

# East Cowes Town & Neighbourhood Plans

## **Town Plan 2021-2036**

Written by Martha James MRTPI and Daniel James

PLAN RESEARCH

# Table of Contents

Town Plan 2021-2036.....	1
1. Executive Summary.....	2
2. Survey methodology.....	3
3. Master planning.....	4
4. Cross-Medina travel.....	5
5. Cycle paths.....	7
6. Local shops and businesses.....	8
7. Waterfront regeneration.....	10
8. Parks and recreation.....	13
9. Housing.....	14
10. Employment.....	17
11. Tourism.....	18

## 1. Executive Summary

The East Cowes Town & Neighbourhood Plans are an opportunity for local residents to influence what happens in the town over the next fifteen years from 2021 to 2036. East Cowes Town Council created a forum for this purpose, including Town and unitary Councillors and representatives of local businesses and services as well as residents.

East Cowes is a gateway to the Isle of Wight, and so the town is the first impression of the Island for many of the visitors who are critical to our economy. The Town & Neighbourhood Plans reflect the pride that local people have in their community, and should be considered in any future decisions involving planning applications, infrastructure, economic regeneration and housing development.

These plans will be used alongside the Isle of Wight Council’s next Island Plan and must be derived from the views of the community, but also conform with the Island Plan’s strategic policies. The plans will set out a vision of what East Cowes will be like to live and work in over the next fifteen years, and how that vision can be achieved.

Not all matters in East Cowes are controlled or affected by the planning system, but where strategic plans and land allocations can make a difference, the Town & Neighbourhood Plans process has been designed to provide the input of local people into that system.

Before writing began, residents’ views were sought to make sure these plans say what the residents of East Cowes want them to say. This document compiles the wishes and concerns of local residents from 4,886 pages of survey data into a series of policies that form the East Cowes Town Plan. The strategic goals of the Town Plan are intended to inform the detailed policies within a forthcoming Neighbourhood Plan which will be put to local residents in a referendum.

## 2. Survey methodology

In August and September 2020, residents living within the East Cowes Town Council boundary were surveyed via a detailed seven-page anonymous questionnaire. This survey sought their input into Town and Neighbourhood Plans for the area. Questionnaires were printed and hand-delivered to an estimated 3850 separate households, and the survey was also available online on the [journeysurveys.com](https://www.journeysurveys.com) website.

There were 428 responses online and 270 responses on paper, for a total of 698 household responses and an estimated response rate of 18% of households in the town.

Postcodes of respondents were collected to indicate the geographical spread of households responding from different parts of the town. 571 respondents provided a complete, valid postcode (82%). Spreads for unique postcodes are shown in Figure 1 (online responses) and Figure 2 (printed responses).

Optionally, respondents could provide contact details in order to take part in the Town & Neighbourhood Plan process. A total of 97 individual residents provided these details, in addition to members of the Town & Neighbourhood Plan Forum previously set up by East Cowes Town Council.

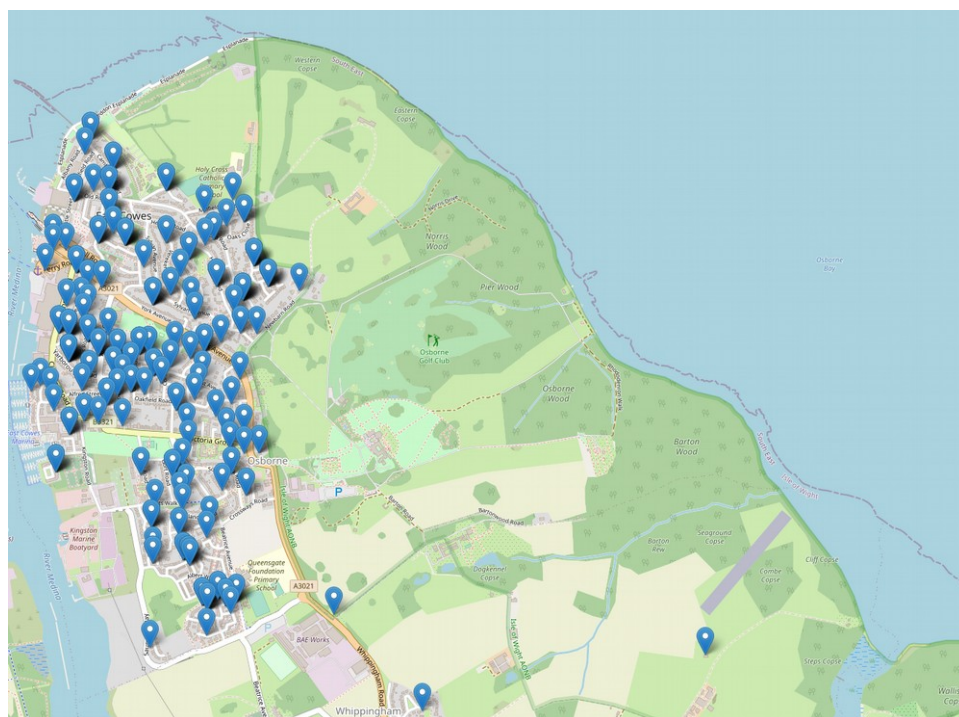


Figure 1: Geographical spread of online survey respondents



Figure 2: Geographical spread of printed survey respondents

### 3. Master planning

As a coastal community, East Cowes depends on robust sea defences to protect both homes and local businesses. The community has experienced multiple attempts to reshape the town and seafront over recent decades, none of which have been completed. Westland Aerospace originally proposed the Port Medina plan, which would have extended the seafront to include new urban and recreational areas built on reclaimed land, and a large additional marina on the Solent side of the town within a new harbour wall.

