

3. The strategy for sustainable development

- 3.1.1. The Dorset Council Local Plan's overarching objective is to contribute to achieving sustainable development. This means pursuing economic, social and environmental aims in mutually supportive ways.
- 3.1.2. Using the Dorset Council Local Plan in planning decisions will influence future patterns of development to help make Dorset more sustainable. This chapter proposes the strategic approach that will enable sustainable growth to meet the needs of Dorset up to 2043. It establishes the broad strategy for this growth, aiming to minimise the need to travel and protect the important environment of Dorset.

3.2. The Strategy for Dorset

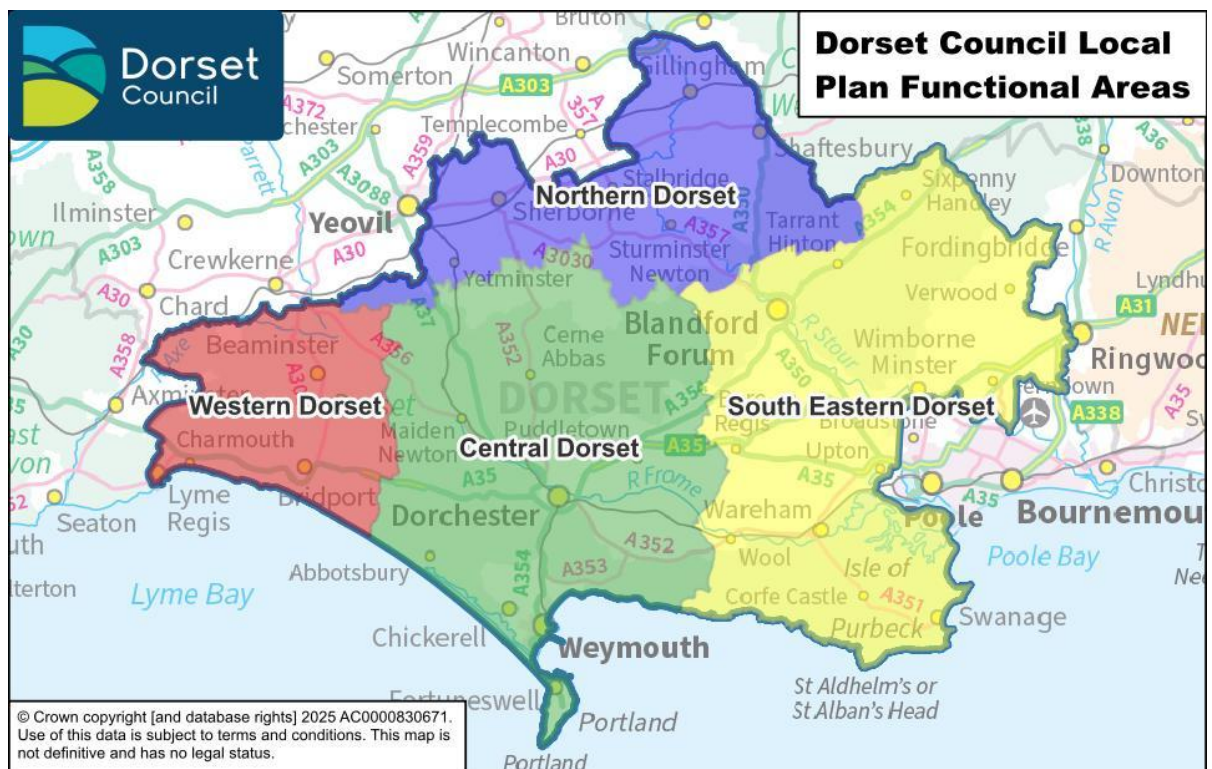
- 3.2.1. The Dorset Council area is predominantly rural, containing many environmentally sensitive places which we need to protect and enhance for their wildlife and scenic beauty. Many of these places are significant both nationally and internationally, including the Jurassic Coast World Heritage site and protected habitats sites.
- 3.2.2. The plan sets out how we will deliver growth across Dorset to benefit those living here, focusing on the most sustainable locations that minimise the need for travel. Different parts of Dorset are influenced by different physical, economic and social influences. Our development strategy takes account of these local influences by recognising that different parts of Dorset function separately from each other³. The four broad functional areas across Dorset are represented in Figure 3.1.
 - The South Eastern area. The parts of Dorset that fringe the built-up area of Bournemouth and Poole and extends to the Isle of Purbeck and northwards towards the Wiltshire border. This area of Dorset has the strongest relationship with the built-up areas of Bournemouth and Poole. The influence of Bournemouth and Poole is stronger in the areas within the Green Belt, such as Wimborne and Ferndown but weaker further away in places such as Blandford and Swanage.
 - The Central area. This focuses on the corridor between Portland, Weymouth and Dorchester but includes the settlements close to them. Weymouth is the

