

Ventnor Esplanade

Interim Design & Development Advice



*Photo - Countryside Agency/IW AONB -
Photographer Joe Low*

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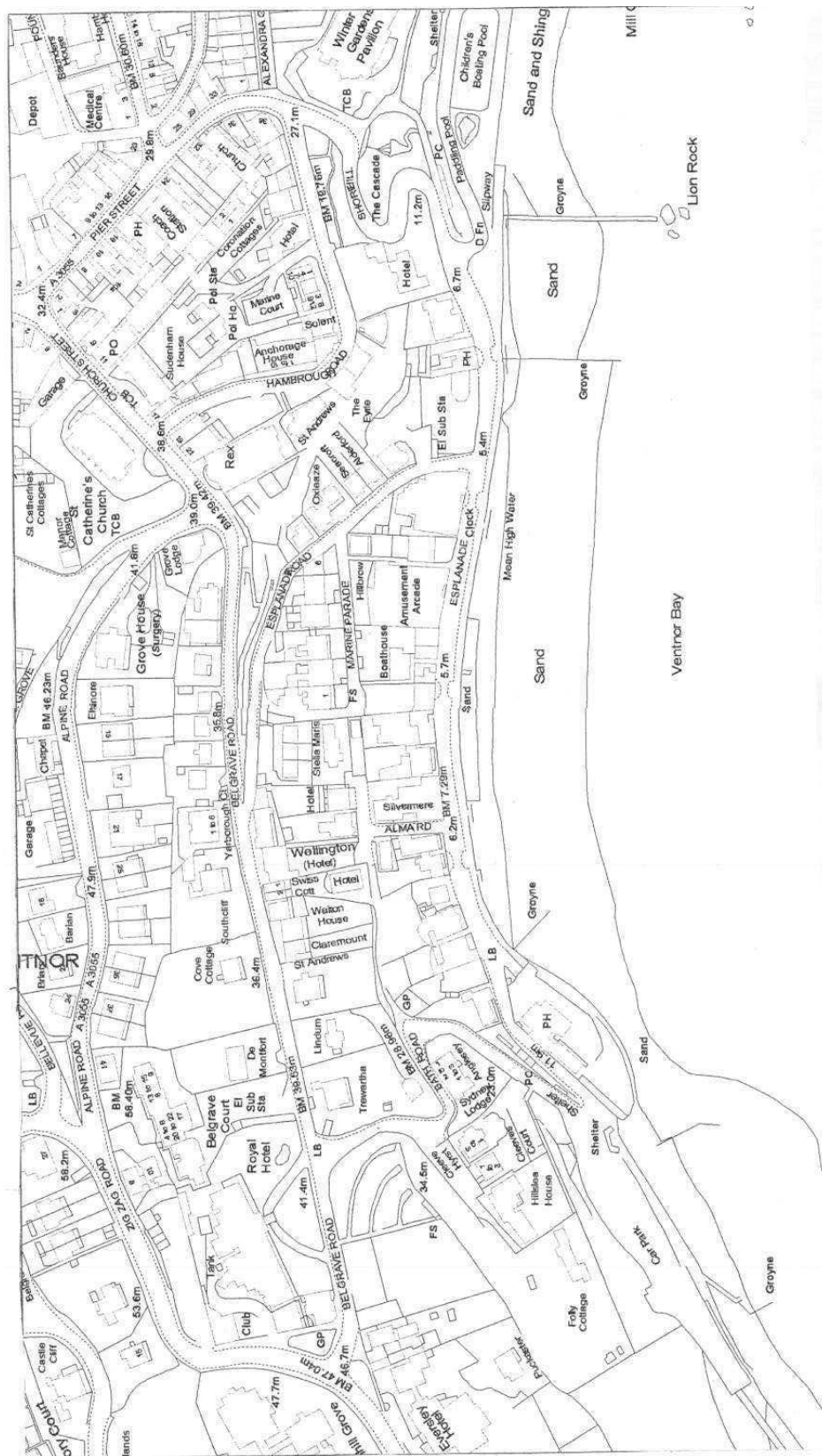
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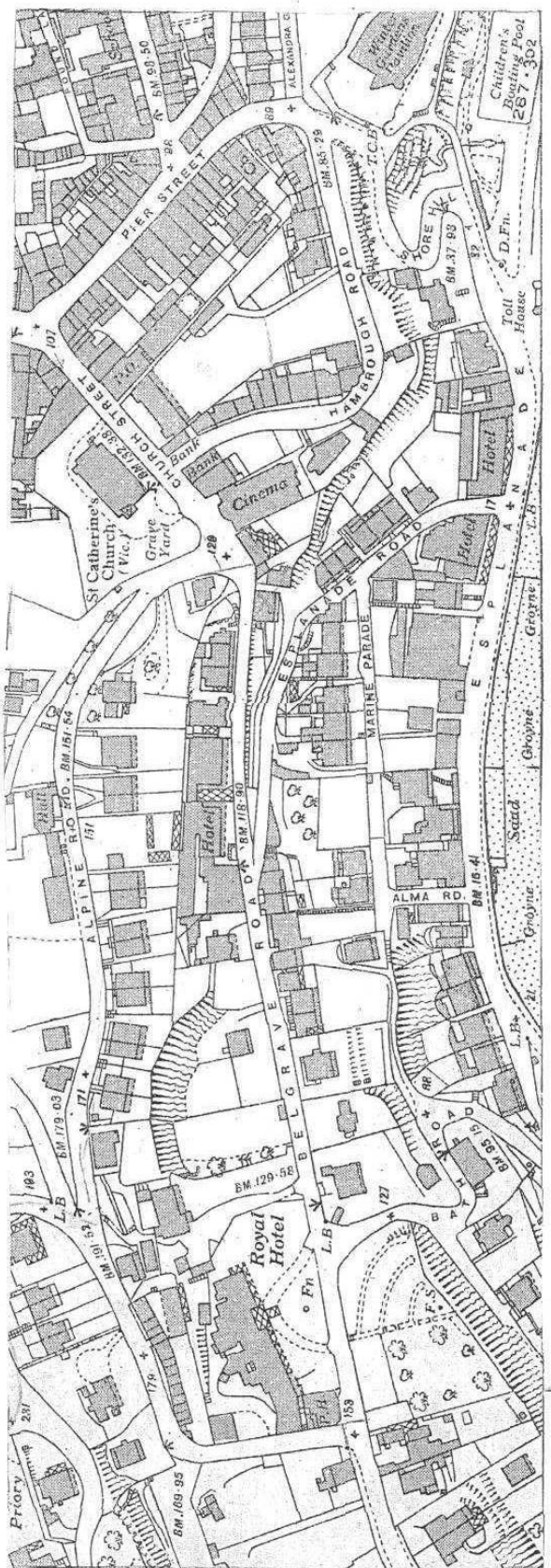
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Map 1 – current OS base (not to scale) North ←

