

- 5.10.2. We have developed strategic approaches to delivering mitigation measures to avoid adverse impacts on these habitat sites. Many of these strategic approaches can be applied effectively to the development delivered through the flexible settlements policy and we will continue with this approach.
- 5.10.3. There may however be instances where there is no strategic approach in place, or where the approach may not be as effective as it needs to be (e.g. due to potential cumulative impacts). In these situations, the flexible settlements policy may need to be temporarily suspended in some areas, until we can be confident that suitable mitigation measures can be delivered.
- 5.10.4. We will need to keep this under review and monitor delivery of homes through the flexible settlements policy and consider whether new approaches to mitigation are needed.

6. Employment Strategy

6.1. Introduction

- 6.1.1. National policy establishes that one of the three objectives of the planning system is to help build a strong, responsive and competitive economy. Significant weight is placed on the need to support economic growth and productivity, with local plans providing a framework for addressing economic priorities. Strategic policies should make sufficient provision for employment and be underpinned by relevant evidence.
- 6.1.2. Planning Practice Guidance directs councils in how to determine their economic need. It sets out that we should develop an idea of future needs based on a range of data which is current and robust. This data could include assessments of labour demand, labour supply, past take-up of employment and relevant consultation.

Employment need in Dorset

- 6.1.3. Our Employment Land Study was completed in 2024 and considers the employment land demand and supply in the area. It provides an assessment of employment needs within the Functional Economic Market Area (FEMA)²⁰ from 2021 to 2039. It highlights which employment sectors are expected to see

²⁰ The Functional Economic Market Area that forms the basis for the Employment Land Study included both the area covered by Dorset Council and the area covered by BCP Council

strong growth and those which are predicted to decline. The work looked at the strategic need for employment space across the whole area rather than by individual settlement but does identify a range of future requirements for Dorset Council.

- 6.1.4. For the Dorset Council area, the study suggested that between 2021 and 2039, there is an overall requirement for between 111.8 to 162.8ha land (375,200 to 532,300 sqm floorspace) to be delivered.
- 6.1.5. An analysis of the delivery of employment land and based on previous projections, the average amount of employment land needed has led us to estimate that between approximately 110ha and 165ha of employment land might be required over the period to 2043.
- 6.1.6. Since the completion of the Employment Land Study there have been revisions to national policy including new housing needs assessments and support for specific employment sectors. Further review is needed to consider the implications of these revisions on our projections of employment land demand.
- 6.1.7. We will update the employment demand forecasts again before the next stage of plan preparation to consider the impacts of revisions to national policy, new growth strategies, local plan timeframe and increased housing numbers. This will ensure that policy to identify and protect sufficient and appropriate land for employment purposes in the local plan will be based on the most up to date evidence on the amount and type of employment land needed.

6.2. Employment Strategy

- 6.2.1. A prosperous local economy is vital to achieving the strategic priorities of Dorset Council. The Dorset Council Plan seeks to encourage growth, foster innovation, support businesses and help create new jobs. The Economic Growth Strategy for Dorset builds on these ambitions, setting out a focussed approach to how Dorset will use its strengths and assets to grow the economy.
- 6.2.2. The Local Plan will help support economic growth and meet identified employment needs by providing a framework for delivering sufficient employment land uses in the right place, of the right type at the right time to meet the needs of Dorset's economy.
- 6.2.3. The focus of the Local Plan's employment strategy will be on protecting the important existing employment sites and allocating opportunities for new development at locations close to the more sustainable settlements. Alongside this, we are seeking to maximise the delivery of employment space through the

use of flexible policies to allow appropriate development in other suitable locations.