³ [DCLP Jan 2021 Functional areas background paper](#)

largest town in the Dorset Council area and its links to both Portland and Dorchester are strong.

- The Northern area. This area focuses on the strategic rail and road corridor between Yeovil in Somerset and Salisbury in Wiltshire. In Dorset, this corridor contains a number of market towns including Gillingham, Shaftesbury, and Sherborne.
- The Western area. This part of Dorset functions separately from the majority of Dorset due to its largely rural nature and its lack of connectivity. The area is dominated by the town of Bridport but also includes Beaminster and Lyme Regis.

Figure 3.1: Functional areas in Dorset



- 3.2.3. Taking account of the role and function of the existing settlements, the strategy outlined here for consultation would lead to growth around the towns and some of the larger villages, reflecting accessibility to facilities. Significant growth is proposed at some of the most accessible locations, and where there are opportunities to invest and deliver services and facilities efficiently alongside new development. All the strategies that are presented in this consultation take account of the hierarchy of settlements across the Dorset Council area.

Settlement Hierarchy

- 3.2.4. We have ranked the towns and villages in Dorset as to their relative sustainability, based on the size of settlements, their facilities, and the travel time to the closest higher order town by public transport and by car.⁴ This is set out in the settlement hierarchy background paper that was prepared as part of our January 2021 Local Plan consultation. A summary of the position of the towns and villages in the different 'Tiers' of the hierarchy is set out below. Growth will be focussed on those settlements listed.
- 3.2.5. Tier 1 – Large built-up areas: In South Eastern Dorset this comprises the parts of the Bournemouth and Poole conurbation that cross into Dorset, and in Central Dorset, the county town of Dorchester and the coastal town of Weymouth.
- South Eastern Dorset: Upton and Corfe Mullen connected with the built-up area of Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole.
 - Central Dorset: Dorchester and Weymouth
- 3.2.6. Tier 2 – Towns and other main settlements: This comprises the market and coastal towns across Dorset and 'other main settlements' within the Green Belt and close to the large built-up area of Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole.
- South Eastern Dorset: Blandford, Ferndown and West Parley, St Leonards and St Ives, Swanage, Wimborne Minster and Colehill, Verwood, West Moors and Wareham.
 - Central Dorset: Chickerell, and the Portland settlements of Castletown, Chiswell, Easton, Fortuneswell, Grove; Southwell, Wakeham and Weston
 - Northern Dorset: Gillingham, Shaftesbury, Sherborne, Sturminster Newton and Stalbridge.
 - Western Dorset: Beaminster, Lyme Regis and Bridport.
- 3.2.7. Tier 3 – Larger Villages: These are typically larger villages which generally have a population of around 500 and a reasonable level of facilities enabling some day-to-day needs to be met locally. These are listed in the Figure 3.2.
- 3.2.8. All other areas are either rural in character or comprise small villages/hamlets that do not have a sufficient services or facilities for everyday needs to be met

⁴ dorsetcouncil.gov.uk/documents/35024/290430/DCLP-Jan-2021-settlement-hierarchy.pdf/14d7fb06-89b3-f76c-feba-e1fda4508ad0

locally. These areas are unlikely to be suitable for growth in line with National Policy⁵.