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Map - The Ordnance Survey 1946 edition (not to scale) North ←

1 Introduction

1.1 Status

This draft advice has been prepared by The Isle of Wight Council as local planning authority. It is prepared from existing policy, guidance and other documents, along with some descriptive material relating to the area and its built form.

1.2 Scope and purpose of the advice

The Esplanade at Ventnor is currently the subject of a review of the boundary of the conservation area with a view to extending it to include the Esplanade as a whole, thus references within this document to advice relating to conservation areas (PPG15 and policies) are noted in brackets for the time being.

There is considerable development pressure locally, with developers proposing demolition and redevelopments which have the potential to affect the character of the area incrementally but dramatically.

The purpose of this advice is to draw attention to the relevant parts of existing documents forming a framework for development within the area, to ensure that the form, use and design of development properly relates to the character and appearance of the area, within the context of national guidance and local policy in accordance with the advice in 'By Design'.

In addition it provides an analysis of the area which may aid those considering sites and schemes to understand the townscape and context more fully prior to considering individual studies on a site by site basis.

It does not invite development, nor does it seek to indicate that there is a need for particular sites to be developed, but it does provide an

indication of what points will need to be addressed where development is proposed. Having said that, compliance with the framework set out here cannot guarantee that planning permission will be granted as each and every site and proposal must be the subject of individual consideration.

