



Being Prepared for Business

*A proposal for a Discovery Phase
to Lake, Sandown and Shanklin Parish Councils*

12 July 2026

Overview

The Bay Business Association (BBA) is seeking a total of £9,000 (£3,000 from each of the three parish councils) to fund a six-month Discovery Phase with two objectives:

1. Identify and evidence specific areas of need in relation to young people, small businesses, and employment opportunities in the Bay.
2. In collaboration with Laura Cansdale, identify relevant funding streams for impactful responses to those needs.

This work will be delivered over six months. A short summary report will be circulated to all three councils at the end of each month, with a full Discovery Report delivered at the end of the six months.

This proposal sits within the strategic framework established by the Bay Area Place Plan, and responds to the challenges identified in the '15 Years' demographic analysis. It also aligns with wider strategies, including the 'Solent Growth and Prosperity Strategy', and the 'Isle of Wight Growth and Prosperity Strategy'.

What We Are Working Towards

The long-term ambition of this work is a Bay where businesses can start, grow and thrive; where young people have the skills, confidence and opportunity to build careers locally; and where the local economy is healthy enough to attract new investment and hold on to the people and businesses it develops.

To move in that direction, two things need to happen alongside each other. The business community needs to be supported, particularly in those early years when the risk of failure is at its greatest. And there needs to be a pipeline of people who are genuinely ready for work: skilled, confident, and with reasons to stay in the area. The relationship between these two things matters. Businesses are more likely to grow, and to stay, when they can find good people. Young people are more likely to remain when there are good businesses to work for.

There is also an opportunity worth remembering: that The Bay could, in time, become an attractive place on the Island for young people who want to start their own venture. The combination of a distinctive, beautiful place, a thriving business community, and the right kind of support could help make that possible.

This project is about exploring what that support might look like, and how to build it carefully, on solid foundations.

What We Already Know

The BBA, as part of the Building the Bay steering group, has already carried out a questionnaire of Bay businesses. That work, alongside informal conversations at numerous networking events over an extended period, has built up a picture of a business community facing real pressure, particularly in the early years, when trading in this area can feel isolating and the support available is inconsistent.

This early research has also surfaced some recurring themes: businesses find it difficult to recruit people with the right skills and attitude; young people want to stay in the area but cannot easily see a way into meaningful work; and a sense that the Bay's genuine strengths - its environment and community - are not being used as well as they could be.

Why Start With a Discovery Phase?

When challenges are visible and pressing, the instinct is often to act quickly. But moving too fast, without a clear picture of what is actually needed, can mean well-intentioned effort lands in the wrong place. This Discovery Phase is about making sure that does not happen here.

The questions it will seek to answer are practical ones. What do local businesses most need? What is preventing young people in the 16-25 age group, including those who are NEET, from finding work in the area? What support already exists, and where are the genuine gaps? What funding might be available, and what would it take to access it?

Investing time in those questions at the outset is the best way to protect the investment the parish councils are making, and to ensure that whatever comes next is built on evidence rather than assumption.

Areas of Enquiry

The following four themes represent our current hypotheses, based on information gathered so far:

1 :: Preparing young people for work

There is strong anecdotal evidence that young people aged 16-25 in the Bay, including those who are NEET, lack access to basic employability support: CV writing, interview technique, and the communication and resilience skills that employers are looking for. We will test that assumption through direct engagement with young people, local schools, and employers, to assess what provision currently exists and where the gaps are.

2 :: Supporting small businesses

The BBA's core membership is small and micro businesses. We will ask them directly what they need, whether that is help navigating business rates, support finding and developing staff, improved AI literacy, or something else entirely.

3 :: Mentoring and peer support

There is a working hypothesis that a structured mentoring programme could deliver meaningful results at a relatively low cost. This could be through connecting young people with business owners, or connecting newer businesses with more experienced ones. We will test whether that appetite exists locally, and whether there are larger businesses or anchor institutions that might contribute expertise or funding to such a programme.

4 :: Making the Bay a better place to do business

Attracting and retaining businesses requires understanding what they need from the place itself. We will gather that evidence, feeding into longer-term work that aligns with Place Plan priorities.

It is important to note that these themes are starting points for enquiry, not predetermined conclusions. The research may confirm them, adjust them, or point towards priorities that have not yet surfaced. That openness is a feature of the Discovery Phase, not a weakness.

Identifying Funding

Alongside evidencing need, the Discovery Phase will produce a mapped and prioritised funding pipeline, in collaboration with Laura Cansdale. Her knowledge of the funding landscape is a significant asset to this project, and the intent is to support and build on her work, not to duplicate it. Together, we will identify funding opportunities appropriate to each subsequent phase of this particular project.

One of the key outcomes of this Discovery Phase is the report we will produce, which will contain the research and evidence needed to support future funding applications.

The Bigger Picture

The Discovery Phase is the first step in a longer programme, one that will be shaped by what this work finds.

We anticipate four broad stages:

1. This Discovery Phase, to evidence need and map the funding landscape.
2. Early Action Phase, using smaller, short-term funding to deliver immediate benefits such as training courses, employability workshops, and practical business support.
3. Community Resilience Phase, drawing on larger programme funding to build skills, networks and long-term business confidence across The Bay.
4. Place and Infrastructure Phase, working on the longer-term, structural conditions that make the Bay genuinely competitive as a place to live, work and invest.

Each stage will include identifying the resource needed to manage the next one. The intention is that parish funding is needed only at the outset - subsequent stages are sustained through the grants and partnerships identified along the way.

Practicalities

Cost: £9000 (£3000 per parish)

Timescale: Six months

Total days: 36 (average 6 days per month)

Deliverables:

- Monthly summary reports, circulated to all three parish councils.
- Final Discovery Report at the end of month six, setting out findings, recommendations, and a prioritised funding pipeline for subsequent phases.

Contact

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