

1. The Dorset Council Local Plan

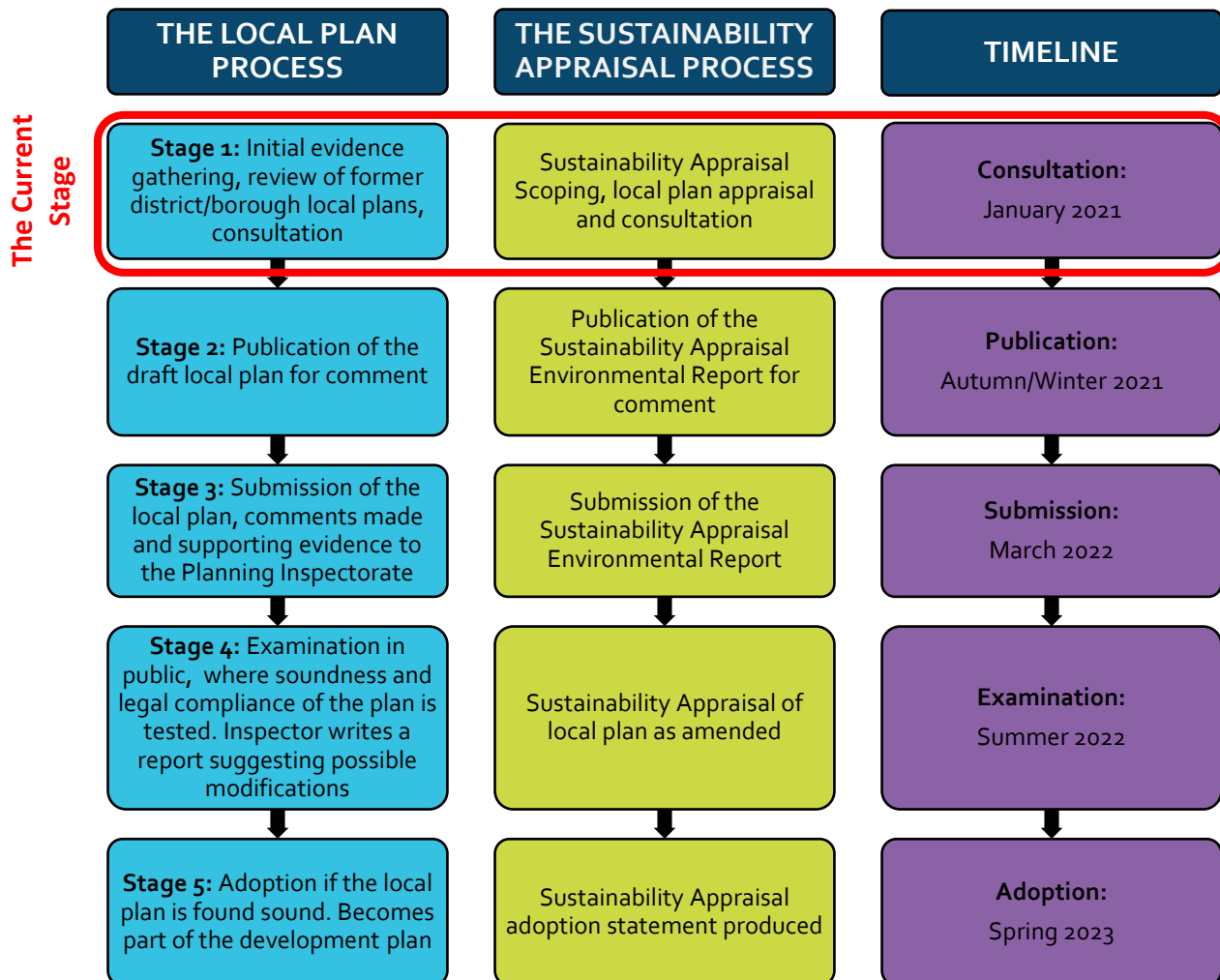
1.1. Introduction

What is a local plan?

- 1.1.1. Planning involves making decisions about the use and development of land. It controls which new buildings will be built and where, and so is important for the future of our towns, villages and countryside. The purpose of the planning system is to contribute to the achievement of sustainable development and local councils are expected to plan positively for the needs of their area.
- 1.1.2. The Dorset Council Local Plan will cover the whole of the Dorset Council area. It is being produced by the newly formed Dorset Council unitary authority. Once adopted, the local plan will form part of the development plan alongside the adopted minerals and waste policy documents and any neighbourhood plans that have also been made part of the development plan. The local plan will contain both strategic and non-strategic policies to manage development alongside further non-strategic policies contained in neighbourhood plans.
- 1.1.3. Neighbourhood plans are prepared by local communities and can be as simple or as detailed as local people want, provided they have regard to national planning policy and are in general conformity with the strategic policies of the local plan. When a neighbourhood plan is made part of the development plan, its policies will take precedence over the existing non-strategic policies in the local plan for that neighbourhood where they are in conflict.
- 1.1.4. Other development plan documents and supplementary planning documents may be produced where necessary to cover specific topics or sites, or to provide more detailed policy. These will also be used to guide decision taking. All relevant planning policy documents will be made available at the council offices and on the council's website www.dorsetcouncil.gov.uk.
- 1.1.5. The Dorset Council Local Plan will eventually replace the current adopted local plans that cover the former district and borough council areas that now make up the Dorset Council area.
- 1.1.6. As the former Dorset districts and borough were all reviewing their local plans when the new Dorset Council was formed, the work undertaken in reviewing these plans has been reviewed and where relevant incorporated into the production of the Dorset