1.3 Aims

- This advice is intended to assist in achieving the following aims:-
- A comprehensive and cohesive approach to development in the area
- Making best use of land in the interests of sustainability, within the constraints of, and appropriate to the context of the location
- Drawing developers attention to the constraints of the locality in relation to safe and stable construction
- Maintaining and enhancing the character and appearance of the area
- Ensuring a high standard of design for buildings and spaces
- Conserving and restoring the remaining early buildings and structures
- Facilitating ease and safety of circulation for pedestrians, cyclists and vehicles
- Protecting the flora and fauna on the slopes and the quality of the water

1.4 Responsibilities

The Isle of Wight Council is the strategic and local planning authority with responsibility for both policy formulation and the determination of planning applications within its area. It is also the Highway Authority for the Island.

Southern Water is the Drainage Authority

The Environment Agency is the responsible body for issues relating to flooding and coastal protection.

Crime and disorder matters are dealt with by the Hampshire and Isle of Wight Constabulary and their Architectural Liaison Officer advises where appropriate on development proposals.

2 Policy context

2.1 National guidance

Planning Policy Guidance Notes and Statements (PPG and PPS) provide a countrywide overview on a wide range of subjects. They are available from the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister at www.odpm.gov.uk and include –

PPS1 – Delivering sustainable development

PPG3 – Housing

PPG4 – Industry & commerce

PPG6 – Town centres and retail

PPS9 – Biodiversity & geological conservation

PPG13 – Transport

PPG14 – Unstable land

(PPG15 – Planning and the historic environment)

PPG16 – Archaeology

PPG19 – Outdoor advertising

PPG20 – Coastal

PPG21 – Tourism

PPG24 – Noise

This list is not exhaustive – other guidance may need to be considered.

2.2 Development Plans

The Isle of Wight Unitary Development Plan was adopted in May 2001 and is the current policy document. Progress is being made towards a new Island Plan and it is intended that most of the existing policies will be saved to that new Plan. The current Plan is available on the Council's website at www.iwight.com where relevant policies can be viewed.

2.3 Other sources given weight

Various publications provide guidance on how development can be fitted into the existing urban form, and how good places can be created.

Two of these are referred to by appeal Inspectors and thus may be considered to have weight in their own right. They are 'By Design' by CABE and DETR, published by Thomas Telford in 2000, and 'Places, Streets and Movement' by DETR, published in 1998.

Both of these documents provide simple and clear guidance on spaces and places and the relationships of buildings to those spaces.

3 Background

3.1 History

There is evidence of occupation in the Ventnor area since Palaeolithic times with its origins as a recognisable settlement being linked to fishing and seafaring.

The benefits to health of the climate on this sheltered coast were recognised in the 1830s and this led to rapid growth with the Esplanade completed by 1847. In 1851 a population of almost 3,000 was recorded.

The roads and railways were improved and by 1900 the population had increased to about 6,000 with the height of its popularity reached just prior to World War 1.

Between the wars the town was still busy and was being compared with Amalfi and Madiera, but in World War II with the invasion of France things changed dramatically with enemy troops only 70 miles to the south making the Island the country's front line.

After the war use of the railways declined and cheap foreign travel brought a cut in visitor numbers leading to a decline in investment and a loss of the earlier vitality in towns such as this. (See map 2)

For further history see www.iwhistory.org.uk which includes period illustrations of the Esplanade, or contact the Ventnor and District Historical Society.

A number of archaeological finds from the area are recorded on the Sites and

Monuments Register currently but they are isolated and do not indicate a significant area of interest on the Esplanade.

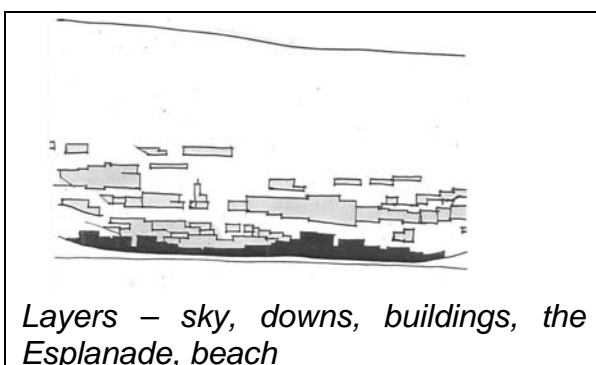
3.2 The current situation

“The scale, massing and height of proposed development should be considered in relation to that of adjoining buildings; the topography; the general pattern of heights in the area; and views, vistas and landmarks.” (By Design)

The Esplanade is bounded at its east and west ends by large public car parks beyond which the coastal cliffs remain undeveloped.

