newport Harbour site**

Two further comments are made in respect of development in and around Newport’s key priority sites. First, there should be no prospect of building on any part of Seaclose Park. Second, there does not necessarily need to be additional housing allocated for Camp Hill over and above that set out in the 2021 draft, if the brownfield regeneration of Newport Riverside is allocated and delivered.

***What does this mean?***

Our proposal promotes environmental protection in two large villages on the Island and delivers on the wishes of those communities. It also provides for significant urban regeneration of an area of Newport around Coppins Bridge that has not so far received the investment it needs. The proposal helps support local businesses and the High Street in Newport, by increasing the potential for footfall both during the daytime and evening.

Councillors allocated £60,000 in the budget in February 2022 to meet the costs of the relevant feasibility study and preparatory work for additional brownfield regeneration. The proposal is therefore costed in terms of further technical work needed to bring the additional site into the plan.

Fig. 2 shows the mathematical changes to housing numbers that our proposal would deliver as compared to the 2021 draft plan.

Location	Current allocation (2021 draft)	Conservative proposal	Net change
Bembridge	193	13	-180
Freshwater*	255	75	-180
Newport	2,136	2,496	+360
Wootton	90	90	0

\* the Freshwater allocation in the 2021 draft is a mix of land inside and outside its current settlement boundary therefore the above numbers are an approximation.

Fig. 2: changes to housing allocations.

## 2. Affordable housing

There is an affordable housing crisis on the Island. House prices and the cost of renting privately has spiralled beyond the means of many people. The housing waiting list has grown in the last year and now stands at around 2,500 (Fig. 3). *“The Council considers that the most pressing affordable housing need for the Island is for genuinely affordable homes to rent.”* (Affordable Housing Report, 14<sup>th</sup> June 2022, p2). We agree. Action rather than words are now required.

### *Defining what is affordable*

The national definition of affordable homes to buy is set out in the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) and includes schemes such as right to buy and shared ownership. A property sold at 80 per cent of market price would fall within the national definition of affordable. When the market price of a two-bedroom bungalow in Bembridge (for example) has reached £625,000 (www.rightmove.com, January 2022), 80% percent of market prices is far from affordable for most Island residents. We support the proposal of a local definition of affordability which is based on the income of Island residents and their ability to pay monthly rent or mortgage repayments. This should be reflected in the IPS as far as is possible. A local definition cannot replace the definition of affordable homes as set out in the NPPF, but it can be a meaningful definition for land owned and developed by the Council.

### *Delivering affordable housing*

The Council set up a housing company two years ago (IWight Homes Ltd, company number 12361688), in order to deliver affordable homes on Council-owned land. Once built, those homes can be retained and let for affordable rent, or sold at affordable prices (local definition). IWight Homes Ltd was allocated £40 million of borrowing in the Council budget in February 2022 for the current financial year, after a Conservative amendment was voted through despite Alliance opposition. In addition, there is over £1.5 million cash ready to spend to recruit staff, set up offices and transform IWight Homes Ltd into a fully functioning housing organisation. Four months later, in the face of rising numbers on the housing register, the company remains listed as dormant at Companies House, with one director, no employees and no business activity. In relation to affordable house building more widely, the Cabinet Member for Housing Needs informed Corporate Scrutiny Committee on 14<sup>th</sup> June 2022, *“...the impression I thought we were going to make from the outset has, if it ever got traction, ground to a halt.”*

He went on to say, *“We have got shocking figures for homelessness, shocking figures for empty properties. Not much being done... I am starting to think the Council is not configured*

to how it should be working at the current time.” (www.youtube.com/watch?v=1u3tb-Dnyjg at 1:22:06)

A significant proportion of the proposed Newport Riverside site (Fig. 1) is already owned by the Council. It should form part of the IPS (as set out in 1 above) and the Council should designate the whole of the part of the site it owns as affordable (local definition) and retain most of the homes built for affordable rent. Our proposal would therefore deliver more affordable housing than the 2021 draft. While this land is prepared for development the Council should start building, without further delay, on other sites it owns, including the three sites which will benefit from money received from the Government’s Brownfield Release Fund.