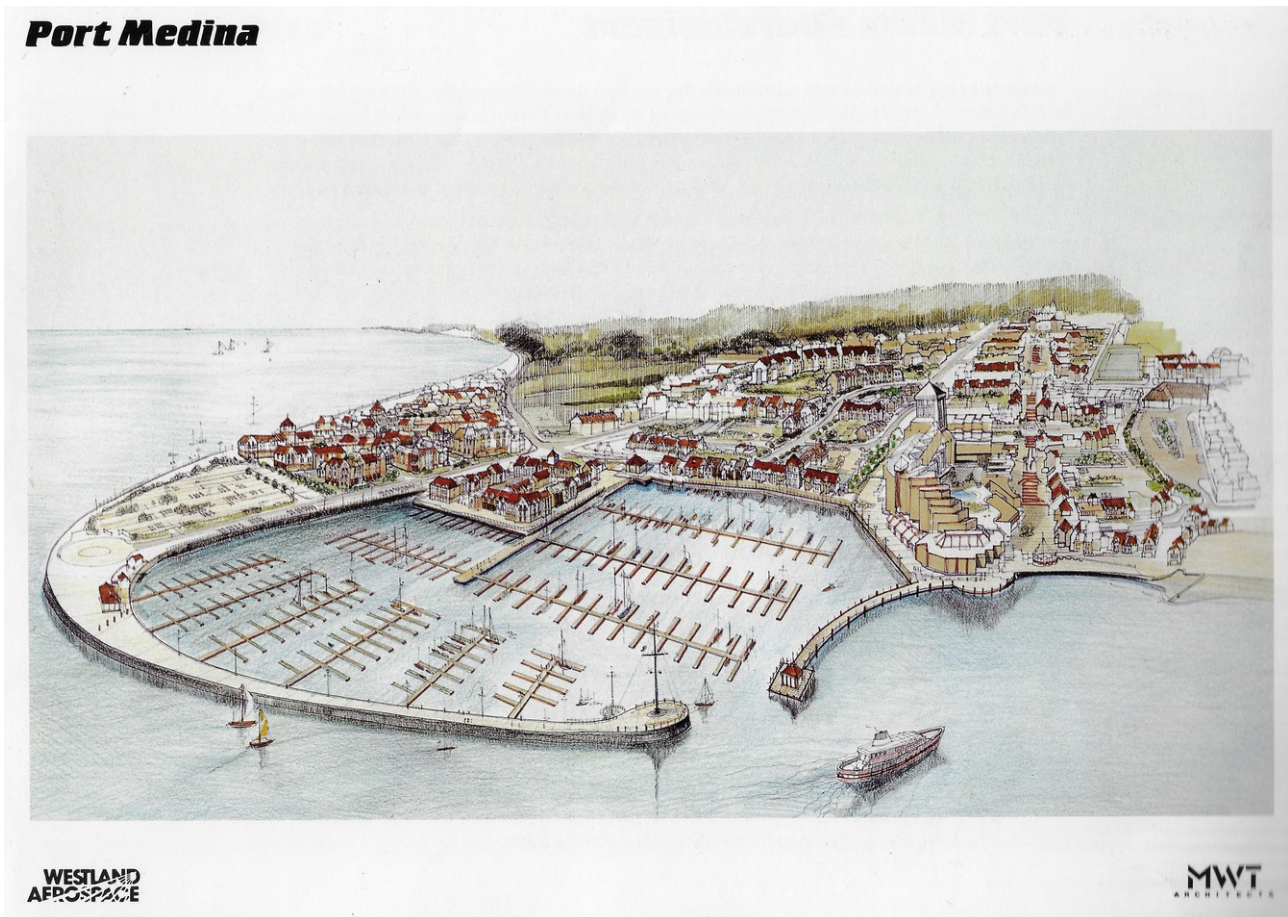


Figure 3: An artist's impression of the never-constructed Port Medina development. Courtesy of East Cowes Heritage Centre

Although East Cowes already has a marina on the River Medina, subsequent redevelopment proposals for the town continued the theme of a new marina with overnight accommodation for the owners of leisure craft. This type of development has become a standard pattern for coastal regeneration, with many similar examples to be found on the south coast of England and around the world.

Decades later, there has been no progress towards reorienting the town of East Cowes around an additional marina facing the Solent. The storage needs of yacht owners are already well-catered for in the region. The Royal Yacht Association lists over sixty active marinas in the United Kingdom on its website at <https://www.rya.org.uk/programmes/active-marina/Pages/active-marinas-list.aspx> not including smaller marinas and harbours, yacht clubs and other boating facilities. On the Isle of Wight alone, facilities listed by the Royal Yacht Association include [East Cowes Marina](#), [Cowes Harbour](#) and [Yarmouth Harbour](#). On the mainland side of the Solent, established marinas include [Town Quay](#)

[Marina Southampton](#), [Emsworth Marina](#), [Port of Poole Marina](#), [Chichester Marina](#), [Southsea Marina](#), [Port Solent Marina](#), [Gosport Marina](#) and [Swanwick Marina](#).

While the creation of new, large-scale marine leisure facilities on the East Cowes seafront remains a possibility, subject to significant investment and the agreement of the various landowners, relying on this development as the catalyst for regeneration has not been a successful model for the town.

**Policy A: The ‘new marina and apartments’ regeneration model for East Cowes will be deprecated in favour of smaller-scale locally responsive developments which address the needs of residents and opportunities created by them.**

#### 4. Cross-Medina travel



Figure 4: Word cloud representing answers to residents’ survey question 2: “What three things would you like to see improved in East Cowes?”

In the survey of East Cowes residents carried out in August and September 2020, the aspect of the town most often cited as in need of improvement was the Floating Bridge or ‘chain ferry’, mentioned by 211 out of 698 households which responded (30% of responses). In November 2020, the current vessel Floating Bridge no. 6 was out of service, having been used for less than three weeks since returning to use following a previous break-down. By February 2021 this vessel had been taken out of service on several further occasions.

While multiple attempts have been made to provide a reliable floating bridge service, the question of whether *even if working* it is the most appropriate form of cross-Medina travel has received less attention. The Isle of Wight Council charges £1.50 for pedestrians and cycles and more for vehicles, for floating bridge crossings which stop after midnight. Passengers must wait for the ferry to arrive and depart, another factor discouraging everyday travel and impulsive trips across the river.

