

Cowes and Northwood Place Plan

A working draft for place-based fractal governance, local investment, community participation and Island-wide collaboration

Status: Working draft for partner review | **Date:** July 2026 | **Prepared for:** Cowes Town Council, Isle of Wight Council and Southampton University Future Towns Team

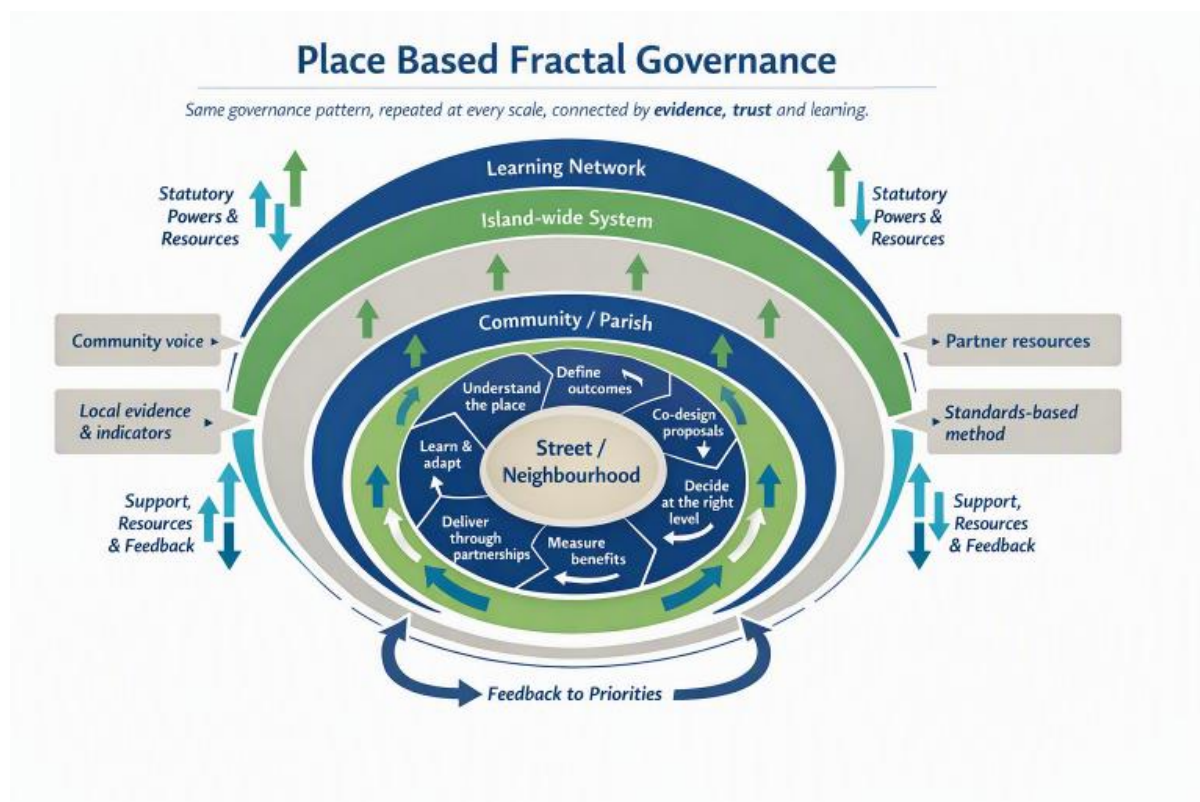


Figure 1: Place Based Fractal Governance overview. The first graphic shows the governance pattern repeated at different scales, from street and neighbourhood level through to town, Island-wide coordination and shared learning. The second graphic shows how local voice becomes practical delivery: residents and groups contribute evidence and priorities, partners test and resource proposals, delivery cells carry out agreed actions, and measured benefits are fed back so the system can learn and improve.



1. Purpose of this updated Place Plan

This updated Place Plan sets out how Cowes and Northwood can work with Isle of Wight Council, Cowes Town Council, neighbouring Island communities, public services, voluntary organisations, businesses and residents to promote and form a Place Based Fractal Governance System. The intention is to create a practical local governance model that can operate at neighbourhood, town, parish, community, service and Island levels while remaining coherent with wider Island place planning, the Island Planning Strategy and sustainable community objectives.