Local Plan. The key stages that the council will follow in producing the local plan are set out in Figure 1.1.

Figure 1.1: Stages in producing the Dorset Council Local Plan



How long does the local plan last?

- 1.1.7. The local plan will cover the period from 2021 to 2038. The start date reflects when the local plan will be published for consultation (Stage 2), with the end date reflecting the requirement for local plans to cover at least 15 years upon adoption.
- 1.1.8. National guidance states that most local plans will require updating in whole or in part every 5 years. This local plan (once adopted) is therefore likely to be reviewed again well before the end of the plan period.

The structure of the Dorset Council Local Plan

- 1.1.9. The local plan is made up of a number of chapters which contain different elements of the strategy for the future development of the area. The policies within these chapters are interrelated and should not be viewed in isolation.
- 1.1.10. This introductory chapter sets out the purpose of the local plan as well as the plan period. It also includes a brief contextual description of Dorset, highlighting some of the broad issues that exist in the area. There is an explanation of some of the key terms used within the plan, with a more detailed explanation of specific terms included in the glossary at the end of the document.
- 1.1.11. Chapter 2 of this plan sets out the overarching vision for the plan area along with strategic priorities for the development and use of land within the Dorset Council area. It goes on to set out the spatial development strategy for the local plan area, the levels of growth that will be attained and the role of neighbourhood plans in achieving this.
- 1.1.12. In managing growth, there is a need to protect the high quality environment of the plan area. Chapter 3 includes a number of policies to minimise the impact of development on the environment including policies to help tackle climate change.
- 1.1.13. A key element of the use and development of land relates to economic growth and the provision of job opportunities for residents. Chapter 4 includes policies to facilitate economic development and support the economic vitality of our towns and the local economy.
- 1.1.14. There is a significant need for more homes within Dorset. The policies in Chapter 5 seek to deliver new homes to meet the needs of all who wish to live in the area.

Use of the words 'will' and 'should'

Policies in this plan are written to cater for a wide range of planning applications, from small scale domestic extensions up to large, mixed- use development sites. Because of this, some flexibility needs to be built into the policy tests on occasion.

Where the word '**will**' has been used, this means that the policy test must be complied with and it is not expected that there will be exceptions made to this policy.

Where the word '**should**' is used, this means in general it is expected that the policy test will be met, but recognises that there may be exceptions made due to specific circumstances. It does not imply that the policy is optional. If an applicant considers that their case is an exception, then they should include information explaining the reasons why they consider such an exception should be made.

Chapter 6 sets out the approach to delivering the necessary supporting infrastructure to accompany growth that will take place in the period to 2038.

- 1.1.15. The second part of the plan contains chapters for each of the main towns where the majority of development will take place. These chapters contain an overall strategy for each town and policies for individual development sites.

1.2. Dorset's distinctive characteristics

- 1.2.1. Dorset Council was formed in April 2019 as a single unitary council covering the former districts of East Dorset, North Dorset, Purbeck, West Dorset and Weymouth & Portland. This draft local plan, when adopted, will become the first local plan for the new Dorset Council area.
- 1.2.2. The Dorset Council area covers some 252,000 hectares and is home to around 378,510 people¹. The area is located on the south coast of England between Southampton and Exeter. It is spatially diverse but primarily a rural area containing market and coastal towns and many rural villages throughout. The south-eastern edge of the Dorset Council area borders the Bournemouth/Christchurch/Poole conurbation which has a significant influence over the plan area, especially in the east.
- 1.2.3. The coast and countryside of Dorset are popular tourist destinations, with the tourist economy contributing £1.8 billion² to the local economy per annum. The county is home to many attractive rural villages and unique landscapes, with 56% of the area (1416 km²) covered by two Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) designations. These sit alongside the 'Jurassic Coast', England's only natural UNESCO World Heritage Site – a beautiful landscape underpinned by diverse geology of international importance which stretches 95 miles along the Dorset coastline.
- 1.2.4. Across the area there are a number of easily recognisable TV and film locations including West Bay where 'Broadchurch' was filmed, Custom House Quay in Weymouth starring in 'Dunkirk', Abbotsbury Swannery featuring in 'Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince', and Gold Hill in Shaftesbury playing host to the popular 1970s Hovis advert. However, Dorset's popularity also puts pressure on the area's more fragile habitats and environmental assets.