In the survey of local residents, 596 households reported having daytime access to a vehicle (85% of responses) and 253 households reported having multiple vehicles (36% of responses). This high level

of vehicle ownership is perhaps not surprising given that there is no train service in East Cowes, and that the town is one of the Island's three mainland vehicle ferry embarkation points. Many survey respondents specifically mentioned choosing to live in East Cowes because of convenient car ferry access to the mainland.

Some survey respondents expressed a desire for a road bridge crossing the Medina, to support a more direct vehicle route compared to driving via Newport. Engineers Mott MacDonald wrote in a 2008 'Newport Traffic Model' report for the Isle of Wight Council that a Medina bridge could be built for around £40 million at 2007 prices, and could be carrying a peak of 900 vehicles per hour by the year 2020. This report did not state a precise location for the envisaged bridge. However, the town centres of the twin peninsulas of East and West Cowes are not well-suited to additional motor vehicle traffic, given the potential for conflict with mainland ferry traffic in East Cowes and the narrow streets of West Cowes. This implies the access for a road bridge would have been built on greenfield land south of the two towns, offering limited utility to pedestrians and residents of the town centres of these communities. One proposal was for a road bridge connecting Saunders Way near Whippingham with the Northwood area, two miles south of West Cowes. A report on a potential Medina crossing by Southampton University engineering students followed in 2011.

Given that the two town centres are roughly 140 metres apart at the location of the floating bridge, and that the usable river width upstream is far less than this due to the mooring of yachts in the Medina, a pedestrian and cycle bridge with a moving section, or a foot tunnel, could be a permanent solution to the problem of everyday access between the two towns. Provision could be made for emergency vehicles to cross the river via a foot bridge, using locking barriers to prevent misuse.

During the planning phase of this project, sensor and camera technology could be used to assess objectively the potential demand for bridge openings on both an hourly and seasonal basis.

**Policy B: The Town Council will continue to support research on a permanent pedestrian and cycle crossing between the town centres of East and West Cowes, with a design which would enable taller vessels to pass on demand.**

Creative solutions for the re-use of the current floating bridge might help recoup some of the public investment in the vessel, above its scrap value. Many survey respondents expressed a desire for new eating-out venues on the East Cowes waterfront. Other residents were concerned about over-development of the seafront adjacent to the Esplanade, which has suffered from significant land stability problems at the eastern end. Some survey respondents suggested resolving this conundrum with the mooring of a floating restaurant within the existing breakwater.

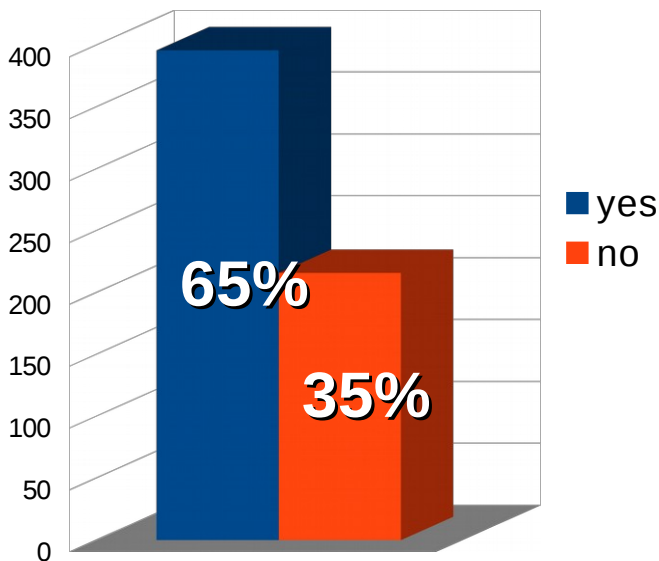
**Policy C: If Floating Bridge no. 6 cannot be made to work reliably, it should be re-purposed or sold rather than scrapped, once stakeholders have agreed on a replacement.**



*Figure 5: Floating Bridge no. 6. Photo courtesy of Michael Paler*

## 5. Cycle paths

Q25 Is there a need for more cycle paths in the area?



65% of residents' survey respondents answered that there was a need for more cycle paths in the East Cowes area. While some earlier cycle path designs have directed cyclists on to pavements and motor-traffic-free footpaths, leading to conflict with pedestrians, the recent development of faster electric bicycles and the re-emergence of cycle sport as a group leisure pursuit have made shared-use footpaths inadequate for current and future cycling needs.

The distinction between routes suitable for low-speed cycling for families with small children and faster cycling groups is not made in the current path network, which uses the same blue cycle signage for all routes.

Some survey respondents cited the need to direct cyclists away from the main A3021 (York Avenue/Whippingham Road) due to danger caused by heavy goods vehicles accessing the vehicle ferry terminal. With this ferry route also being a key access point for the Island's investment in cycle tourism, a safer alternative could be promoted.

There is an established 'Round the Island' cycle route through the town from the Floating Bridge, along Clarence Road, Beatrice Avenue and Alverstone Road towards Wootton Bridge, but it has no apparent cycle provision other than signage. This route crosses the A3021 awkwardly at the Priory School/Folly Lane junction in Whippingham, while the southern section of the route in Alverstone Road has a national 60mph speed limit despite being narrow. There is currently no section of this cycle route connecting to the Newport cycleway via Seaclose until it reaches Wootton Bridge, which would create a 2.4 mile detour each way for East Cowes residents using the signposted route for commuting to work or school in Newport.