The Plan is informed by PAS 184:2017, ISO 37106:2021 and ISO 37101:2016. In plain English, these standards help turn a good local idea into something that can be explained, tested, funded, delivered and improved over time. PAS 184:2017 is useful because it encourages clear project scoping: what problem is being solved, who benefits, what evidence is needed, what risks exist, how the proposal could be paid for, and how success will be measured. ISO 37106:2021 helps because it focuses on the way places organise themselves to become more joined-up, collaborative, citizen-centred and digitally enabled, rather than treating “smart” as simply buying technology. ISO 37101:2016 adds the wider management discipline needed for sustainable communities, helping partners set objectives, agree responsibilities, manage resources, check progress and keep improving through a practical Plan-Do-Check-Act approach. The Plan also draws on ISO 37120, ISO 37122, ISO 37123 and ISO 37124, which provide a common language for indicators covering services, quality of life, smart community development, resilience and guidance on using those indicators proportionately. For Cowes and Northwood, the benefit is not certification for its own sake; it is a more trusted, transparent and repeatable way to connect local priorities, community voice, evidence, investment and delivery across neighbourhood, town and Island levels. These standards are used as guidance and structure; they do not replace local democratic judgement, statutory responsibilities or community priorities.

Consultation and review status. This document is presented as a working draft for discussion and review by Cowes Town Council, Isle of Wight Council, the Southampton University Future Towns Team and other local partners. It is intended to support dialogue, refinement and further suggestions before any formal adoption, endorsement or implementation decisions are made.

Review purpose: This draft is intended to prompt constructive review, challenge and refinement. It does not commit any organisation to adoption, funding, governance arrangements or delivery responsibilities until formal decisions are made through the appropriate bodies.

2. Executive summary

This working draft proposes an updated Cowes and Northwood Place Plan built around a Place Based Fractal Governance System. Its purpose is to create a practical, repeatable and trusted framework through which residents, councillors, Isle of Wight Council, Cowes Town Council, local businesses, community organisations, education partners, public services and anchor institutions can agree priorities, develop projects, attract investment, measure benefits and connect local action to Island-wide planning.

The Plan is informed by PAS 184, ISO 37106, ISO 37101 and the related ISO 37120 family of standards. Together, these provide a standards-based foundation for robust project scoping, open and collaborative governance, citizen-centred decision-making, sustainable community management, performance indicators, resilience, smart communities and continuous improvement.

The main priorities include local democratic participation, a Cowes Economic Strategy and Investment Prospectus, maritime heritage and local learning, local transport and parking using Link and Place modelling, green spaces and heritage corridors, data-enabled decision-making, possible future Cowes Peninsula collaboration and later-stage exploration of Area Boards. The document is

