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## **A Vision for Weymouth Harbour and Peninsula**

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### **Executive summary**

Weymouth has a number of highly distinctive features which, taken together, make for a 'unique selling proposition' and offer the prospect of making Weymouth a highly desirable place to live and to visit. However, Weymouth Harbour and peninsula face also some challenges which will need to be met successfully, if the town is to make the most of its positive features.

In exploring the optimum balance between the different opportunities open to the Council and Harbour Authority, this report sets out a number of options for the short-term, medium-term and long-term for the Harbour and peninsula.

In choosing between these options, the Council must decide how it wishes to balance its priorities between:

- achieving short-term capital gains or revenue streams from selling the freeholds or leasing the land or developed properties (favouring high quality commercial and residential development at market value);
- enhancing the long-term attractiveness and viability of the Harbour as a business (favouring marine uses, car parking and other facilities for boatowners, stacking for boats, etc.);
- reinvigorating the local economy through the form of Harbour and peninsula developments which improve business profit levels and employment opportunities (both by making them less seasonal and improving wage levels);
- supporting the long-term regeneration of the town as a whole (potentially including cultural facilities, active leisure facilities, educational premises, wide-ranging retail facilities, and extension of the public realm in a way that would be attractive both for local residents and tourists);
- increasing the long-term attractiveness of the town as a national (and international) tourist destination, which offers very high quality in its natural and built environment, hospitality and retail venues, and year-round (and weather-proofed) leisure activities, and which consequently attracts high tourist spend.

Whatever their level of priority, each of these outcomes is important. **The need to demonstrate significant achievement against each of these outcomes suggests that a phased development of the Harbour and peninsula is necessary, so that the early developments which are part of the planned sequential transformation do not rule out the possibility of highly desirable future opportunities. The commitments to government, in accepting the LUF funding, need to be taken into account in decisions on this phasing.**

Short term improvements – taken here to mean ‘within the next 3 years’ – must occur quickly and demonstrate the ability of all the major stakeholders to work together and implement their joint intentions. This is all the more important because of scepticism amongst local residents and key partners about the willingness and capacity of Dorset Council, both as the Council and as the Harbour Authority, to take successful action. A decision on the short-term options set out below therefore needs to be made quickly and action needs to follow rapidly.

Moreover, consideration of the medium-term and long-term options must follow soon after, so that, as far as possible, no short-term and medium-term decisions are taken which could preclude potentially valuable long-term options.

#### *Short-term vision*

In principle, all of the short-term options set out in this Vision Statement are consistent with each other and in line with proposals in the Coastal Communities funding and the Levelling-Up funding. Each contributes to the longer-term development of Weymouth Harbour and peninsula. Moreover, they appear possible within the next 3 years, so they lay down a marker making clear the intent of the Council and Harbour Authority to make rapid progress with the regeneration of the area. They include:

- Remedial works to the Harbour and peninsula walls
- Relocation of the fish landing quay
- Hospitality and retail facilities on the peninsula
- North Quay redevelopment (with or without road relocation)
- Weymouth Bowl redevelopment
- Rejigging of the berths in the inner Harbour

**There is a strong case for all these short-term options to be implemented in the next 3 years.**

#### *Medium-term vision*

After the short-term improvements have been agreed and implemented, a range of medium-term opportunities for the Harbour and peninsula need to be considered, so that continued improvements are demonstrated, potentially contributing both to the quality of life of local people and also to the quality of the tourist offer and level of tourist spend locally.

Given the outstanding potential of Weymouth, there is a wide range of medium-term developments around the Harbour and peninsula which could make an important contribution to the success of the area and to the town as a whole. They include:

- Development of 4\* or 5\* hotel on the peninsula

- Residential development
- Development of leisure and entertainment facilities on the peninsula
- Development of public space on the peninsula
- Development of wider hospitality offer on the peninsula
- Extension of the outer Harbour
- New Bond Street redevelopment
- Redevelopment of eastern side of the inner Harbour
- Development of a boatyard for repair and maintenance of small craft

There are clearly a lot of medium-term options. All of them are interesting but none of them are currently supported by detailed business cases. **The first five of these options are highlighted in the LUF bid and commitments have been made to take them forward, so there is a presumption that their feasibility will be carefully tested in the immediate future.**

Each of the other options offers benefits to the regeneration of the area and to Weymouth more generally and should also be explored through preparation of outline business cases and market testing. Some of these options will become more clearly defined and their potential for successful contributions will become clearer, once the short-term options are implemented.

Similarly, as the national economy and the economy of coastal towns in England evolve in the next few years, the potential value-for-money of some of these medium-term options will increase and for others will decrease.