The existing Round the Island route passes 0.6 miles from the north end of East Cowes Road, along Alverstone Road, where a spur added to the route could connect towards Island Harbour and the existing cycle path between Newport and Ryde. This upgraded route out of East Cowes could offer an

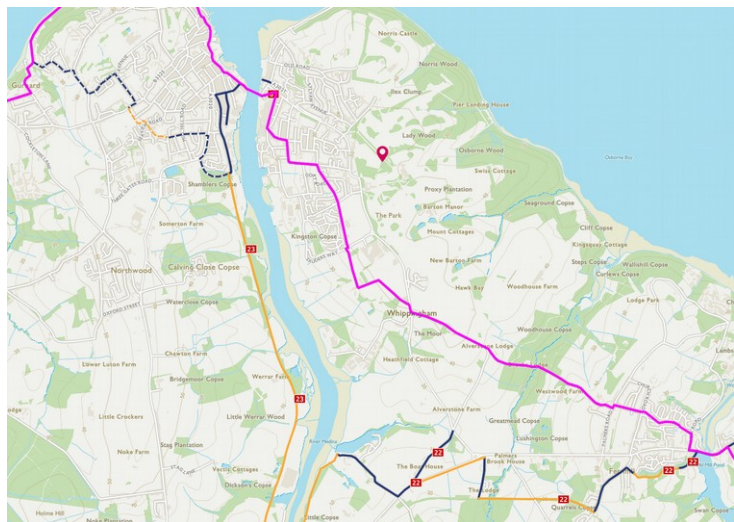


Figure 6: The popular Round the Island cycle route does not connect to the Newport cycleway until Wootton Bridge. Map data courtesy of Sustrans/OpenStreetMap

alternative more suitable for faster electric bike and sporting cyclists to the cycle path shared with pedestrians from West Cowes to Newport. It could also offer a safer cycle route for East Cowes residents and visitors, of particular utility until a reliable cycle crossing of the Medina is available.

While the funding for complete new cycle paths might be harder to obtain, the existing roads on the Round the Island route could be upgraded at minimal cost using prominent road markings and coloured tarmac when surfaces are renewed. Junction upgrades for better cyclist visibility could be planned as part of normal highway maintenance and improvements.

**Policy D: The Town Council will support new and improved cycle routes including upgrade of the ‘Round the Island’ route to provide safe junctions, reduced speed limits, clear road markings and a more direct connection to Newport.**

## 6. Local shops and businesses

Many respondents to the residents’ survey expressed concern about the lack of diversity of shops in East Cowes town centre, unpredictable business closing times, and the number of empty shops. While retailers nationally have been struggling under the twin onslaughts of online competition and the coronavirus pandemic, East Cowes suffers from the additional challenges of incomplete regeneration attempts, a one-way road system which doesn’t encourage stopping in the town, and an atypical high street layout with little coherence.

While the Waitrose store was listed by respondents as a key asset of the town, it is poorly integrated with the town centre, having a large blank wall facing towards local businesses located between Well Road and Link Road. The town centre’s business capacity and critical mass have also been compromised by ad-hoc residential conversion of some ground-floor retail premises and a scattering of new-build residential dwellings recently created among the commercial premises.



*Figure 7: East Cowes town centre is the only location on the Island with a significant quantity of commercial buildings near a vehicle ferry. Photo courtesy of Michael Paler*

East Cowes town centre has a strategic advantage in that it is the only location on the Island where a significant number of available business premises are located directly adjacent to a vehicle ferry terminal. Some empty buildings in the town centre could be repurposed as live/work units.



The Isle of Wight Council owns substantial office and warehouse space in the town, much of which is vacant at the time of writing, since its acquisition of the Venture Quays site.



*Figure 8: The local authority is now the owner of vacant office and warehouse space in East Cowes. Photo courtesy of Michael Paler*

For businesses which buy and sell online, parcel dispatch times can be critical in providing good customer service. Red Funnel's courier partner Acclaim Logistics has its parcel depot in West Cowes, while the Red Jet service which serves that town no longer carries parcels, so a package sent from East Cowes might cross the Medina twice on its way to the mainland. Other couriers are located outside of the town centre, requiring another van trip. Support for existing traders and new business start-ups in East Cowes could be enabled by making provision for a parcel and pallet drop off and collection point near the Red Funnel terminal. This provision could support the existing hourly delivery service to and from the mainland.

**Policy E: The Town Council, with support from outside agencies, will promote local employment through support for existing business and start-up units, and parcel & pallet logistics in the town centre.**

One finding of the residents' survey was that there are few reasonably-priced food retail options in the town, leaving residents on lower incomes with little choice but to travel to Newport in search of better deals.

While almost all residents reported using local shops, the modal average spend of survey respondents in these local shops was £20 to £50 per week. Responses indicated a lack of independent food retailers specialising in fresh produce, such as fruit, vegetables or baked goods in East Cowes.

The strategic location of the town with its ferry connection means that it should be possible to attract both mainland and local traders to a weekly open-air market, providing fresh food for both health and economic benefits to the town. King's Square, between Waitrose and the Well Road car park, could offer a town centre location for a regular market, subject to the support of the Isle of Wight Council.



*Figure 9: King's Square outside Waitrose could provide a location for a weekly open-air market, with this car park immediately adjacent. Photo courtesy of Michael Paler*

**Policy F: The Town Council will work with local businesses to develop a weekly open-air market selling fresh food and local produce in the town centre.**

## 7. Waterfront regeneration

Many residents expressed in the survey that their enjoyment and appreciation of the seafront area had been compromised by lack of action to clear the coastal landslip since it occurred in 2014. Some respondents pointed out that recent, larger landslips in other areas of the Island, such as at Totland Bay, had already been mitigated via the construction of new paths.

77% of survey respondents reported that they no longer walked as often in the area, compared to before the landslip.

Warning signs in the area of the landslip mean that some residents reported being

afraid to walk in the woodland area any longer, especially those with impaired mobility who fear falling over and injuring themselves. A community group of volunteers is currently working to make the woodland safer and more accessible, with ambitions to create a wooden walkway through this area.



*Figure 10: A creative solution might be needed to fund removal of the seafront landslip. Photo courtesy of Michael Paler*

Due to the condition of the long retaining wall adjacent to the woodland on the seafront, the metalwork of which appears to be made from old railway track and is now severely rusted, there is limited prospect for leisure development at the eastern end of the Esplanade until such time as ground stability is addressed. The potentially high capital cost of that work means that development of the area is unlikely to fund stability improvements on a Section 106 contribution basis, creating a chicken-and-egg problem which is likely to result in no stability improvements and no leisure development in the foreseeable future.

This stalemate might suit the survey respondents who would prefer that the area was left wild, but it does not benefit local residents who are currently unable to access the parts of the East Cowes beach that they report as most favoured, towards the Norris Castle estate to the east.