3. Strategic ambition

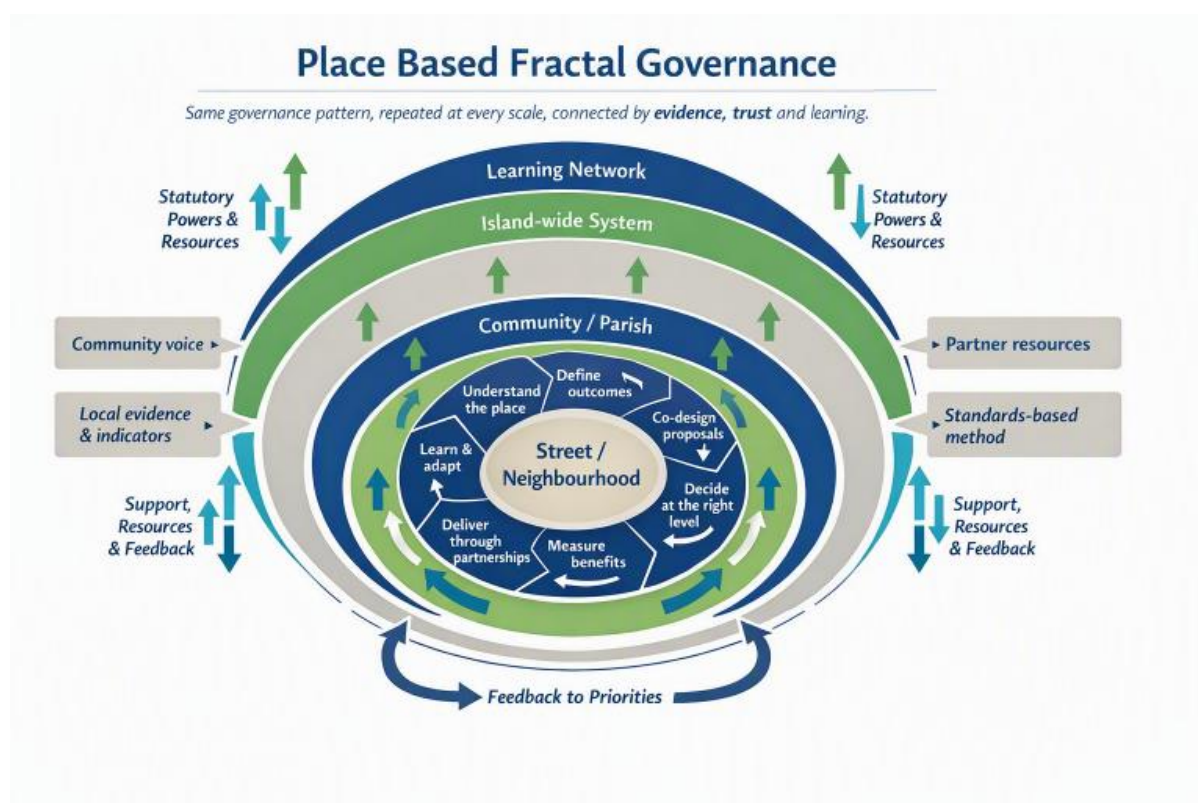
Our ambition is to establish Cowes and Northwood as an active, connected and trusted place within an Island-wide system of places. The local Place Plan should not sit apart from the rest of the Island; it should become a working node within a wider network of local plans, shared standards, common data, transparent decision-making and community-led delivery.

- Enable decisions to be made at the most local competent level, with clear escalation routes where Island-wide coordination is needed.
- Create repeatable governance patterns that can be used by streets, neighbourhoods, parishes, towns, service partnerships and Island-wide boards.
- Align local priorities with Isle of Wight Council place plans, planning policy, climate and environment responsibilities, infrastructure planning and public service reform.
- Use data, local knowledge and lived experience together, rather than treating digital evidence and community voice as separate systems.
- Build trust through transparency, shared measures of success and visible feedback loops between residents, partners and decision-makers.

4. What is a Place Based Fractal Governance System?

A Place Based Fractal Governance System is a governance model in which the same core principles, roles, evidence practices and accountability loops are repeated at different scales. A small neighbourhood group, a parish partnership, a town forum and an Island-wide board should all be able to use a recognisable pattern: understand the place, engage the community, define outcomes, test proposals, deliver collaboratively, measure impact and learn.

Fractal governance does not mean duplicating bureaucracy. It means creating a simple, shared operating pattern that can be scaled up or down. Each level of the system should be locally meaningful, connected to neighbouring places, compatible with Council processes and capable of contributing evidence and action to Island-wide priorities.



5. Standards alignment

Table 1: Standards alignment and application

Standard or framework	Relevant emphasis for this Place Plan	Application to fractal governance
PAS 184:2017	Smart thinking, smart practices, agile scoping, benefits mapping and robust project proposals.	Use a consistent proposal template for local projects, including problem definition, stakeholders, benefits, risks, delivery route and evidence of value.
ISO 37106:2021	Open, collaborative, citizen-centric and digitally enabled operating models for sustainable communities.	Define repeatable governance processes for vision, leadership, engagement, data, interoperability, integrated services, privacy and inclusion.
ISO 37101:2016	Management system for sustainable development in communities using a holistic Plan-Do-Check-Act approach.	Use objectives, responsibilities, resources, operational controls, performance evaluation and continual improvement at each place scale.
ISO 37120, ISO 37122 and ISO 37123	Indicators for city services, quality of life, smart cities and resilient cities.	Develop a balanced local indicator set for wellbeing, resilience, smartness, inclusion, environment, infrastructure and service outcomes.
ISO 37124	Guidance on using ISO 37120, ISO 37122 and ISO 37123.	Support proportionate use of indicators so that smaller places can contribute meaningful evidence without excessive burden.

6. Proposed governance architecture

The proposed architecture is a nested system of place forums, delivery cells and evidence loops. It should be designed with Isle of Wight Council so that local insight can inform Council strategies and Council priorities can be translated into practical local action.