The feasibility of the first five options (LUF-funded) now needs urgently to be tested. The Council does not necessarily have to make final decisions about which of the other medium-term options it prefers. However, decisions will have to be made in the next two to three years, or else the implementation of these options will be further delayed, which will not only be highly frustrating for the residents of Weymouth but will also potentially mean that valuable opportunities are lost through the delay.

Two key factors need to be taken into account in making these medium-term decisions. First, some at least of the activities to be supported in the medium-term need to be clearly earmarked as 'limited life'. This is fundamental because some space on the peninsula (and perhaps also in other spaces within the Harbour area) needs to be kept available in case major advantageous long-term developments become feasible, so that those can be accommodated reasonably quickly. Moreover, 'limited life' land uses can be regarded as pilots from which it can be learnt what activities are likely to be successful in Weymouth and, also important, what activities fit the cultural image which Weymouth seeks to promote– and which activities don't fit this image.

#### *Longer-term vision*

The long-term vision for Weymouth Harbour and peninsula (and for Weymouth town more generally) is naturally shrouded in uncertainty. However, it appears that Weymouth has a potential well in advance of most English coastal towns, seaside resorts and ports. For this potential to be realised, ambitions have to set high and long-term aims have to be demanding, while also being plausible – the vision of 'where we ideally want to be' has to be married with the 'art of the possible'.

One long-term option is clearly to secure for Weymouth Harbour and peninsula the location of a nationally or internationally renowned attraction. As this has not been the subject of significant detailed discussion to date, the options for achieving this are necessarily less clearly delineated. However, there do seem to be attractive possibilities, which now deserve consideration. If one of these options is regarded as potentially desirable, then it has repercussions for the choice of medium-term options – clearly, sufficient space needs to be kept available in the longer term for such a major long-term option to be pursued. This, in turn, would mean that at least some of the medium-term developments need to be clearly specified as time-limited, so that they can make room for a longer-term option, once that has been successfully secured. This would not be so important if this major facility is located off the peninsula (e.g. in the Westway redevelopment).

Such a nationally significant long-term option would be a key building block in the long-term regeneration of the town. However, it will not be easy. As a risky option, elected members must consider whether the potential gains, if successful, would be likely to outweigh the resources which would be needed, over a substantial period of time, to secure such an attraction.

A further long-term option would involve an ambitious regeneration scheme for the western bank of the inner Harbour, in which the Westway road would be relocated and all or most of the current buildings would become part of a land assembly process, providing the opportunity for a complete redevelopment, with major waterside properties and the chance to connect together residential, commercial, leisure and maritime land uses in a coherent package. This would increase significantly the value of the land, and therefore the returns to the Council's land assembly process. It would also greatly increase the flexibility of the Council in determining the mix of affordable housing, market value housing, commercial uses and leisure and entertainment facilities in the subsequent development. Part of this development could constitute a 'cultural and education quarter'.

### *Summary*

Clearly, it will be important for Dorset Council and its partners to be seen to deliver on their commitments under the current funding schemes or, at the very least, to negotiate highly attractive alternatives, where these have become available. Not only will this be important to the funding bodies providing the redevelopment resources but the reputation of the Council and its credibility with local residents will be affected. While some flexibility can be expected to be exercised if major obstacles occur – or if major unexpected opportunities arise – it could be unfortunate if the overall intent of these schemes were not achieved.

However, the possibility of ambitious, high value options becoming available which were not originally envisaged when current funding bids were made means that the development of Weymouth Harbour and peninsula should be undertaken in a sequence of phases which will allow valuable new possibilities to emerge, as learning occurs from the short- and medium-term projects which are implemented.

In order to pursue the potential of Weymouth as a national and/or international coastal town, **there is a strong case for all of the short-term options, most of the medium-term options, and at least one of the long-term options to be pursued.**

# **A Vision for Weymouth Harbour and Peninsula**

## **Introduction**

Dorset Council commissioned in early September 2023 a report which would allow the Council to develop a Vision Statement for the future of Weymouth Harbour and peninsula.

Specifically, a report was required which would:

- establish the Council's agreed objectives and priorities with respect to the development of the Harbour and peninsula;
- set out the Council's approach to delivering these objectives and priorities; and
- consider the optimum balance between harbour/marine offer/residential/commercial and other uses, taking into account the economic and financial benefits, the Council's obligations to DHLUC following the LUF grant, and as a Harbour Authority, and the relationship of these developments to the wider regeneration of Weymouth.