A compromise might be for the Town Plan to enable a limited amount of commercial activity at the more stable western end or the centre of the Esplanade, with revenue contributing towards the cost of removing landslip soil and reinstating footpaths through the woodland area. In the absence of funding to rebuild the retaining wall, it might have to be accepted that the wooded area will in all likelihood subside at some point in the future, ruling out this eastern area for structures such as beach huts which could prove dangerous in that event.



*Figure 11: Limited commercial activity on the more stable land of the seafront could provide amenities for local people and funds for restoration of the area. Photo courtesy of Michael Paler*

Several residents reported persistent smell nuisance in the beach area, particularly at low tide, although some reported that it was caused by rotting seaweed, while others believed that it was caused by a sewage outfall pipe. This issue would have to be resolved in order to attract and retain investment in leisure or hospitality businesses in the area.

A suggestion made by local residents in the post-survey Town Plan consultation was to create an open-air events area, with mains water and electricity connections available for mobile facilities such as

festival-style catering trailers. These events and the associated mobile businesses could deliver seasonal amenities and revenue without the construction of additional buildings in the seafront area.

**Policy G: The Town Council will research the use of a limited area for commercial leisure and hospitality activity on the the seafront, in order to provide amenities for local residents and generate revenue towards the cost of clearing the landslip. Loss of any open space to development which would compromise public amenity will be resisted by the Town Council.**

Several residents requested that the toilet block combined with a pumping station at the western end of the Esplanade should be refurbished and re-opened because it is too far for them to walk to the next set of public toilets, beyond the Shoreside Cafe. Other respondents expressed the view that the western toilet block should either be re-opened or demolished. Adjacent to this toilet block is an under-utilised area of block paving which could be used as a dinghy park, potentially freeing up the existing tennis court on the seafront which is currently used for boat storage. Alternatively, it could become a boat landing area serving a refurbished Barracks building with public toilets. This area already includes the under-used Bell's Landing stage and a slipway opening in the sea wall, facing the calmer waters within the breakwater. A local project to create a new boat slipway on the seafront is also in progress.



*Figure 12: The little-used area adjacent to the closed-down toilets at the town end of the Esplanade could become a boat landing area or a new dinghy park. Photo courtesy of Michael Paler*

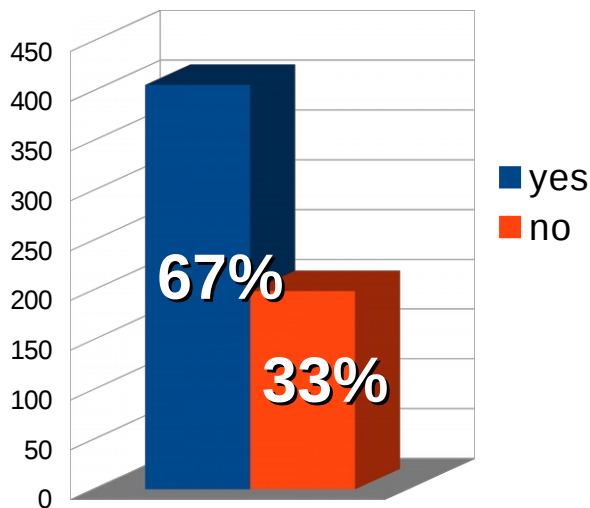
**Policy H: The Town Council will support research into the location of an improved dinghy park, and work to ensure public toilets are available at the western end of the seafront.**

While an area of car parking exists on the Esplanade at present, there would appear to be little specific provision made for residents with impaired mobility, those who need vehicle access to this public amenity area the most.

**Policy I: The Town Council will ensure vehicle parking reserved for ‘blue badge’ holders is available close to the seafront.**

### 8. Parks and recreation

Q24 Is there a need for more recreational facilities in the town?



While residents who responded to the survey frequently cited their appreciation for the public parks in East Cowes, they also mentioned a general lack of recreational facilities since a works club which used to serve the town was demolished as part of a previous regeneration scheme.

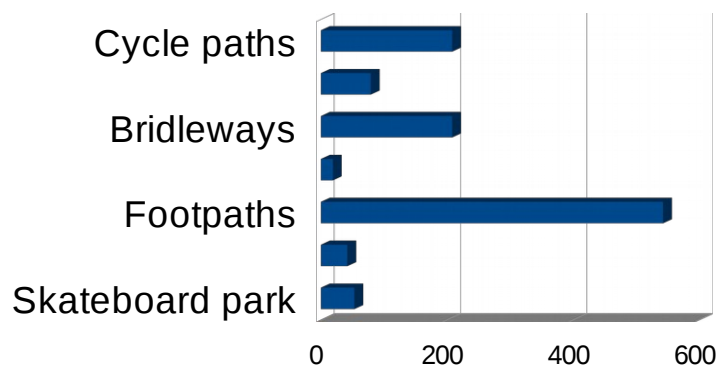
Popular requests in the survey included using the Town Hall to provide more entertainments and activities, and the provision of a seawater swimming pool, lido or pontoon for adults and older children, with changing facilities, subject to water quality issues being resolved. An indoor sports centre providing all-year-round recreation, fitness and wellness to local residents was also an aspiration for the town.

The vacant former Studio School buildings at the Jubilee Recreation Ground were cited as a venue which could provide an indoor recreational

facility for local residents.

**Policy J: The Town Council will support research by local community groups into potential sites for open-air swimming with changing rooms and an indoor sports centre in the town.**

Q23 Do you use any of the existing recreational facilities in the town?



In the survey of residents, footpaths, cycle paths and bridleways were by far the most commonly reported facilities used. Perhaps because of the East Cowes peninsula being dominated by the three private estates of Norris Castle, Osborne House and Barton Manor, there are far fewer formal rights of way in the area than is normal for the Island. Sheets 2 and 5 of the Isle of Wight definitive rights of

way map show only two formal footpaths south of the town, the short path 25 to the east of Whippingham Church, and path 24 south from Whippingham Church to Folly Works. There are no formal bridleways shown on the definitive map within the East Cowes area at all.