Between those car parks sits the strip of development facing south onto the road and the beach. These sites in part back onto Marine Parade which is the next parallel road to the north, set higher up the slope, and again supporting a row of properties facing south.

This layering is typical of development on the Island’s coastal areas and allows each level to benefit from sea views above the row in front making use of the rise in land level. In addition to this, the areas between the rows of development often support greenery in the form of gardens, shrubs, or just undergrowth on steep slopes providing green wedges which read as part of the pattern of development and provide valuable habitats and wildlife corridors running through the developed areas.



Over time some of the buildings on the Esplanade have been lost or are deteriorating due to lack of investment and there is pressure for redevelopment and re-use.

As this pressure continues and increases there is a growing need to deal comprehensively with the area to ensure that the special character of this area is protected.

3.3 View from the water

(See front cover illustration)

Like many of the Island’s towns, Ventnor is often viewed from the sea, and this longer view needs to be considered in addition to those from dry land. Given the greater distance of views from the sea, there is less detail, but more pattern, and thus the way development follows the landform and clings in tiers to the slopes, with roads zigzagging upwards is important to the appearance of the town.

Integral to this pattern, and to the way the town is viewed are the green wedges which are sometimes gardens while others are overgrown cliff slopes which are too steep to be used. They separate the layers of development and emphasise the tiered form and steepness of the coastal strip.

3.4 View from higher ground

Looking down on Ventnor from above at whatever level – from the downs or from one of the higher roads – the roofscape and the layering of buildings along the contours is significant to the appearance of the town.



Looking down into the bowl which has the Esplanade at its far edge, the stepping down of the buildings following the land is a familiar form and presents more roofs than backs of buildings to the observer.

The green wedges are important to this aspect also as they punctuate the layers of roofs and emphasise the steepness of the land here.

4 General design advice

4.1 Application

This advice is intended to apply to the Esplanade, though it may be helpful in considering other sites in the immediate area.

It can be applied to schemes for alteration, extension, additional development or re-development, however where sites fall within a designated conservation area, any demolition must be fully justified as part of the submission, and these and other development proposals must be supported by a contextual analysis and design statement.

4.2 Redevelopment

PPS1, PPG3, PPG13, (PPG15), UDP policies, etc.

Where there are proposals for demolition and redevelopment, the value of the existing building both in terms of its usability and visual contribution to the area need to be considered. The repair and reuse of viable existing buildings will be the preferred option as this is likely to result in the most sustainable use of resources as well as preserving the character.

Where a building is incapable of reuse and this can be adequately justified, proposals for replacement will be considered.

That consideration will include the contextual fit, the appropriateness of the use, and the relationship with

relevant policy and guidance. Quality of design, local appropriateness, and respect for place will be required in all schemes, as well as reference to and compliance with the requirements of policies and guidance relevant to the site, use and scheme proposed.

4.3 Additional development

PPS1, PPG3, PPG13, (PPG15), UDP policies, etc.

Where additional development is proposed in the form of extension or additional structures within a curtilage, the points in the above paragraph will be relevant.

In addition the relationship of the new works to existing structures on site will be a consideration along with the overall contextual fit.

4.4 Land use

UDP policies

The area is within the development envelope but outside the town centre. Thus the relevant plan policies will guide actual use. Most of the ground floor uses currently existing on the Esplanade are related to tourism and commerce and add to the vitality and interest of the Esplanade as a 'seafront'.

At upper levels uses are mainly residential or hotel type use.

4.5 Traffic and parking

PPG13, UDP policies and 'Places, Streets and Movement'

"Look at the place not the car."
(Places, Streets & Movement)

The roads in the area are by necessity steep and winding and thus are not suitable for large vehicles. They also constrain capacity as passing places and junctions need to be carefully negotiated making movement very slow.