The approach to be taken involved a review of the existing documentation and interviews with the key stakeholders. In addition to this, interviewees have been encouraged to provide further documentation and clarification on key points arising in the interviews.

In exploring the optimum balance between the different opportunities open to the Council and Harbour Authority, this report sets out a number of options for the short-term, medium-term and long-term for the Harbour and peninsula.

## **Context – the distinctive characteristics of Weymouth Harbour and peninsula**

The interviews have reinforced the statements found in virtually all of the planning, strategy and consultation documents which have been prepared in recent years in respect of the Harbour and peninsula.

They emphasised that Weymouth has a number of highly distinctive features which, taken together, make for a 'unique selling proposition':

- a beach which is amongst the best in Europe
- a magnificent Georgian seafront
- a charming Harbour with berths for over 400 boats
- an historic and characterful feature in Northe Fort
- a long and eventful history as a port
- proximity to several Marine Conservation Areas
- proximity to an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty

However, it also became clear from the interviews that Weymouth has a number of challenges which will need to be met if it is to make the most of these positive features:

- the economy of the town has been declining for decades, with increasing levels of deprivation in certain areas, and the lowest social mobility in England
- the economy is highly dependent on tourism, currently offering low wages to employees and low revenue for local businesses
- the tourist economy is highly seasonal (and weather-dependent), so that employment is limited for much of the year
- the Harbour needs significant repair and maintenance expenditure
- the environment around the inner Harbour is dominated by busy roads, large car parks, buildings facing away from the waterside, and, in many cases, unattractive and often empty or underused buildings
- the inner Harbour is not suitable for large boats and not well suited for medium-sized boats – and the lifting bridge imposes delays on boats berthed there
- Weymouth lies a considerable distance – a long day’s sail - from other major sailing destinations, placing a constraint on the potential for attracting weekend sailing traffic
- The suitability of the peninsula for buildings of any significant size is not yet clear, given uncertainty about its structural stability, and there are also questions of possible land contamination – if current investigations reveal major problems along these lines, some of the options below will become less viable.

Consequently, the options which are set out here include approaches which are directly aimed at a range of strategic objectives. The Council must therefore decide how it wishes to balance its priorities between:

- achieving short-term capital gains or revenue streams from selling the freeholds or leasing the land or developed properties (favouring high quality commercial and residential development at market value);
- enhancing the long-term attractiveness and viability of the Harbour as a business (favouring marine uses, car parking and other facilities for boatowners, stacking for boats, etc.);
- reinvigorating the local economy through the form of Harbour and peninsula developments which improve business profit levels and employment opportunities (both by making them less seasonal and improving wage levels);
- supporting the long-term regeneration of the town as a whole (potentially including cultural facilities, active leisure facilities, educational premises, wide-ranging retail facilities, and extension of the public realm in a way that would be attractive both for local residents and tourists);
- increasing the long-term attractiveness of the town as a national (and international) tourist destination, which offers very high quality in its natural and built environment, hospitality and retail venues, and year-round (and weather-proofed) leisure activities, and which consequently attracts high tourist spend.

## **A vision of phased development for Weymouth**

After a significant period of economic decline in the town, it is clear that the regeneration of Weymouth cannot be achieved quickly. On the other hand, the town clearly has such advantages that it could become a major jewel on the south coast.

However, the lack of progress in implementing the various plans and strategies which have been agreed in past years has left a question mark over the ability of the public agencies in the area to agree and implement the required improvements. This suggests that early positive developments will be critical in establishing the credibility of any vision which is now adopted for the area.

This in turn suggests that a phased development of the Harbour and peninsula is necessary, in which short term improvements – taken here to mean ‘within the next 3 years’ - occur quickly and demonstrate the ability of all the major stakeholders to work together and implement their joint intentions. A choice between the short-term options set out below therefore needs to be made quickly and action needs to follow rapidly.

After the short-term improvements have been agreed and implemented, a range of medium-term opportunities for the Harbour and peninsula need to be considered, so that continued improvements are demonstrated, potentially contributing both to the quality of life of local people and also to the quality of the tourist offer and level of tourist spend in the local economy.

Finally, there remains the possibility that the Harbour and peninsula could be developed in a way which gives it a national, or even international, profile. As this has not been the subject of significant detailed discussion to date, the options for achieving this are necessarily less clearly delineated. However, these do seem potentially attractive, so now deserve consideration. If one of these options is regarded as potentially desirable, then it has repercussions for the choice of medium-term options – clearly, sufficient space needs to be kept available in the longer term for this option to be pursued. This, in turn, means that at least some of the medium-term development needs to be clearly delineated as time-limited, so that it can eventually make room for the longer-term option, once that has been successfully secured.