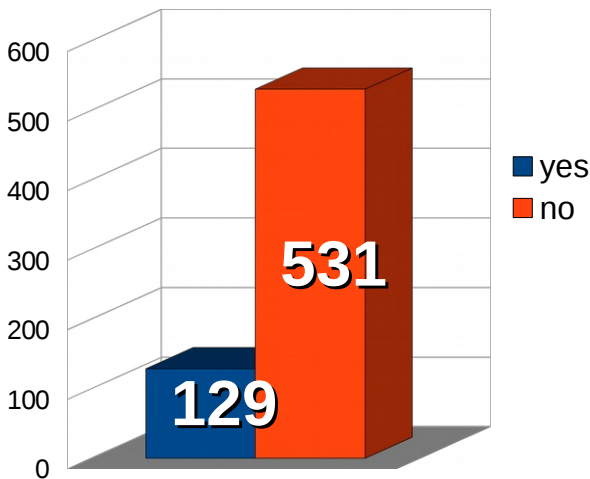
**Policy K: The Town Council will support the development of new routes for signposted footpaths and bridleways to better connect the town to the surrounding countryside.**

While East Cowes parks and streets have benefited from avenues and groves of trees planted since Victorian times, as reflected in local road names, these trees have not always been replaced with similar specimens when they reached the end of their natural lives.

**Policy L: The Town Council will work to reinstate historic patterns of tree planting by replacing trees lost from public parks and streets with species of equivalent quality.**

## 9. Housing

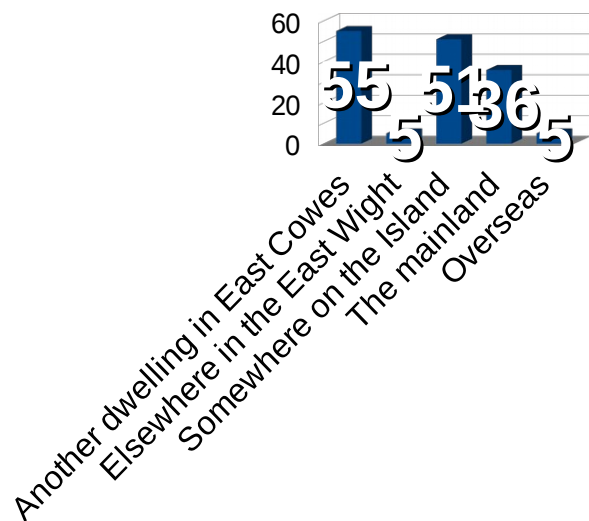
Q8 Is there anyone in your household in need of alternative accommodation?



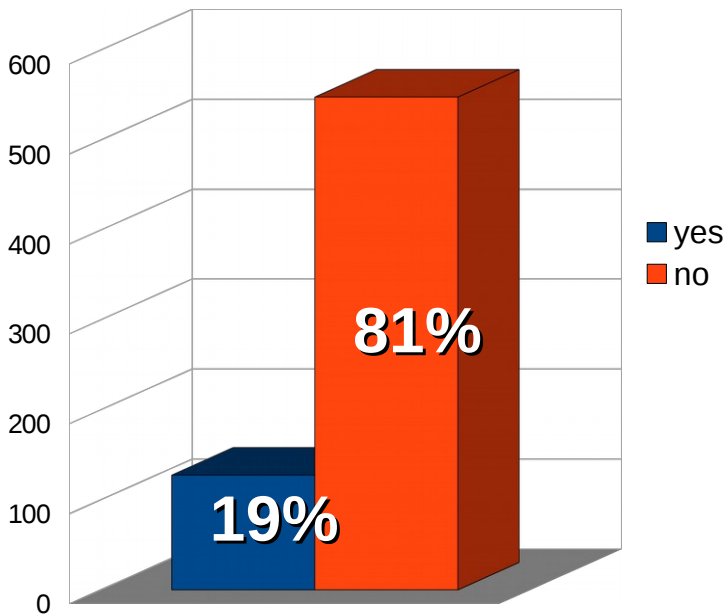
20% of the households which answered Question 8 in the residents' survey reported a member of the household being in housing need. Extrapolated from the 698 households who responded to the survey to all 3850 households in the town, the reported level of housing need would be equivalent to 712 households in the town seeking some form of alternative accommodation.

The majority of respondents in housing need were seeking housing on the Island (73% of responses), with remaining in East Cowes the single most popular option (36% of responses) in answer to Question 8b.

Q8b If you answered 'Yes', where does this person need to move to?