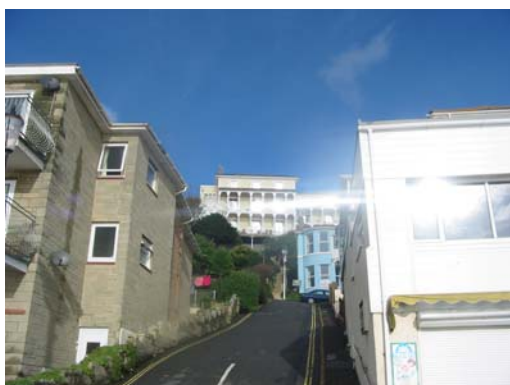
The 2 public car parks are considered to be adequate for current and future needs, and in fact there is little

opportunity to extend them. They are easily accessible from the entire Esplanade.

On street parking is very limited due to the width of carriageways and the steepness of side streets. Dropping off can be achieved out of season when limited space is available, but during the holiday period this is impossible.

Marine Parade at the rear of the Esplanade properties does for the most part provide an opportunity for access and off street parking where plots stretch through. Otherwise, where full width buildings exist or are proposed, there is little opportunity due to the need to maintain active frontages.

Access for service vehicles including fire engines can be difficult, the more so as the size of these vehicles increases.



4.6 Land stability

PPG14 and UDP policies

The Island is known to have a number of areas where the land is unstable to the extent that existing structures are damaged and new development is constrained to a greater or lesser degree. There have been various reports and studies made over time and many of these have been published. The stability of land is a major consideration in dealing with planning applications and The Council will require detailed information in each case.

Ventnor Esplanade falls into this category with the Esplanade noted as being within an area likely to be subject to significant constraints on

development, the southern part being on a main landslide toe subject to uplift and heave, and the area behind it noted as being subject to rotational slides.

This sensitivity needs to be considered not only in the design of new structures, but also in terms of demolition of existing structures and the construction works themselves.

The Council does therefore require comprehensive and expert investigations as part of any planning submission, and will have those submissions examined by its own expert whose advice will form part of the consideration of each application. The level of detail required will vary with the site and the complexity of the proposal, but in many cases it will not be appropriate to provide this information by condition as the economic viability and design for a site is likely to be affected by the land conditions and the cost of accommodating mitigating works.

4.7 Habitats

PPS9 and UDP policies

“Integrating new development into its landscape setting reduces its impact on nature and reinforces local distinctiveness.” (By Design)

The sheltered, south facing cliffed landscape around the Esplanade is surprisingly rich in wildlife. The mild, almost frost-free climate allows all sorts of tender exotic plants to thrive and spread, co-existing with a wide range of uncommon native seacliff plants, such as cushion-forming lime-green flowered rock samphire and pink flowered rock sea-spurrey which adorn natural rock outcrops and give real character to the area. Natural features are an important component of the Esplanade character and should be retained.

The Cascade is a source of clean, unpolluted water which deposits lime-

rich tufa encrustations. It supports a valuable aquatic flora and fauna.

This area is a stronghold for the exotic wall lizard, which can be seen basking on stone walls and is a Ventnor speciality. They are highly regarded by visitors and residents. Consideration of their requirements should be made when re-pointing walls clearing ground and constructing new buildings. Successful conversions have involved using gabions and retaining crevices in south-facing walls to provide suitable habitats for them.

The beach below mean low water and the onshore waters form part of the South Wight European Marine Site, specially protected for its rich marine flora and fauna living in off-shore reefs. New development will need careful environmental assessment if there is a risk of it impacting upon the marine environment.

4.8 Streetscape

PPS1, (PPG15), UDP policies and 'By Design'

"The scale of buildings should relate to the width of the street." (By Design)



The Esplanade is in fact Ventnor's seafront with buildings on the north side and the beach and English Channel on the south.

The road itself is quite narrow and when the tide is in there is little or no beach. When the tide is out, the beach is still relatively narrow making the area quite intimate in terms of scale.

This intimacy is reflected in, or is a function of the modest plot widths and the generally small buildings which for the most part reach a maximum of 3 stories from the pavement on which they sit.

Historic photos indicate single storey buildings along part of the Esplanade. The reasons for this are not clear, but these small structures are an important part of the character of the area which takes the form of a section of an upturned bowl.

The focal point on the Esplanade is the Metropole building which was a large hotel and is being replaced with a similarly large block with shops etc on the ground floor and apartments above. To the east and west of this the buildings step down in height so that this building clearly marks the main road junction and visual pivot around which the streetscape balances.