Figure 3.2: Settlements within Tier 3 of the Hierarchy

South Eastern	Central	Northern	Western
Aldersholt	Broadmayne & West Knighton	Bishop's Caundle	Burton Bradstock
Bere Regis	Cerne Abbas	Bradford Abbas	Broadwindsor
Bovington	Charlton Down	Bourton	Charmouth
Charlton Marshall	Charminster	Child Okeford	Mosterton
Corfe Castle	Crossways & Moreton Station	Fontmell Magna	Salway Ash
Cranborne	Maiden Newton & Higher Frome	Hazelbury Bryan	
Harmans Cross	Vauchurch	Iwerne Minster	
Langton Matravers	Milborne St Andrew	Marnhull	
Lytchett Matravers	Milton Abbas	Motcombe	
Lytchett Minster	Piddletrenthide	Okeford Fitzpaine	
Pimperne	Portesham	Shillingstone	
Sandford	Puddletown	Thornford	
Sixpenny Handley	Winterbourne Abbas & Winterbourne Steepleton	Yetminster	
Stoborough	Winfrith Newburgh		
Stourpaine			
Sturminster Marshall			
Three Legged Cross			
West Lulworth			
Winterborne Kingston			
Winterborne Stickland			
Winterborne Whitechurch			
Wool & East Burton			

⁵ National Planning Policy Framework, December 2024, paragraph 110.

New Settlements

- 3.2.9. Our proposed approach to meeting growth needs is focused on allocating new sites for housing alongside a new, more flexible strategy for delivering homes on smaller sites. This will deliver growth in the short and medium term, but we are also considering a longer-term strategy for meeting needs. This longer-term approach will explore opportunities for new or significantly expanded settlements. Due to the scale of the development being considered, it is likely to be at least 10 years before any new homes are delivered.

Question 3: The proposed settlement hierarchy lists the towns and villages that will be the focus for new homes. Are there other settlements where we should plan for new homes? Do you have any comments on whether a settlement is in the right Tier or not?

3.3. South Eastern Dorset area

- 3.3.1. The South Eastern Dorset area interacts strongly with the towns of Bournemouth and Poole both economically and from a housing market perspective. The towns of Wimborne and Ferndown are desirable places to live and provide important services and employment opportunities. There is significant demand within the area for additional employment space and homes. The affordability of housing is a major issue.
- 3.3.2. Much of the area is extremely environmentally sensitive, with many areas having multiple habitats and species, as well as landscape designations. The South Eastern functional area supports significant areas of national and international importance for nature conservation, notably the Dorset heathlands and including Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs), Special Protection Areas (SPAs), Special Areas of Conservation (SACs) and Ramsar sites. This restricts the suitable land for development and places mitigation requirements on the development that does take place.
- 3.3.3. Parts of the area are designated as National Landscapes, including the Dorset National Landscape in the south of the area and the Cranborne Chase National Landscape in the north. In addition, the coast is designated a heritage coast and part of Jurassic Coast World Heritage Site. The coast is at risk of erosion and land instability, and some of the settlements are at significant risk of fluvial and surface water flooding.

- 3.3.4. The South East Dorset Green Belt is also a consideration in this area. Release of Green Belt will help to meet the needs of the area, linking in closely to the towns of Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole. However, traffic congestion is a major issue despite the A31 trunk road running through the area. This means that encouraging a shift to active forms of travel and public transport is important.
- 3.3.5. Towns close to the conurbation will continue to grow to reflect their function as service centres for the wider area. Further away from the conurbation, towns such as Blandford and Verwood will be the focus for growth for both housing and employment supported by the network of larger villages.

Question 4: Do you have any comments on the proposed strategy for the south eastern area?