- **Neighbourhood and street level:** resident-led identification of issues, opportunities, local assets and quick-win actions.
- **Community and parish level:** coordination of priorities, volunteer capacity, local partnerships, community resilience and project proposals.
- **Town and place level:** strategic alignment across Cowes and Northwood, including economy, transport, public realm, health, housing, environment and culture.
- **Island-wide level:** coordination with Isle of Wight Council, other place plans, statutory strategies, infrastructure planning and investment programmes.
- **Learning network level:** shared practice between Island places so that successful methods can be adapted and reused.

Future development: Area Boards. Once the place-based fractal governance structure has been tested, trusted and clearly connected to Isle of Wight Council processes, a further stage could be to explore the creation of Area Boards. These would be designed to harness the skills, assets and resources of local businesses, voluntary organisations, education and skills providers, public services and anchor institutions. Potential partners could include organisations such as Cowes Harbour Commission, UKSA, BAE Systems and other local employers, community bodies and service providers, but only subject to discussion, invitation and agreement.

Area Boards should be developed only when there is local consent, clarity of purpose, transparent membership, agreed accountability, alignment with parish and town councils, and a clear relationship with existing community organisations. Their role should be to coordinate shared priorities, unlock resources, support delivery and connect local projects to wider Island strategies without replacing local democratic voices or community-led action.

7. Core operating cycle

1. **Understand the place:** combine local knowledge, demographic evidence, service data, environmental data, business insight and community experience.
2. **Define shared outcomes:** agree what success means for residents, businesses, public bodies and the wider Island.
3. **Co-design proposals:** use PAS 184-style scoping to develop practical proposals that are viable, measurable and capable of delivery.
4. **Decide at the right level:** keep decisions local where possible, escalate only where statutory powers, resources or Island-wide coordination are required.
5. **Deliver through partnerships:** form time-limited delivery groups with clear roles, resources, milestones and risk controls.
6. **Measure benefits:** track outputs, outcomes, community value, inclusion, resilience and sustainability impacts.
7. **Learn and adapt:** review what worked, publish learning and adapt the model for the next cycle.

8. Priority themes for Cowes and Northwood

- **Connected and inclusive communities:** strengthen participation, local leadership, volunteering, digital inclusion and access to services.
- **Resilient local economy:** support maritime, visitor, creative, care, green and local enterprise opportunities while improving links between skills, employment and place identity. A specific priority should be to develop a Cowes Economic Strategy and outward-facing Economic Prospectus to set out the town's aspirational economic future, infrastructure needs and investment proposition.
- **Heritage, culture and local learning:** recognise Cowes' unusually rich maritime, civic and industrial history as a tourism, education and place identity asset. Working through the Town Council and local partners, develop heritage trails, guided walks, interpretation, school and youth learning resources, digital storytelling and events that connect Cowes' past with its future maritime and economic ambition.
- **Healthy and liveable neighbourhoods:** align public realm, active travel, community safety, housing quality, access to nature and local wellbeing.
- **Local transport, parking and Link and Place planning:** work with Isle of Wight Council to develop a local transport plan for Cowes and Northwood, aligned with the Island Transport Plan, using Link and Place modelling to balance movement, access, public realm, parking, safety, active travel, visitor needs and the quality of local streets as places.
- **Climate, coast and environment:** support local climate action, coastal resilience, biodiversity, responsible resource use and community preparedness.
- **Green spaces, active travel and heritage corridors:** enhance Northwood Recreation Ground, St Mary's Road Park, Arctic Park, Mornington Woods and the old

railway tunnel as a connected network of community, biodiversity, wellbeing, education, heritage and active travel assets.

- **Data-enabled local decision-making:** establish shared evidence, open reporting and ethical data practices that support community trust.
- **Island-wide collaboration:** connect Cowes and Northwood priorities with neighbouring place plans and Isle of Wight Council strategies.

9. Economic strategy and investment prospectus

A key priority for Cowes should be the development of a dedicated Economic Strategy and outward-facing Economic Prospectus. These should set out an agreed aspirational plan for the town's maritime, visitor, skills, infrastructure and investment future, including the ambition to help Cowes strengthen its position among leading international yachting venues.