The north side of the Esplanade is quite busy and the businesses occupying it are generally related to tourism. Most of the frontages represent some form of activity or surveillance with windows, shop windows, cafes etc adding to the vitality as is traditional in such resorts.



The south side of the Esplanade is open between the public house on the western end and the pumping station on the eastern end save for a few small and traditional beach huts which reflect the age and origins of Ventnor as a resort.

The whole area is active with busy frontages and a street which is overlooked from each property.

4.9 Public space

PPS1, (PPG15), UDP policies, 'By Design' and 'Places, Streets and Movement

The 2 public car parks at either end of the Esplanade are well used, and any development within them will need to be related to that use, and of a small scale suitable to their informal setting.

The children's pool and adjacent public toilets would benefit from improvement, as perhaps might the public realm generally, though the retention of the traditional seaside character will be essential to the success of any such scheme. Separate guidance has already been published by The Council for this area.

The use of pathways on the cliffs is affected by land stability and the need for safety so any scheme for the repair of such pathways needs to consider how paths and steps could be constructed and maintained whilst keeping the very low key character of the cliffs intact.

4.10 Form

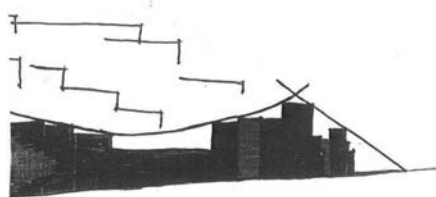
PPS1, (PPG15), UDP policies, 'By Design'

Form is defined as layout, urban grain, height, massing, materials and details and landscape in 'By Design'. The relationship with roads and boundaries and to neighbouring property also forms part of this aspect of development.

Analysis of the surrounding area will provide clues as to how the area works currently and how new works should fit into that framework.

Mistakes are often made in deciding the form of structures in relation to their setting and this can be seen in many streets where new work sticks out as being too tall, set too far back (or forward) for example, so careful attention to this is vital in ensuring a good fit for any new building work.

The existence of a focal point in the form of the tallest building (Metropole), marking the road junction and the pivotal point of the Esplanade gives it balance and enhances the composition of the view. The maintenance of this urban form and hierarchy is essential in retaining the character and appearance of the Esplanade when viewed from many locations.



From an old photo looking east showing the Metropole as the focal point

4.11 Materials, details and style

PPS1, (PPG15), UDP policies

The character of a place – its local distinctiveness – is important to new development and to its ability to sit comfortably in its context. Items such as window style and proportion, the amount and kind of decorative detail,

and the predominant materials all contribute to local distinctiveness.

This is not to say that all development must copy that which already exists, and in fact this would devalue the historic interest of the originals. What it does do is provide the designer with references with which to work so that a scheme can be seen to respect its location and harmonize with earlier developments.

Design statements allow for the context to be recognised and for the clues to be analysed and interpreted to suit a new scheme, and for the design approach to be explained and justified to those who will comment on and determine applications for planning permission.



4.12 Design and crime

PPS1 and 'By Design'

"Analysis of the local context should take account of security issues."
(Places, Streets & Movement)

The creation of safe and attractive places and spaces is essential in any development and this should form part of the design consideration both within the site and in relation to the context.

Clear definition between public and private space, and the ability for all areas to be looked out upon to provide security and surveillance is important in this respect. Street frontages are included within this, and the use of active frontages is supported.

The Police provide comment and guidance on design matters relating to

crime reduction measures through their Architectural Liaison service.

5 Conclusion

"If too little weight is given to the local context, the proposal may be opposed locally." *(By Design)*

Ventnor Esplanade is a sensitive area in many respects, and all of those sensitivities need to be considered and respected when development is proposed.

As part of planning application submissions the Council will require clear documentation to show how applicants have addressed the constraints imposed on their particular site and its context.

These submissions will be considered in light of policy and guidance as indicated above, and where schemes fail either to provide adequate information, or to meet the requirements of the relevant policy and guidance, it is likely that permission will not be granted.

In short therefore, the best advice is to do the background work thoroughly, and present it clearly; to allow that background work to steer and inform your design solution; and to respect the special character that is Ventnor and its Esplanade.

This document is produced by the Conservation & Design Team which is part of Planning Services at the Isle of Wight Council. This version is dated March 2006.