3.4. Central Dorset area

- 3.4.1. The Dorchester – Weymouth – Portland corridor acts as a significant economic hub for the central part of Dorset. These towns are supported by the centres of Chickerell and Crossways. The Dorset Innovation Park at Winfrith also creates a focus for continued growth.
- 3.4.2. The area sits within a particularly attractive environment that includes parts of the Dorset National Landscape and the Jurassic Coast World Heritage Site. There are multiple areas of national and international importance for nature conservation including large parts of Portland, the Chesil and the Fleet to the west of Weymouth, and Dorset Heathlands. Alongside the ecological assets, there are a significant number of important heritage assets including Maiden Castle which sits just to the south of Dorchester. Both Dorchester and Weymouth are affected by flood risk connected with the Rivers Frome and Wey. Weymouth is also particularly affected by the risks associated with sea level rise resulting from climate change.
- 3.4.3. The area has good rail connections to South East Dorset area and beyond, as well as Bristol. It also has good connections onto the trunk road network. However, the frequency and reliability of the rail connections, and the congestion on the road network can be problematic. Promoting active travel, and use of public transport is important to realising the area's future growth potential.

- 3.4.4. Recognising the role and function of the settlements within the area, Central Dorset will be the focus for growth away from the Bournemouth Christchurch and Poole conurbation. Within the bounds of the important environmental assets, there are significant opportunities for further growth along the Portland – Weymouth - Dorchester corridor to support and enhance the continued value of the central Dorset area to the wider Dorset economy.
- 3.4.5. Together the settlements in this area create a large population, benefiting concentrations of local employers and supporting town centre activities. The area has opportunities to attract significant international investment in 'green energy' generation. Investment and delivery in this sector of the UK economy closely aligns with the Council's objectives and priorities around the ecological and climate emergencies and the Dorset Economic Growth Strategy.
- 3.4.6. The Dorset Clean Energy Super Cluster includes offshore wind in the English Channel, a deepwater offshore wind-hub associated with Portland Port to service the renewable sector, carbon dioxide capture and storage, hydrogen production and storage, and potentially Nuclear Small Modular Reactors. While much of the development in the super cluster will need to be assessed against the policies, and through the processes, for Nationally Significant Infrastructure Projects (NSIPs), the local plan should set a positive framework to help build upon the opportunities that these infrastructure projects will provide to generate prosperity and increase standards of living for people in the local area.
- 3.4.7. Opportunities for smaller scale growth at villages in the area will complement the potential for significant growth to the north of Dorchester and at Crossways. The regeneration of Weymouth Town Centre will also be significant in the future prosperity of the area.
- 3.4.8. The large-scale opportunities at Dorchester, at Crossways and at Weymouth will create new, high-quality places of exceptional design. Ensuring the local facilities are provided and that active travel and public transport are priorities will be important to the area's success.

Question 5: Do you have any comments on the proposed strategy for the central area?

3.5. Northern Dorset area

- 3.5.1. The Northern Dorset area is largely rural but includes a number of significant market towns, with Gillingham, Shaftesbury and Sherborne being the largest.

The area sits within the corridor connecting Yeovil in Somerset and Salisbury in Wiltshire via the London to Exeter railway line, the A303 trunk road and the A30. There are mainline railway stations at Sherborne and Gillingham providing easy links between these towns and the wider area. To the south, transport is less convenient and hence, although connected, the area functions independently from the rest of Dorset with a greater reliance on Yeovil and Salisbury.