The Place Plan should provide the governance framework, community mandate and partnership route for this work, while the Economic Strategy and Prospectus should provide the detailed evidence, investment case and delivery proposition. This distinction is important: the Place Plan should establish why the economic ambition matters and how it will be governed; the Strategy and Prospectus should set out what investment is needed, what benefits it will create and how partners can participate.

The Strategy and Prospectus should address harbour and waterfront infrastructure, visitor facilities, public realm, active travel and transport connections, event capacity, marine services, skills and apprenticeships, digital connectivity, environmental resilience, hospitality, retail, accommodation and the wider Cowes Peninsula offer. They should also connect to known local strengths and opportunities, including Cowes Week, Round the Island Race, marina and harbour facilities, the East Cowes marine hub, Cowes Harbour Commission's strategic planning, marine businesses, education and training providers, and the Island's wider growth and prosperity agenda.

Cowes' maritime, civic and industrial history should be treated as a core part of the town's economic and visitor proposition, not simply as a background asset. Existing local strengths include the Cowes Maritime Museum, the Classic Boat Museum, the Maritime Heritage Trail, Cowes Heritage and Community Group, historic yachting clubs, shipbuilding history, royal yachting connections, the floating bridge story, J. Samuel White's legacy and the wider Medina waterfront heritage. These assets can support longer visitor stays, stronger local identity, school and youth learning, volunteer participation and intergenerational community pride.

The Economic Prospectus should be designed as an outward-facing document for investors, funders, public bodies and anchor organisations. It should translate local ambition into investable propositions, showing the infrastructure, skills, environmental, social and economic benefits that could be achieved through coordinated investment in Cowes and, where appropriate, the wider Cowes Peninsula.

10. Local transport, parking and Link and Place planning

The Place Plan should include a Local Transport, Link and Place Plan, developed with Isle of Wight Council, to align local priorities with the Council's Island Transport Plan 4 for 2025–2040. The Council's plan emphasises net zero and climate resilience, sustainable and efficient travel, inclusive and affordable access, safety, healthier communities, behaviour change, infrastructure, land-use planning, sustainable tourism and technology.

Link and Place modelling is particularly suitable for Cowes because many streets and spaces perform more than one role. They are movement links for residents, visitors, deliveries, ferry users, public transport, walking, wheeling and cycling, but they are also places for shopping, heritage, events, social life, public space, waterfront activity and local identity. A local Link and Place

assessment should therefore classify streets and routes according to both their movement role and their place value.

The local transport plan should consider walking, wheeling, cycling, buses, ferry and harbour access, parking, loading, deliveries, coach and visitor movement, safer routes to schools, access to health and community facilities, public realm, event management, signage, wayfinding, digital information, electric vehicle charging, mobility hubs and connections between Cowes, Northwood, Gurnard and, if agreed in future, East Cowes as part of a wider Cowes Peninsula approach.

Parking should be treated as a specific local issue and opportunity. The Place Plan should not assume that parking provision must either remain unchanged or be reduced in order to improve the town. Instead, it should explore whether existing car parks can be repurposed, redesigned or developed for wider community, economic, housing, workspace, visitor, public realm or green infrastructure uses while retaining at least the same number of parking spaces through better layout, decked parking, shared-use arrangements, mobility hubs, electric vehicle charging and improved management.

Any car park repurposing proposal should be evidence-led and should test ownership, planning policy, viability, access, safety, drainage, heritage, townscape, climate resilience, revenue implications, seasonal demand and impacts on residents, businesses and visitors. The aim should be to use land more productively without losing a single car parking space unless future community agreement and transport evidence clearly support a different approach.

11. Green spaces, active travel and heritage corridors

The Place Plan should include a Green Spaces, Active Travel and Heritage Corridors programme to enhance Northwood Recreation Ground, St Mary's Road Park, Arctic Park, Mornington Woods and the old railway tunnel as a connected network rather than as isolated sites. This programme should support health and wellbeing, biodiversity, climate resilience, local education, heritage interpretation, active travel and community stewardship.

Potential enhancements should include native planting, wildflower areas, pollinator corridors, tree management, habitat boxes, ecological surveys, walking loops, seating, shade, accessible routes, outdoor classrooms, nature trails, citizen science, school projects, volunteer days and better walking and cycling links between green spaces, the town centre, waterfront and neighbouring communities.