**It will be important to ensure that the early developments which are part of the planned sequential transformation do not rule out the possibility of highly desirable future options. The commitments to government, in accepting the LUF funding, need to be taken into account in decisions on this phasing.**

## **Current commitments for redevelopment of the Harbour and peninsula**

There are number of commitments in relation to the redevelopment of the Harbour and peninsula which need to be taken into account in future decisions on regeneration of the area –

and further commitments are likely to arise from the current Neighbourhood Planning process being carried out by Weymouth Town Council.

The **Coastal Communities funding bid** contained several strands, including:

- Improvement of Harbour facilities for the fishing industry and Harbour businesses, increasing usable space with new pontoons attached to a repaired and strengthened Harbour wall.
- Provision of a stable base for the Quay and improving the flood defences for the town, allowing for future climate change and sea level rises.
- Facilities for boat crews to use for storage, lock up space and showers and secure storage and facilities for the Harbour Authority
- A pedestrian and cyclist walkway hugging the waterside, linking the beach with the Harbour and enabling the public safely to view fishing boats unloading their catch
- A Harbour Centre of Excellence for Coastal Town small and medium enterprises, including a co-working employment space for a wide range of entrepreneurs, start-ups and microenterprises and state-of-the-art training facilities. Including for marine activities. **(This proposal, however, has now been taken further at a site off the peninsula.**

The Levelling Up Fund (LUF) bid focusses on three sites in the town - the Peninsula, North Quay, and the town centre. The main focus of the work outlined in the bid includes:

- installation of utility infrastructure and repairs to the Harbour walls at the peninsula and North Quay which will allow proposals from private investors for new residential, commercial and leisure to be invited;
- the business case for the Harbour wall repairs is based on bringing work forward by 10 years, so redevelopment can happen sooner;
- land assembly in the town centre, which involves purchasing long leasehold interests, as previously done for Weymouth Bowl, to help generate fresh development opportunities and regain management of the land that the Council already owns.

In relation to the LUF scheme, the HGP outline of Weymouth Peninsula 'Option B' 18 August 2023) details:

- a perimeter of residential homes with commercial units at ground floor and a new 70-bed luxury hotel, involving construction of 210 residential units (in 11 blocks) and over 5,500 sq.m of commercial space, and with 365 parking spaces;
- a new public square, where events such as the local seafood festival can take place (covering the car park below)
- creation of 'an active and vibrant outlook' from all developments, including visual connections to and views of the Nothe Fort and towards Weymouth Beach;
- retention and renewal of the Pavilion Theatre, adjoining it with a new commercial offering to create a contemporary cultural district;
- conversion of the pleasure pier into a cafe/restaurant, lit as a beacon at night;
- retention of the Esplanade as the access road, with a vehicular loop around the Theatre and residential units for servicing and access to the podium car park;
- a pedestrian board walk wrapping the whole perimeter.



**Clearly, it will be important for Dorset Council and its partners to be seen to deliver on these commitments under the current funding schemes or, at the very least, to negotiate highly attractive alternatives, where these have become available.** Not only will this be important to the funding bodies who are providing the resources for these early redevelopment initiatives but the reputation of the Council and its credibility with local residents will be affected if these commitments are not implemented. While some flexibility can be expected to be exercised, especially if major obstacles occur – or if major unexpected opportunities arise – it could be highly unfortunate if the overall intent of these schemes were not achieved.

## **Short-term options for the Harbour and peninsula**

The following short-term options have been suggested during the course of this review:

- ***Remedial works to the Harbour and peninsula walls***

These remedial works are essential for the long term sustainability of the Harbour and peninsula, so constitute a irreducible minimum component of the regeneration programme. As such, they are part of the commitment to DHLUC. Moreover, an early start will be key to establishing credibility with local people and with potential investors.

- ***Relocation of fish landing quay***

This is just about to begin. It has been widely heralded as a welcome sign of a start to the regeneration activities which have been promised under the Coastal Communities Funding and the Levelling-Up Funding.

Although there has been some concern that the new location of the fish landing quay might not be optimal, given the potential for unpleasant smells at particular times (especially in hot weather) and the effect this might have on other land uses which are likely to locate nearby (residential apartments, restaurants and cafes with outdoor tables, etc.), it has also been strongly argued that this can be seen as one of the ‘natural hazards’ of locating in the vicinity of a harbour. Moreover, it has been argued that, if a very strong case emerges at some stage in the future for a major development (one of the long-term options) to take over the space which will now be used by the fish landing quay, then the expense in knocking down and relocating the fish landing quay elsewhere on the peninsula (or, conceivably, on the other side across the channel) would not be exorbitant.