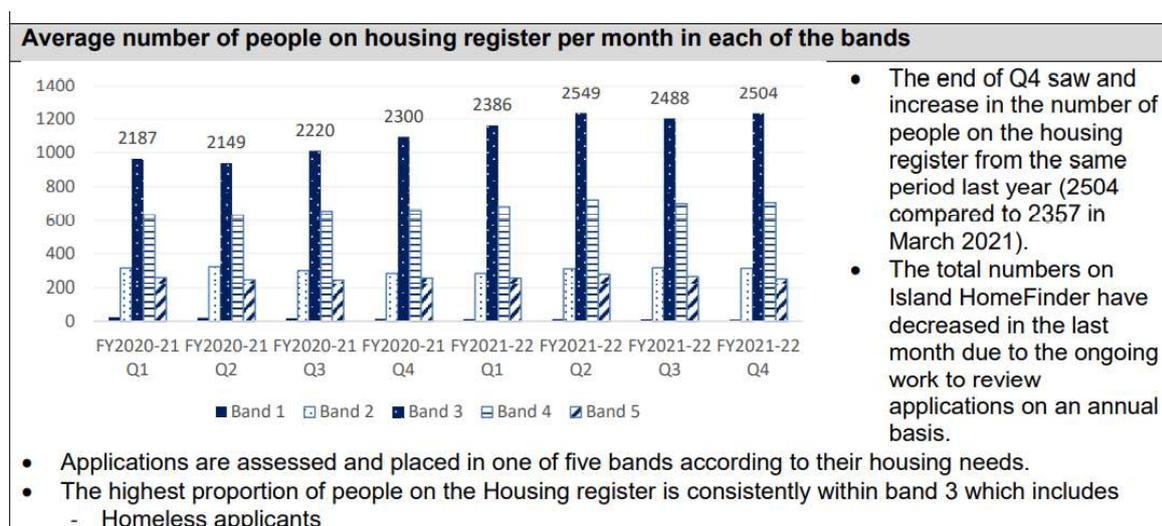


Fig. 3: number of people on the housing register (source: Quarterly Report, 14<sup>th</sup> June 2022)

### 3. Protecting our countryside from inappropriate development

Paragraph 72 of the National Planning Policy Framework says, “in rural areas planning policies and decisions should be responsive to local circumstances and support housing developments that reflect local needs”.

The 2012 strategy supported this policy (Core Strategy SP1) but the new plan does not reflect the previous plan’s specific wording. Any omissions or ambiguity in this regard is this contrary to national policy and cuts across the fundamental principle of the 2021 draft, namely, to direct housing to the areas where it is most needed.

We propose that the 2021 draft contains clear unambiguous provisions that prevent development outside of settlement boundaries unless there is clear evidence of a local community need. This will not reduce the base number of dwellings set out in the 2021 draft which are comprised of allocated and windfall sites, however, it will benefit the environment, biodiversity, and the Island’s tourist economy. We further believe that it accords with the general wishes expressed by many Islanders during the consultation.

## 4. Environment and commitment to Carbon Net Zero

In July 2019 the Isle of Wight Council unanimously supported a resolution to recognise that there was a Climate Emergency, and the Council set an aspiration that the Island should aim to be carbon neutral by 2030. At this time the Isle of Wight was recognised by Friends of the Earth to be the second most environmentally friendly Local Authority in England.

In September 2021 the Council published its Mission Zero – Climate and Environment Strategy 2021 – 2040. This plan states, *“This document and the Action Plan attached to it will form a key part of creating a sustainable future for our Island and, together with other strategies and plans in existence and coming forward in the next few years, in particular the Island Plan Core Strategy.”* Delivering carbon net zero supports much wider environmental objectives which includes biosphere status, however, the shift in emphasis towards biosphere in the 2021 draft risks losing sight of the wider goal relating to carbon emissions.

The Island Planning Strategy should incorporate the core messages and objectives of the Mission Zero strategy, and should avoid any confusion of this core requirement with biosphere reserve status. Recognition by UNESCO is a very welcome acknowledgement that the Island is at one with its important environmental and cultural heritage, but the Island has to do more to contribute to the global reduction in carbon and greenhouse gas emissions.