The old railway tunnel should be explored carefully as a potential heritage, biodiversity, education and active travel asset. Possible uses could include safe heritage interpretation, a walking or cycling heritage route if access and safety allow, a biodiversity or bat habitat area where ecological surveys support this, an arts or light installation subject to permissions, or a symbolic gateway within a wider Cowes green and heritage trail.

No firm use for the tunnel should be assumed until ownership, access, structural condition, public safety, ecological, heritage and legal matters have been assessed. The Place Plan should therefore commit to exploring options, building local support and developing an evidence-based feasibility study before any proposal is advanced.

12. Data, evidence and digital inclusion

The system should treat data as a shared civic asset while respecting privacy, security and inclusion. Local evidence should include quantitative indicators, qualitative experience, asset mapping, service insight and community priorities. A simple place dashboard could show progress against agreed outcomes, but it should be designed so that people without digital access or specialist skills can still participate fully.

Data governance should include clear ownership, lawful processing, proportionality, transparency, accessibility and feedback to communities. Where possible, measures should align with the ISO 37120 family of indicators while being adapted to the scale and character of Cowes, Northwood and the Island.

13. Partnership with Isle of Wight Council and Island places

The Place Plan should be developed with Isle of Wight Council as both a statutory authority and a system convenor. The Council's planning policy function, local plan work, infrastructure planning, climate and environment responsibilities, public health role and community involvement processes should be connected to the Place Based Fractal Governance System. The local plan context is especially important because the Council's Local Plan section acts as the hub for the Island Planning Strategy, planning policy maps, monitoring reports and the Statement of Community Involvement.

This Plan should therefore establish a regular dialogue with the Council, Cowes Town Council, the Southampton University Future Towns Team and other Island place plans, including shared agenda-setting, common evidence standards, joint project development, academic and practical insight, and mechanisms for feeding local priorities into Island-wide decisions.

14. Implementation roadmap

Table 2: Implementation roadmap

Phase	Focus	Key actions
Phase 1: Mobilise	Establish shared intent and working arrangements.	Confirm partners, agree terms of reference, map existing place plans, identify community assets and create a draft outcomes framework.
Phase 2: Diagnose	Build the evidence base and understand local priorities.	Run community engagement, gather data, identify inequalities, map risks and opportunities, and agree priority themes.
Phase 3: Co-design	Develop place-based project proposals.	Use PAS 184-style project scoping, benefits mapping, risk assessment, delivery planning and investment readiness checks. Begin scoping the Cowes Economic Strategy and Investment Prospectus as a priority project, alongside a Local Transport, Link and Place Plan, a Cowes Maritime Heritage, Tourism and Learning Initiative, and a Green Spaces, Active Travel and Heritage Corridors programme led or convened through the Town Council, Isle of Wight Council and local partners.
Phase 4: Deliver	Implement practical projects through local partnerships.	Create delivery cells, assign responsibilities, align with Council processes, secure resources and publish progress updates. Develop the evidence base, investment themes and partner proposition for the Economic Strategy and Prospectus. Develop the Local Transport, Link and Place Plan, including route classification, parking demand and supply evidence, car park repurposing options, access, safety, active travel, public realm and visitor movement. Develop pilot heritage, tourism and learning projects such as trails, guided walks,

		interpretation panels, digital storytelling, education packs and links to local museums, schools, youth groups and maritime organisations. Develop pilot green space and corridor projects such as biodiversity improvements, accessible walking loops, signage, seating, outdoor learning, citizen science and feasibility work for the old railway tunnel.
Phase 5: Learn and scale	Review impact and share learning across the Island.	Measure outcomes, update the Place Plan, share reusable methods and support other Island places to adapt the model. Use learning from the economic work to inform wider Cowes Peninsula and Island place planning.
Phase 6: Explore Area Boards	Develop a later-stage governance and delivery mechanism for larger shared geographies.	Subject to discussion and agreement, define the purpose, geography, membership, decision rights, accountability arrangements and resource contribution model for Area Boards involving local democratic representatives, Isle of Wight Council, businesses, anchor organisations, voluntary groups and community partners.

15. Learning and capability: applying Bloom's Taxonomy

Bloom's Taxonomy can be used as a practical learning ladder to help residents, community groups, councillors, officers and delivery partners progress from awareness of local issues to analysis, evaluation and co-creation of place-based solutions. It should be treated as a supporting educational model rather than as a formal requirement of PAS 184, ISO 37106 or ISO 37101.