- 3.5.2. Although there are fewer designated wildlife sites than in other parts of Dorset, the area has a rich environment. The Fontmell & Melbury Downs, Rooksmoor and Holnest Special Areas of Conservation are all recognised for their ecological importance. The heart of the area is characterised by the attractive, undulating Blackmore Vale landscape with the River Stour flowing through it. In the west the River Yeo flows westwards from Sherborne towards Yeovil and the Somerset Levels.
- 3.5.3. The focus for growth in the Northern Dorset area will be at the three main towns alongside growth at the smaller market towns and larger villages. Development at these settlements will support existing services and enhance their role as hubs for the wider rural area. Improvements to active travel and public transport provision will be important to support growth.
- 3.5.4. The three main towns will also provide the main drivers of the economy in the northern area. Gillingham is already host to a number of major manufacturing employers. Similarly, Shaftesbury and Sherborne, both historic and attractive towns with significant tourist economies, also host some significant businesses. Expansion of these businesses will be something that the Local Plan will seek to enable.
- 3.5.5. The smaller market towns and villages are more rural in character with both Stalbridge and Sturminster Newton having economies that reflect their agricultural heritage. Both towns were on the old railway line that connected to Poole in the south and this route now offers opportunities for enhanced active travel provision between the towns through provision of the North Dorset Trailway, potentially linking to Templecombe Railway Station. Growth at these towns and villages will complement that at the larger towns and will support their roles as local service centres for the surrounding rural area.

Question 6: Do you have any comments on the proposed strategy for the northern area?

3.6. Western Dorset area

- 3.6.1. The natural environment of Western Dorset is one of its greatest assets. The strategy prioritises the protection and enhancement of environmentally sensitive areas particularly the gently undulating landscape and coastline of this part of the Dorset National Landscape whilst also supporting the communities that live there.
- 3.6.2. Despite the challenges associated with a rural economy and relatively poor connectivity, the area has strong potential, particularly through the cultural and economic vitality of Bridport. Growth will be directed towards improving digital infrastructure and rural mobility and supporting local enterprise. Large sections of the coast are however susceptible to coastal change and flood risk.
- 3.6.3. Within the area, the towns of Bridport, Beaminster and Lyme Regis form the main centres for service provision. Growth will be focused on these centres with the aim of minimising impact and reducing the need for travel. Development at the larger villages will be aimed at enhancing the resilience of the rural and coastal communities.
- 3.6.4. Economic development will need to build on the strengths of each town. Bridport has a long history of manufacturing, and this continues today with several businesses working in the manufacturing sector. Alongside Bridport, Lyme Regis has significant connections with the sea both as a fishing port but also for tourism whereas Beaminster has a focus on the agricultural industry and food production. The villages in this area will support the three towns by strengthening their tourist offer and building on local skills and rural enterprise.

Question 7: Do you have any comments on the proposed strategy for the western area?

3.7. Infrastructure Delivery

- 3.7.1. Infrastructure is a key component of sustainable development. We will work with infrastructure providers to establish and deliver the infrastructure needed to support growth. The planning system enables local authorities to secure

infrastructure in different ways, but the starting position is in the creation of policies that can anticipate where investment is likely to be necessary.

- 3.7.2. Growth through a local plan places direct and indirect pressure on existing facilities. Development should contribute towards the provision of infrastructure but in a way which is appropriate. National planning policy expects policies within local plans to set out the financial contributions expected from development; such policies should not undermine the delivery of the plan.
- 3.7.3. We encourage respondents to indicate where there are infrastructure needs, both for specific sites and wider areas. This will allow us to plan for the needs of development and to secure infrastructure provision through the most appropriate methods.
- 3.7.4. We currently use a combination of planning obligations and the Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) to secure infrastructure when development takes place. Understanding future needs will enable us to progress a revised Community Infrastructure Levy charging schedule alongside the preparation of the Local Plan.

Question 8: Is there any important infrastructure that needs to be delivered alongside new homes in the Western/Central/South Eastern/Northern area?

4. Housing Delivery Strategy

- 4.1.1. National policy emphasises that the Government's aim is to boost the supply of new homes. We are required to plan to meet need for all types of homes and ensure that there is a sufficient amount and variety of land available to meet these needs. In addition to this, we want to meet local needs in well-designed sustainable communities.

4.2. Local Housing Need and Housing Delivery

- 4.2.1. National policy requires us to plan to meet the need for new homes in Dorset using a local housing needs assessment as a key part of the evidence. Planning for new homes should be based on a local housing need figure calculated using the Standard Method set out in national planning practice guidance.