- ***Hospitality and retail facilities on the peninsula***

In the short-term there is a clear opportunity to begin the development of what is likely, by the medium term, to be an important cluster of hospitality and retail activities on the peninsula. The realisation of these developments should be feasible within the next 3 years but their location will naturally depend on decisions about which other short-term

and medium-term developments will be sought for the peninsula.

One set of these hospitality and retail facilities could well be associated with the new fish landing quay, which will be a distinctive feature on the peninsula, and could attract fish restaurants and cafes, and retail outlets with a fishing theme. There should also be investigation of the possibility that at least some of these should have viewing areas of the fish landing – e.g. through glass walls or floors). Moreover, retail units including fish and seafood sales and other fishing-related shops would be appropriate.

- ***North Quay redevelopment and road relocation***

With the recent approval of demolition of the old Borough Council offices, this can proceed rapidly, again providing a major signal that the regeneration of the Harbour and peninsula has started in earnest.

There was a general consensus that this was also an opportunity to relocate the current harbourside road, so that the new development would front onto the waterside. While this would no doubt slow down implementation of this development, it would both greatly increase the desirability of the new development and begin the process of reshaping the visual impact and pedestrian enjoyment of the south side of the Harbour.

There was also a general consensus that the ground floor of the new development should be devoted to either public space (e.g. exhibitions and presentations related to the Harbour, rooms and spaces for public meetings, Harbour Authority offices, etc.) or commercial use.

There was also strong support for the rest of the redevelopment site to consist of residential apartments. Given its waterside location, such apartments would be highly desirable and there would therefore be a financial incentive to devote a high proportion of them to 'market value' developments. They would also be some distance from the town centre, so may not be so desirable as affordable housing as would be developments on the other side of the inner Harbour. However, the mix of market housing and affordable housing would be a matter of choice for the Council.

- ***Weymouth Bowl redevelopment***

The redevelopment of the old Bowling Alley site appears to present few problems and could therefore be undertaken rapidly. This site could potentially be appropriate for housing, leisure or other commercial activity. However, its proximity to the town centre would appear to make it a prime location for social and affordable housing.

- ***Rejigging of the berths in the inner Harbour***

A number of proposals have been made for improving the facilities for owners of boats berthed in the inner Harbour. One proposal is to integrate the current marinas, to

improve access to the berths and increase their number – under this proposal, pedestrian access and marina facilities (washrooms, toilets, storerooms, etc.) would be provided at a southern entrance. However, this proposal would mean poor car access, as the main car parks would probably be on the other side of the channel, unless public car parking was a part of the North Quay redevelopment.

- ***Summary of short-term options***

All of these short-term options are, in principle, consistent with each other and in line with proposals in the Coastal Communities funding and the Levelling-Up funding. Each contributes to the longer-term development of Weymouth Harbour and peninsula. Moreover, they appear possible within the next 3 years, so lay down a marker making clear the intent of the Council and Harbour Authority to make rapid progress with the regeneration of the area.

## **Medium-term options for the harbour and peninsula**

- ***Extension of outer Harbour***

There is important support for the outer Harbour to be extended to increase the number of berths to be offered. Two sub-options have been suggested here – in one, the extension of the outer Harbour would open the possibility for much larger boats to use it. This would have the advantage of bringing in significant income and also attracting the high spend which such boatowners might bring to the town. There is some scepticism, however, that the regeneration of Weymouth would have to be considerably advanced before the owners of such boats would consider Weymouth as a particularly attractive destination – in this view, this sub-option should be considered for the longer-term, once the regeneration of Weymouth as a whole had proven successful. The other sub-option is for the extended outer Harbour to target bigger boats than currently use the inner Harbour, but still boats within the medium-size category. It is not clear how the business case for this sub-option would stack up but clearly it would be in keeping with the current spirit and image of Weymouth. Neither of these sub-options were part of the Coastal Communities Funding or Levelling Up bids, which are likely to have priority, so they seem appropriate for medium-term rather than short-term consideration.

- ***Development of wider hospitality offer on the peninsula***

There is clearly considerable scope for a wider hospitality offer on the peninsula. The location of this offer could be flexible – there are wonderful opportunities for it to look over the beach or further out into the bay, to look towards North Fort and North Gardens or to be adjacent to the Pavilion theatre (or to take the place of the theatre, if its stability becomes an issue). The leases for such hospitality premises should provide a substantial income, considerably in excess of the car parking income currently earned

from these spaces on the peninsula. Such developments should be designed to ensure continued wonderful views between the beach, peninsula and Fort.