6.3. Employment allocations

- 6.3.1. The adopted local plans in the Dorset Council area contain a number of employment allocations, some of which are not yet developed. As existing allocations, we expect that most of these sites will contribute to future supply, and they will be reallocated in the new Local Plan.
- 6.3.2. However, there may be barriers to development which are blocking delivery on some existing employment allocations despite being identified for many years. We will work to identify the barriers to their delivery, to understand why they have not come forward despite policy support. Where these issues cannot be overcome, and there is no reasonable prospect of a site being developed, we may decide to 'release' them for other uses in the new Local Plan.
- 6.3.3. To meet future need, the Dorset Council Local Plan will also identify sites as new employment allocations. These areas will be primarily reserved for offices, research and development, industrial processes and storage and distribution (uses within the E(g), B2 and B8 classes) as these uses are those where there is a need and that support new jobs in the areas.
- 6.3.4. The larger settlements have a key role to play in the delivery of new employment opportunities because of their accessibility to labour, support services and infrastructure. We have identified new site opportunities in locations close to the more sustainable settlements.
- 6.3.5. To allow the expansion of existing sites and businesses we have also identified options adjacent to existing industrial estates and business parks. We will continue to work with employers to understand their operational requirements, and future expansion plans, and where possible seek to identify space to respond to these needs.
- 6.3.6. At this stage, as further work is needed on the projection figures, we have not limited the proposed site opportunities so that they align with Employment Land Study assessments of need. Instead, we have presented a range of all realistic potential opportunity sites so that when demand figures are finalised at the next stage of plan production, provision can be made in the most appropriate locations.
- 6.3.7. The opportunity sites being considered as potential new employment sites are included in Appendix B – Opportunity sites for employment, which accompanies

this document. They are also shown in the relevant section of the online consultation. The site location, size and other relevant planning information is set out. The list of option sites, and their boundaries, may be revised in light of consultation feedback or on the basis of additional evidence.

Question 20: The Local Plan will retain and protect existing key employment sites, identify new employment sites at locations close to more sustainable settlements, allow for expansion of existing employment sites and allow for new employment sites in suitable locations. Do you have any comments on this approach?

6.4. Employment development away from allocated sites

- 6.4.1. As Dorset's population grows, employment opportunities are vital to maintain balanced, sustainable and prosperous communities. We will encourage delivery of allocated sites to meet the area's employment needs.
- 6.4.2. However, there may be a specific need for employment space that is not met by or identified in the Local Plan allocations and therefore we are considering a more flexible approach. Allowing flexibility will help to ensure a varied and responsive supply to support other suitable opportunities to deliver employment space and jobs. This will enable employment land to be developed outside of allocated sites subject to various criteria.
- 6.4.3. We think that the scale and type of new employment development should be controlled to reflect its location, and focused on places where it will provide people with the opportunity to work locally. This will help to promote social inclusion and reduce the need to travel.
- 6.4.4. For this reason, we are suggesting that settlements within Tier 1, Tier 2 and Tier 3 of the settlement hierarchy detailed in Section 3, will be a focus for growth as the most sustainable locations. We also think that the policy should encourage employment development on previously developed land and the re-use or replacement of suitable existing buildings. We will look to develop a policy that enables this more flexible approach.
- 6.4.5. While development should generally be concentrated in the areas which are most sustainable, we acknowledge that some businesses may have specific requirements that could justify development in a particular location. The plan will recognise and respond to this.

- 6.4.6. The economy and the environment are closely linked. The outstanding natural and historic environment of Dorset contributes to the economy by making it an attractive place to live and work and supports the tourist economy. Reflecting this, we think that there is a need to enable employment development in locations away from the Tier 1, Tier 2 and Tier 3 settlements where the need is justified and all normal planning considerations have been adequately addressed.
- 6.4.7. We think that it is particularly important in rural areas to ensure that development is sensitive to its surroundings, does not have unacceptable impacts on local roads and exploits any opportunity to make a location more sustainable.

Question 21: The Local Plan will enable employment land to be developed outside identified sites at certain towns and villages, subject to certain considerations. Do you agree with this approach?

6.5. Mixed use development

- 6.5.1. In addition to the 'stand-alone' employment allocations, we think there are opportunities for employment land provision as part of 'mixed use' sites where space for jobs is provided in conjunction with new housing developments.
- 6.5.2. When developing sites national policy encourages effective use of land and exploration of whether multiple benefits can be achieved, including through mixed use schemes to help secure sustainable patterns of development.
- 6.5.3. Mixed use schemes can also help overcome some of the barriers to the delivery of employment sites such as the provision of utilities infrastructure.
- 6.5.4. Our evidence suggests that in mixed use developments the employment component should be brought forward alongside the residential element, preferably with the homes facilitating the infrastructure requirements of the whole scheme including connections to utilities and transport infrastructure. It also suggests that the employment provision on mixed use developments is generally considered to be best positioned adjacent to but separate from the residential areas.
- 6.5.5. We are suggesting that larger housing sites (allocated and unallocated) will be required to provide employment land in addition to the new homes, thus making them mixed use. We think that it would be reasonable to seek around 0.25ha of

employment land for every 100 homes developed. This requirement would apply on a proportionate basis to all proposals for 300 or more homes meaning that for a scheme of 400 homes, around 1ha of employment land should be provided.