**Q9 Do you believe there is a need for more housing in East Cowes?**

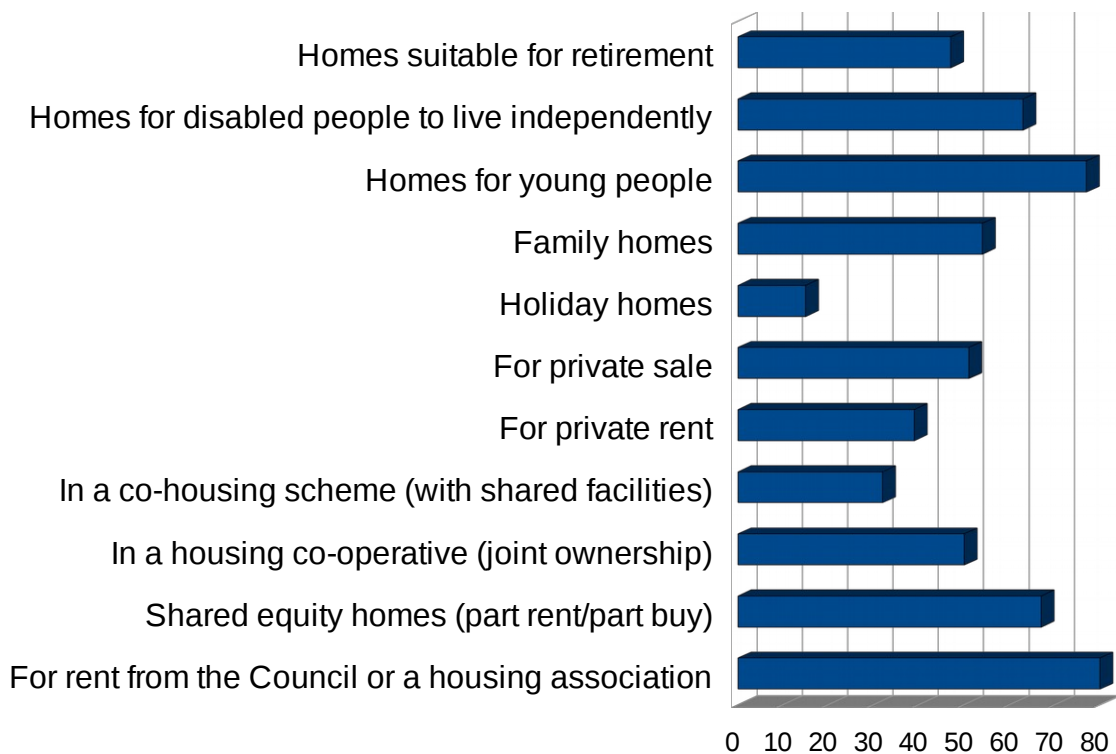


The number of respondents who believe there is a need for more housing in the town (19%) was consistent with the number of households seeking alternative accommodation (20%).

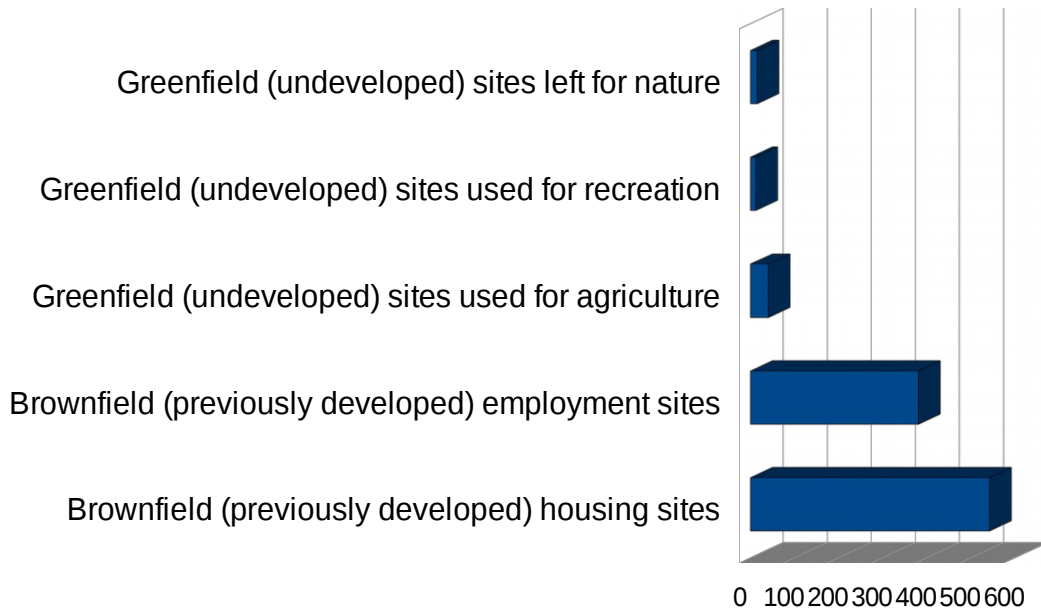
With some residents seeking larger properties and others wishing to downsize, the conclusion that additional house building would be required in order to meet housing need does not necessarily follow from patterns of local demand.

In response to Question 9b, homes for young people and homes for rent from the Council or a housing association were the most popular type of new housing sought. Homes for disabled people to live independently and shared equity homes were a close second.

**Q9b If you answered 'Yes', should this be:**

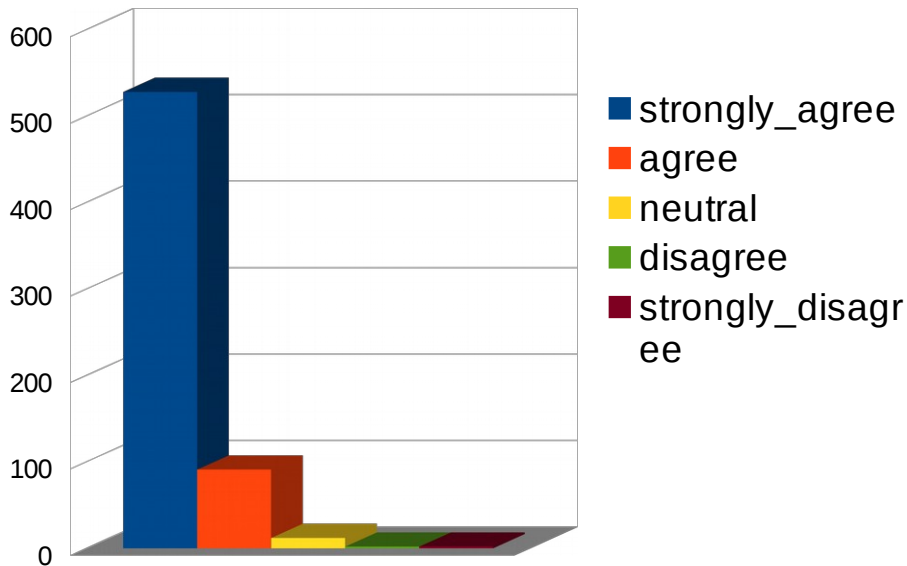


Q10 If future housing development was required, where should this be sited?



Respondents to Question 10 expressed a clear preference for new housing to be located on brownfield sites (93% of all responses). 97% of respondents either agreed or strongly agreed that the protection of the countryside around the town is important.

Q17 Do you agree or disagree that the protection of the countryside around the town is important?