- ***Development of 4\* or 5\* hotel***

The peninsula offers a major opportunity for a high quality hotel of architectural distinction, designed to fit into the contours of the bay and Harbour channel – one version of this was outlined in the LUF-bid. As in that bid, it may be that a relatively small-scale (around 70-bed) hotel would fit most readily with market requirements in the medium-term. However, the attractiveness of the site is likely to mean that this development could be achieved quite early in the medium term.

- ***Residential development***

The peninsula also offers a major opportunity for highly attractive residential accommodation, designed to fit into the contours of the bay and harbour channel, in line with the LUF bid and taking into account the associated planning challenges. Again, the location of this accommodation could be flexible – each of the orientations of facing the beach or bay, or North the Fort and Gardens would have their attractions. Given the stunning location, ground floor retail and hospitality uses would be also be likely to yield high rental and lease revenue, particularly when on the waterfront. While this development would be likely to be less desirable as affordable housing, the mix of market and affordable housing would be a choice for the Council. To take this option forward would, of course, require a revision to the current Harbour Revision Order, which might take several years, potentially taking it into the medium-term development phase – advice is currently being sought on this.

- ***Development of leisure and entertainment facilities on the peninsula***

In keeping with the tradition of coastal towns and seaside resorts, the peninsula would offer the opportunity for development of leisure and entertainment facilities for both local and tourist use. Particularly important would be provision of some rainproof activities (although not necessarily fully closed buildings). Moreover, some of these facilities would need to be let on medium-term leases, if it was desired to keep open for the longer-term the possibility of a major national attraction. They might also restrict full achievement of the residential units proposed in the LUF bid. However, such facilities would be likely to result in significant increases in higher visits from local residents and in higher tourist footfall and spend. Consequently, a more thorough exploration of all the relevant options and their business cases would be desirable.

- ***Development of public space on the peninsula***

As the likely location of different land uses on the peninsula emerges more clearly in the medium term, provision will need to be made for public space (for example, as in the

'public square' included in the LUF bid). Other suggestions have included an 'amphitheatre' which could have some overhead protection from rain and which could stage bands at the weekend, a 'Speakers' Corner' on Sundays, picnics for families, etc.' or a lido; or a facility for bathing and diving off a pier; or an interpretation walkway, explaining the sealife to be found in the bay and down the coast. The design of such public space could be made the subject of a public competition, in which all residents could participate – and it could also be an important project for local schools, where pupils could sound out local opinion on the emerging proposals. With its significant level of footfall, units around this public space would be likely to have high commercial value.

- ***New Bond Street redevelopment***

The New Bond Street site, encompassing the current Post Office site, a major multi-storey car park and a number of commercial premises, was included in the LUF bid and covers a number of properties which are not in very good condition and are therefore candidates for regeneration. However, the long leases enjoyed by the current occupants of this site would cost a considerable sum to buy back, and these costs, together with the redevelopment costs of the site, appear unlikely to be recoupable from any commercial uses, in the current state of the town centre property market. This may, however, change over the next few years, so it may be most appropriate to revisit the regeneration potential of this site in the medium-term, particularly if there is private interest in its redevelopment.

- ***Redevelopment of eastern side of inner Harbour***

There is general consensus that there is a major opportunity to redevelop both eastern and western sides of the inner Harbour, as the land on both sides has for some time been underdeveloped and does not make the most of its potentially spectacular location.

Considering the eastern side of the inner Harbour, the mix of uses to be encouraged in such a major redevelopment will depend on the Council's priorities, as well as on market demand. In general, the waterside location of these developments is likely to favour ground floor commercial use, with higher floors devoted to residential apartments. The residential apartments facing onto the waterside are likely to be particularly attractive, but the central location of the developments would ensure that all of the apartments would be highly desirable. However, a wide range of other land uses would also prize a location around the inner Harbour.

The choice of the most appropriate land use mix in a specific locality therefore needs to be consistent with the Council's decision on its priorities for the outcomes it seeks, as identified earlier, namely:

- its short-term capital gains or revenue streams;
- extending the long-term attractiveness and viability of the Harbour;
- the vitality of the local economy and employment opportunities;

- the long-term regeneration of the town as a whole; and
- the long-term attractiveness of the town as a national (and international) tourist destination.