## 5. Maximising the benefits of the Solent Freeport

Freeports are areas designated by the Government that will benefit from incentives to encourage economic activity. The Solent Freeport (as shown in Fig. 4) will unlock billions of pounds’ worth of investment, create tens of thousands of new jobs and level up our important coastal communities ([www.solentfreeport.com](http://www.solentfreeport.com)).

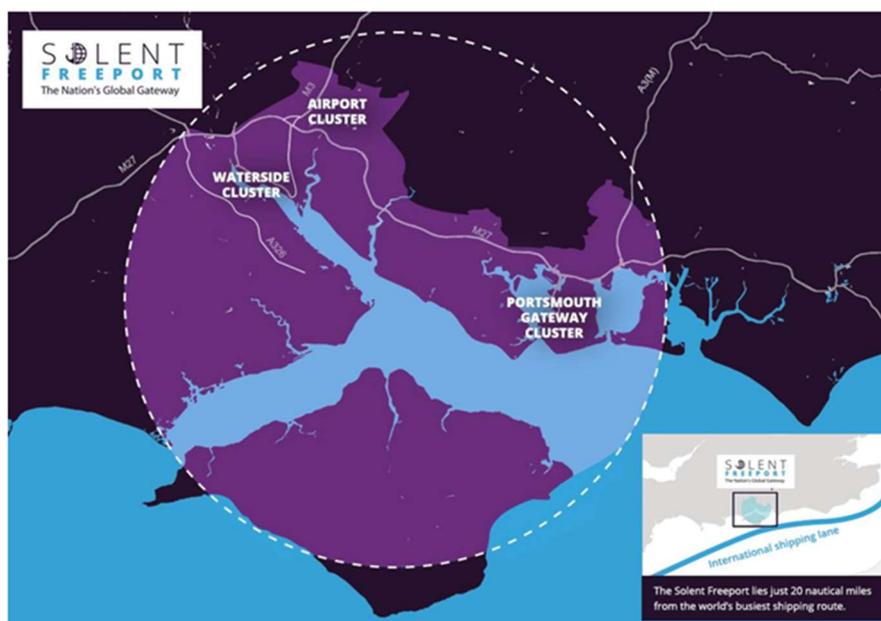


Fig. 4: Solent Freeport area (source: Southampton City Council)

Being part of a Freeport should attract considerable investment, and analysis suggests Freeport status could draw an estimated £1 billion of extra investment into the Solent area. It is further suggested that the Freeport will create over 16,000 new jobs in the Solent area and we should seek to ensure that a fair proportion of those jobs are on the Island.

The Freeport should support our innovative industries, encouraging growth in high tech development and composites, wind turbine and marine industry manufacturing. It should secure greater investment in our infrastructure and connectivity.

The precise details of the Solent Freeport benefits for the Isle of Wight are still emerging as the governance arrangements are finalised. Current Council planning policy E1 includes wording which supports the Solent Freeport however there is no specific mention in the 2021 draft. Appropriate reference to the Freeport should be made within the IPS and there should be a new dedicated Freeport policy. The employment land allocation in the 2021 draft at Kingston Marine Park is a good example of an area that should benefit.

## Conclusion

Delivery of the Island Planning Strategy is a key part of the Alliance Group's plan to deliver affordable homes (Affordable Housing Report, 14th June 2022, p5). The proposals within this paper provide for additional affordable homes, including affordable rental accommodation on brownfield land, close to jobs and within the Solent Freeport development area.

These proposals also better reflect the wishes and feelings of local communities, including two villages which have been allocated significantly greater numbers of housing in the 2021 draft than comparable settlements, and against local opinion.

This paper is greener, more aspirational and better suited to the specific needs of the Island and we believe it should enjoy majority Councillor support so that the Isle of Wight Council can adopt a new up to date Island Planning Strategy.



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Conservative Group Leader



**Cllr Warren Drew**

Conservative Policy Spokesman