Cowes South & Northwood –Councillor's Report (John Nicholson)

October 2026

Building Civic Leadership through Place

With rising recognition on the potential role and local leadership that Town and Parish Councils can provide through following the Place Making Standards, Cowes is emerging from the ashes to pioneer how well joined-up governance could work through an organised and structured fractal framework.

We have a draft revised Place Plan, that more directly aligned with the Standards, written in more concise, straight forward terms, stating exactly what its purpose is and how it should be used to achieve strategic goals. Instead of trying to be a comprehensive Plan reaching in all directions and hard to pin down, this new version serves as a core document, a hub to a whole series of specific policies, strategies and plans that go into more detail, relevant to their subject, and align, in hierarchical order, with other relevant documents, like National Standards and IW Council Island wide Policies, Strategies, Plans, in a fractal manner.

The beauty of this system, is its simplicity of replication yet ability to deal with specific local concerns in a recognisably aligned manner. Understanding the International, British derived, Place Making Standards, it is plain to see that this is where they lead, if properly implemented, in spirit, rather than letter, resulting in a more inclusive, community focused, joined-up system of governance where influence can be led from bottom up as well as top down. This is part of the reason that Southampton University are so interested in the Cowes approach, which, already, in its infancy, at start, can be replicated to serve other locations on the Island to equally good effect and relevance. This demonstrates the potential and ease in which a complete Place Based Fractal Governance System for the Island could be set up. All it needs is for people to open their eyes and smell the coffee!

Connecting Cowes (and beyond)

Our Place Plan is known as Connecting Cowes, a brilliant name that that captures exactly what it is all about, and we are already making progress in doing just that. Now we have the right staff in the right numbers to start to build relationships and take a pro-active interest in the town and its surrounds. But, to do this sustainably we need a management structure to follow, and that is the process that we are slowly entering into. Without such a structure the Council will succumb to the vagaries of the inevitable political cycles and personalities. Having a management structure that allows for strategic planning, continuity, informed democratic debate and decision, considerate inclusion of other stakeholders in our area, to help plan a prosperous future for us all, is the basis of good governance.

If we can tie this in to run with how the IW Council are going to operate in developing Place Based relationships, and use our success as a replicable model for other areas, we are leading the way in not just connecting Cowes, but connecting the Island.

Uniting the Cowes Peninsula

The areas within the peninsula of Cowes are quite distinct from the rest of the Island and have a lot in common with each other. The same area used to be served by Cowes Urban District Council, a Council that made its own roads, and, as a boy, I remember, facilitated public services and amenities that we could only dream of today. There is no going back to those days, and, I expect, we would not want to, as the realities of modern times is quite different.

There is, however, a good case for greater cooperation between local Councils in the Cowes peninsula, focusing on common interests and character rather than the somewhat adversarial, even suspicious relationship that has evolved between us as isolated local authorities. The mechanism to enable this is, of course, the Place Plan. Northwood and Cowes were the first to see this and now Gurnard are asking about joining and, across the river, East Cowes could be willing to, at least, look at what the benefits of closer working together might bring.

A united Cowes Peninsula or North Medin, would ake us the largest democratic block on the Island, larger than Ryde!

John Nicholson, Town & Parish Councillor for Northwood & Cowes South
Place Plan Advisory Board Representative