Redevelopment of the eastern side of the inner Harbour will have the advantage that much of the land near the Harbour is currently devoted to car parking. It seems likely that the ground floors of developments on the side of the Harbour would be attractive to a range of commercial uses, while the upper floors would be highly attractive for residential uses. The waterside location would mean that such accommodation would be likely to fetch high prices but the mix of affordable and market value housing on this site would be a choice for the Council.

Such a development would, however, involve relocating the harbourside road and building over the current car parks. This would entail either provision of alternative car parking on other sites at a suitable distance from the town centre and marina (e.g. in a multi-storey car park on this eastern side of the inner Harbour or on the opposite, western side of the inner Harbour). These requirements suggest that this option is a medium-term rather than short-term proposition – but it has been suggested that a quite early start could be made on implementing such a scheme.

- ***Development of a boatyard for repair and maintenance of small craft***

A number of the harbours with which Weymouth competes have boatyards but this facility is currently missing in Weymouth, so that boatowners have to travel in order to have even routine repair and maintenance undertaken. This could be a profitable opportunity for the Harbour in the medium term. Possible locations have been suggested as either across the channel from the south of the peninsula or at far end of inner Harbour near Westham Bridge.

- ***Summary of medium-term options***

There are clearly a lot of medium-term options. All are interesting but none of them are currently supported by detailed business cases, although those in the LUF bid are currently being considered together with the Council's responsibilities to the harbour.

Some of these options will become more clearly defined and their potential success will become more obvious, once the short-term options have been implemented.

Similarly, as the national economy and the economy of coastal towns in England evolves in the next few years, the potential value-for-money of some of these medium-term options will increase and for others will decrease.

The feasibility of the first five options (LUF-funded) now needs urgently to be tested. For the moment, the Council does not necessarily have to make decisions about which of the other medium-term options it prefers. However, decisions will have to be made in the next two to three years, or else the implementation of these options will be further

delayed, which will not only be highly frustrating for the residents of Weymouth but will also potentially mean that valuable opportunities are lost through the delay.

Two key factors need to be taken into account in making these medium-term decisions. First, some at least of the activities to be supported in the medium-term need to be clearly earmarked as 'limited life'. This is fundamentally because some space on the peninsula (and perhaps also in the Westway redevelopment) needs to be kept available in case major advantageous long-term developments become feasible, so that they can be accommodated reasonably quickly. Moreover, 'limited life' land uses can be regarded as pilots from which it can be learnt what activities are likely to be successful in Weymouth and, also important, what activities fit the cultural image which Weymouth seeks to promote and support – and which activities don't fit this image.

Second, several of these options involve building over or demolishing existing car parking provision and diversion of existing traffic flows. While the road relocations appear practical, that needs to be further investigated. Supplementary car parking is likely to be needed around the Harbour, even in the short and medium term, meaning that some of the sites considered above would probably need to provide parking, along with some 'park and ride' provision. In the longer term, the Westway redevelopment, considered in the next section, would be likely to ease many parking problems, particularly if a circular electric bus route were to run around the inner Harbour.

## **Long-term options for the Harbour and peninsula**

Discussions of the options for Weymouth Harbour and peninsula have highlighted that there has been rather less attention paid to the possibility of ambitious longer-term developments than to the practical scope for short-term improvements. While this is understandable, it is in danger of selling short the potential represented by such an outstanding part of the British coastline. In this section, we highlight two possible longer-term development options, which we believe need to be considered carefully. One option would significantly improve the profile of Weymouth as a place to live and as a regional tourist destination. The other option might dramatically alter the profile of Weymouth as a national and international tourist destination.

- ***Redevelopment of western side of the inner Harbour (including relocation of Westway)***

The first option is an ambitious regeneration of the western bank of the inner Harbour. It was generally agreed that the buildings currently occupying the western side of the inner Harbour are either underused (sometimes empty) or in the wrong place. Land assembly could involve the current supermarket, the Courts building, and the KwikFit premises and surrounding vacant land. It has also been suggested that the DWP building could be included. This would present major opportunities for large-scale development.

The appropriate development on this side of the Harbour depends on what is done with Westway. If Westway is to remain in place, then redevelopment on the western side of the

inner Harbour could take place in the medium-term, as on the eastern side of the Harbour, but the resulting developments would be likely to be regarded as much less desirable by most of the land uses involved.

If the Westway road is relocated and the DWP building becomes part of the land assembly and redevelopment process, this option would provide the opportunity for a complete redevelopment of the long western embankment of the inner Harbour. This would provide a really substantial area for redevelopment and the chance to connect together residential, commercial, leisure and maritime land uses in a more coherent package. This would increase significantly the value of the land, and therefore the returns to the land assembly process engaged in by the Council. It would also greatly increase the flexibility of the Council in determining the mix of affordable housing, market value housing, commercial uses and leisure and entertainment facilities in the subsequent development.