- 6.5.6. We do not think that the requirements should be applied to smaller housing developments as this would result in a very dispersed distribution of small quantities of employment land spread across the council area. We don't think this dispersed approach would be attractive to businesses and the market and could have other implications for development viability and amenity.
- 6.5.7. There may be strategic reasons for requiring a greater or lesser proportion of employment uses on particular local plan allocations than that suggested by the above approach. Where this is the case, any requirements will be clearly specified by the site policy.

Question 22: We have suggested that larger scale housing sites should be required to provide land for employment uses. Proposals for 300 homes or more would be mixed residential and employment developments, with a ratio of 0.25ha of employment space for every 100 homes. How much do you agree or disagree with this approach?

- a. Agree
- b. Partially agree
- c. Neutral
- d. Partially disagree
- e. Disagree

Please provide any further comments or reasoning...

6.6. Protecting employment sites

- 6.6.1. Alongside supporting delivery of new employment land, we also think that the Local Plan should include controls to retain and protect existing employment uses in suitable locations.
- 6.6.2. Existing employment sites may come under pressure for change of use to non-employment uses. The loss of employment sites can reduce local job opportunities and impact negatively on economic competitiveness, potentially undermining economic growth.

- 6.6.3. We consider that Local Plan policies to retain important employment sites will help to provide opportunities to meet employment needs locally, to reduce the need to travel, and to promote economic growth and social inclusion.
- 6.6.4. As part of our strategy, we propose that the most important existing employment sites are identified and rigorously protected. We will call these 'key' sites for employment uses.
- 6.6.5. There are also other less important employment sites. Although they have a role in providing jobs for local people, a more flexible approach will be taken to the development of these 'non-key' employment sites.
- 6.6.6. To maintain employment opportunities for businesses and to help to provide jobs, employment development provided on new Local Plan employment allocations will be protected as 'key' sites. Areas of employment land delivered through mixed-use allocations may also be designated as 'key' sites, with requirements set out in the accompanying site policy.
- 6.6.7. There are a number of industrial sites and business parks in Dorset which have been provided through, and protected by, employment allocations of the adopted local plans. These allocated sites will be reviewed to assess their contribution to the supply of employment land/jobs and determine whether they are 'key'.
- 6.6.8. The existing allocated employment sites being evaluated are shown on the maps within Appendix B – Opportunity sites for employment. Sites that have already been redeveloped, allocated in for housing or have residential uses permitted are not presented. Where part of a site has been redeveloped for other uses, but some employment space remains, the allocation has been retained to allow for a consideration of the residual economic area.
- 6.6.9. The site areas shown are those defined by the adopted local plans. Boundaries of any employment sites selected as 'key' will be reevaluated during the next stage of plan preparation and revisions made as necessary to ensure they remain appropriate.
- 6.6.10. We intend to primarily restrict the types of uses on 'key' employment sites to offices, research and development uses, uses involving industrial processes and storage and distribution uses²¹.

²¹ i.e. uses within the E(g), B2 and B8 classes of the Use Classes Order 1987 (as amended)

- 6.6.11. To provide flexibility to respond to the economy, we are also suggesting that some other uses may be appropriate on 'key' sites so long as they are directly compatible with and complementary to the employment function and they enhance job provision, the effective operation and appeal of the site. Uses that do not provide direct and ongoing employment opportunities, such as residential development or retail development, would not be permitted.
- 6.6.12. Employment development will continue to be supported on other 'non-key' employment sites, but it may also be possible to consider the provision of alternative uses. When assessing planning applications for this development we will consider the appropriateness of the proposed use as well as the acceptability of the scheme on the remainder of the site and the wider area. Factors for consideration will include whether the proposed use would result in the loss of jobs; the delivery of important community or environmental benefits; and the viability or suitability of alternative employment uses.

Question 23: We have suggested that the Local Plan should include policies to protect the most important existing 'key' employment sites.

- a) Do you have any views on the strategy we have suggested for protecting employment sites?
- b) What criteria should we consider when defining 'key' and 'non-key' employment sites?
 - a. Site size
 - b. Location
 - c. Employment use type
 - d. Accessibility
 - e. Contribution to meeting economic objectives/needs
 - f. Market attractiveness
 - g. Opportunities for growth/expansion
 - h. The site's status in previous local plans
 - i. Other