Table 3: Bloom's Taxonomy and place-based governance capability

Bloom's level	Place-based governance capability	Practical application
Remember	Know the Place Plan, standards, local priorities and available evidence.	Briefings, public summaries, shared glossaries and accessible local evidence packs.
Understand	Explain what place-based fractal governance means for Cowes, Northwood and the wider Island.	Workshops, community conversations and visual explanations of the governance model.
Apply	Use the governance template, project scoping process and evidence framework.	Local groups prepare proposals using a common format aligned with PAS 184-style benefits mapping.
Analyse	Identify relationships, risks, inequalities, dependencies and trade-offs.	Compare options across social, environmental, economic, wellbeing and service impacts.
Evaluate	Judge whether proposals are fair, viable, sustainable, inclusive and aligned with Island priorities.	Use transparent criteria, community review panels and partner challenge sessions.
Create	Co-design new projects, delivery cells, dashboards, local partnerships and governance solutions.	Develop pilot projects and reusable governance patterns that other Island places can adapt.

Using Bloom's Taxonomy in this way strengthens the Plan's commitment to participation and transparency. It helps ensure that engagement is not limited to consultation, but supports people

to understand evidence, shape proposals, challenge decisions and help create solutions. This is particularly important for a fractal governance system because each level of the system depends on people having the confidence, knowledge and capability to act locally while remaining connected to Island-wide priorities.

16. Measures of success

- Residents can see how local priorities are set, acted on and reviewed.
- Community groups, businesses and public services use a shared process for developing proposals.
- Local evidence is trusted, accessible and connected to Island-wide planning.
- Projects demonstrate social, environmental, economic and wellbeing benefits.
- Decision-making is more transparent, participatory and proportionate.
- Other Island places can adapt the same governance pattern without losing their local identity.

17. Consultation feedback

This section should be used to capture feedback from Cowes Town Council, Isle of Wight Council, the Southampton University Future Towns Team, community organisations, businesses, residents and other local partners. Feedback should be recorded transparently so that contributors can see how comments have been considered and how the working draft has changed as a result.

Table 4: Consultation feedback log

Consultee or organisation	Theme or section commented on	Summary of feedback	Proposed response or amendment	Status
Cowes Town Council				Awaiting review
Isle of Wight Council				Awaiting review
Southampton University Future Towns Team				Awaiting review
Community organisations and residents				To be invited
Local businesses and anchor organisations				To be invited

18. Next steps guide

1. Submit this working draft to Cowes Town Council, Isle of Wight Council and the Southampton University Future Towns Team for review, challenge and further suggestions.
2. Agree a review timetable, named contacts and a simple feedback template so that comments can be captured consistently.
3. Hold a partner review session to test the overall ambition, governance model, standards alignment, priority themes and proposed delivery route.

4. Prepare a revised draft showing which suggestions have been accepted, amended, deferred or not taken forward, with reasons.
5. Confirm whether the Plan should remain focused on Cowes and Northwood or begin exploratory dialogue on a wider Cowes Peninsula geography involving Gurnard and, if appropriate, East Cowes.
6. Agree the first three to five pilot workstreams, likely to include the Economic Strategy and Investment Prospectus, Local Transport, Link and Place Plan, Maritime Heritage, Tourism and Learning Initiative, Green Spaces, Active Travel and Heritage Corridors programme, and the governance template.
7. Identify lead partners, supporting organisations, evidence needs, resource requirements, risks and early milestones for each pilot workstream.
8. Develop a public engagement plan so that residents, businesses, community organisations, young people and under-represented groups can help shape priorities before formal adoption.
9. Produce a revised version for consideration by Cowes Town Council and discussion with Isle of Wight Council and partner organisations.
10. Publish a six-month progress and learning review once the first workstreams have been tested.

Closing note. This draft should be treated as a starting point for collaborative refinement. Its value will depend on the quality of partner review, community engagement, evidence gathering and the willingness of local organisations to work together through a clear, transparent and place-based process.



Figure 2: Transformation sigil. The sigil symbolises the scheme's intended journey: from scattered local pressures and uncertainty, into shared order through governance and evidence, then into practical delivery, learning and lasting local legacy.