For the moment it is not clear what future land uses would be most appropriate here. Clearly, housing development would allow a very substantial number of dwellings to be constructed – potentially high market value apartments facing the waterside, affordable housing throughout the rest of the site. Again, the ground floors of the waterside frontage could be made available for commercial use. Alternatively, there could be some major leisure developments on this stretch of the harbourside. For example, this could be an appropriate site for the relocation of the Pavilion theatre, if other highly desirable developments on the peninsula were pressing for more space. Again, if a large-scale leisure swimming, sauna and spa facility could be attracted to one of these sites, this could be the location of a strong tourist attraction, as well as a major asset for local residents. Other entertainment and active leisure facilities could also be appropriate. Further multi-story car parking may be desirable in the longer-term, and a location close to the harbourside would be very advantageous. Finally, if the Harbour Authority wishes to make stacking available to boat owners, when demand for marina berths rises significantly, then the empty land by Westham Bridge could offer an appropriate location.

A further possibility that has been mooted is for a 'Culture and Education Quarter' to be established on part of this site, hosting, for example, a small theatre and/or art cinema, an art exhibition space, and other leisure facilities. It might also host a relocated Weymouth College (which is seeking much closer ties with the town centre and could release valuable housing land if it left its current site).

The land assembly and redevelopment of these sites on the west bank of inner Harbour would clearly take some time. However, some elements of this land assembly could be undertaken earlier – indeed, even in the short-term. Moreover, some elements of the long-term redevelopment could also be brought forward – for example, it has been suggested that a pedestrian walkway on the marina side of the Harbour walls could be constructed along Westway, opening up this side of the marina to pedestrians, both local and tourist. Even before Westway is relocated, some of the land assembled which will not be affected by the long-term road location could be made available for some uses with high social or market value – or for medium-term uses which will bring footfall and spend to the area by attracting tourists and local people within a 3 – 10 year window. Such early actions would have the advantage of signalling to developers that investment on this bank of the marina is likely to be increasingly attractive in the longer-term future.



- ***Attraction of a major national or international facility***

The most exciting long-term option – but also the most risky – would be to aim to attract a major national or international museum or interpretation centre to the Harbour or peninsula. To be convincing, such a facility should relate to at least one of Weymouth’s ‘unique selling propositions’. For example, it could build upon Weymouth’s location on the Jurassic coast, which is now a World Heritage Site ... or its proximity to Marine Conservation Areas ... or its historic roles (fishing, trade, sea bathing, royal holidays, Jane Austen stories, piracy, smuggling, D Day) on the south coast ... or potential Eden project connections ... or ...

This option would entail a systematic trawling of national museums and relevant public agencies to identify potentially ‘footloose’ activities which could be devolved to Weymouth from their current locations (many of which are likely to be in London, and under pressure to consider devolution outside of London, as part of the ‘Levelling Up’ agenda).

Such ‘fishing expeditions’ would take considerable time and patient negotiation. It is quite likely that this would involve a 3 – 5 year exploration period and a 3 - 5 year transition period for the design, building and equipping of the resultant facility. This would therefore be a genuinely long-term option and would involve considerable inputs from Council officers and representatives of partner organisations in the area.

Moreover, if this option is pursued, it would be necessary to ensure that space would be available when the option was successfully secured, which has significant implications for the timing of (and potential income from) some of the medium-term developments.

- ***Summary of long-term options***

The long-term vision for Weymouth Harbour and peninsula (and for Weymouth town more generally) is naturally shrouded in uncertainty. However, it appears that Weymouth has a potential well in advance of that of most English coastal towns, seaside resorts and ports.

For this potential to be realised, ambitions need to be set high and long-term aims have to be demanding, while also being plausible – the vision of ‘where we ideally want to be’ has to be married with the ‘art of the possible’.

The redevelopment of the western bank of the inner Harbour could prove a dramatic turning point in Weymouth’s future. However, achieving it within a practical timescale will require coordinated efforts from a range of stakeholders in the town, both public and private sector. For such redevelopment to be credible will require clear signals from all key organisations involved that they are willing and able to play their part in such a joint project.

To secure the location on Weymouth Harbour or peninsula of a nationally or internationally renowned attraction will not be easy. The major potential gains are clear from the experience of other coastal towns and cities which have succeeded in pulling this off. However, as a risky option, elected members must consider whether the potential gains, if successful, would be likely to outweigh the resources which would be needed, over a substantial period of time, to capture such an attraction.