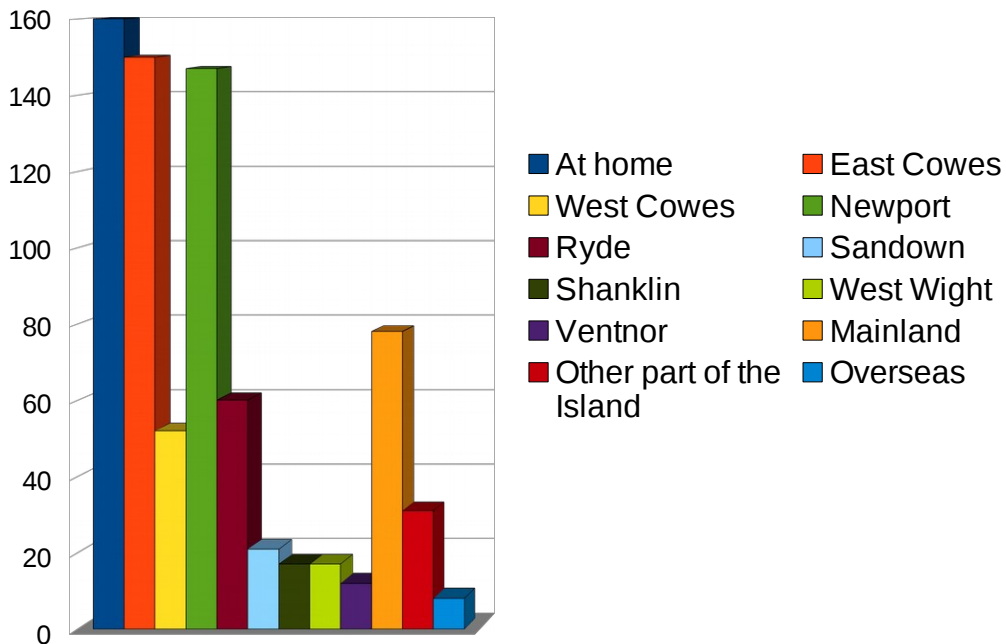


**Policy M: The Town Council will support the allocation of land for housing young people and disabled people, including for rent or shared equity purchase, on brownfield sites within the settlement boundary.**



## 10. Employment

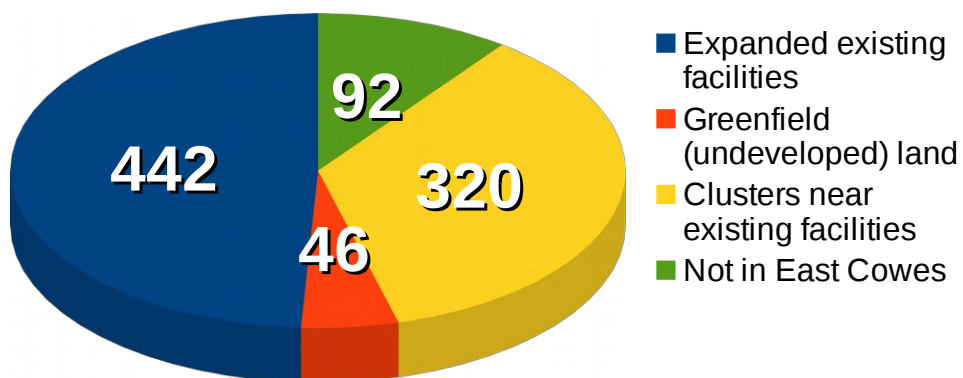
Q5 Where are your main places of work?



Respondents to Question 5 were not empowered to distinguish whether they were working from home as normal employment or self-employment practice, were working from home at the time of the survey due to temporary Covid-19 measures, or had family responsibilities at home. Responses to a supplementary question Q5b indicated that the majority of home workers do so occasionally.

While most respondents working outside the home did so locally in East Cowes, Newport was a close second. More respondents indicated that they worked on the mainland or in Ryde than indicated that they worked in West Cowes.

Q6 Where should new employment sites be located?

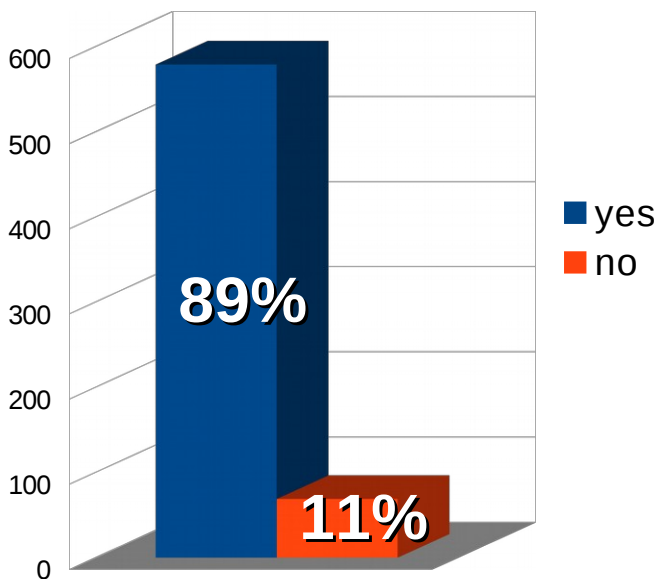


Respondents to Question 6 indicated a clear preference for employment sites being located with or near existing facilities. More respondents offered the opinion that there should be no new employment sites in East Cowes than supported new employment buildings on greenfield sites.

**Policy N: The Town Council will support the allocation of brownfield land for employment use adjacent to or in clusters near existing employment sites.**

### 11. Tourism

Q30 Do you think it is a good idea to encourage more tourism in East Cowes?



While there was strong support among survey respondents for the development of tourism generally (89% in favour), question 30b enabled residents to be more specific about the forms of tourism which they believed would be most appropriate for increasing revenue in the town. The top three options supported by residents were royal heritage, encouraging visitors to use local facilities, and marine heritage.

**Policy O: The Town Council will support closer links between Osborne House and the town centre in order to increase tourist spend in the local economy.**

**Policy P: The Town Council, working with local stakeholders, will support the retention of the Classic Boat Museum in East Cowes and the further development of marine heritage as a tourist attraction.**

Q30b Which opportunities for developing tourism revenue do you think are appropriate in the town?