¹ 2019 Mid-Year Estimates, ONS

² <https://www.visit-dorset.com/dbimgs/2018-Infographic-The%20Economic%20Impact%20of%20%20Dorset's%20Visitor%20Economy-p.pdf>

- 1.2.5. Dorset includes a series of towns and villages with clear and distinct historic identities and characters that bind those that live there. Dorset's rich heritage includes Iron Age hillforts, Roman settlements, Saxon and Georgian towns. It also has a strong literary heritage, with well-known associations including Thomas Hardy and William Barnes. It is home to the thousand year old Corfe Castle which lies in the heart of the dramatic Purbeck landscape, the ancient Cerne Abbas Giant chalk figure situated on the Dorset Downs, and an array of thousands of listed buildings which form an irreplaceable part of Dorset's cultural heritage and represent tangible connections with our past.
- 1.2.6. The east of the county is heavily influenced by the urban area of Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole Council (BCP) as the main centre of population in the area. Across the remainder of the area there are a range of market and coastal towns which act as service and employment centres for their rural hinterlands, with the largest of these being centred on the Weymouth – Dorchester corridor.
- 1.2.7. Running through the south of the council area is the Weymouth to London Waterloo railway line which connects the towns of Weymouth, Dorchester and Wareham to the Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole conurbation and on to the South East and London. In the north of the council area is the Exeter to London Waterloo railway line which connects the towns of Sherborne and Gillingham with Yeovil and Salisbury. In addition, the Heart of Wessex line connects Weymouth to Yeovil and on to Bristol via a number of smaller villages, and the Swanage Railway branch line connects Swanage and Corfe Castle to the main line at Wareham, though it does not currently support regular services.
- 1.2.8. The main east – west road routes through the southern area are via the A31/A35 which is part of the Strategic Road Network. This route connects Lyme Regis and Bridport in the west via Dorchester to the BCP conurbation in the east. Whilst the A303 corridor clips the north of the county, north – south routes are often less direct and more challenging.
- 1.2.9. Aside from the tourism industry, the key economic sectors in Dorset are advanced engineering and manufacturing, including aerospace, defence, composite and marine technologies; agri-tech; and food and drink, with the area boasting a varied selection of locally produced victuals, including meat, fish, dairy and wine. The Dorset Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) area, which also covers the BCP conurbation, boasts one of the fastest growing creative and digital hubs in Europe and is a rapidly growing centre for financial services. The financial services sector is also the largest GVA (gross

value added) earner for Dorset³. Workforce retention is however a big issue for the council area with many school leavers moving away to pursue careers elsewhere or to go to university due to the lack of local higher and further education facilities. Also many people move into the area to retire. These trends are expected to continue, exacerbating current issues which businesses face in recruiting and retaining suitable employees.

1.3. Issues and challenges facing Dorset

Environmental issues

Climate change

- 1.3.1. Dorset Council has declared a climate and ecological emergency. The impacts of climate change are expected to be vast and irreversible, including hotter summers and wetter winters, with more frequent and extreme weather events bringing about increased flooding and droughts. Although the scale and details of predictions may change as more information comes forward and modelling becomes more effective, an average global temperature rise of at least two degrees centigrade is predicted by around 2040 unless the commitments made in the 2015 Paris Agreement are fully implemented. This projection is expected to pose knock on impacts on the natural environment and natural resources including water supply and biodiversity.
- 1.3.2. In order to prepare for inevitable climate change, Dorset must implement adaptation measures such as avoiding flood risk. Furthermore, as climate change is predominantly human induced, we must also mitigate against future climate change through lowering emissions of the greenhouse gases (GHGs) which cause the warming effect. The 2008 Climate Change Act commits the UK to reducing levels of GHGs to net zero by 2050 and Dorset has an important part to play in this. Annual GHG emissions were estimated in 2018 to be 43% below that of the 1990 baseline⁴, however there is still a long way to go before we reach net zero emissions.
- 1.3.3. The local plan facilitates both the adaptation and mitigation of climate change and its implications in Dorset⁵ because it has the potential to influence sectors which currently produce significant GHG emissions. This includes the transport sector, which

³ <https://www.dorsetlep.co.uk/dorsets-sectors>

⁴ <https://dorsetlnp.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/Climate-Change-Adaptation-Position-Paper1.pdf>

⁵ https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/862887/2018_Final_greenhouse_gas_emissions_statistical_release.pdf

produces around 28% of net emissions, where the local plan can help reduce the need to travel through its role in managing the location of development. It can also encourage the use of public transport, support active transport through effective permeable and attractive urban design, and promote the provision of electric charging points for vehicles. The local plan also has a role to play in reducing emissions from the energy sector, which currently produces 23% of GHG emissions, by facilitating renewable energy developments. The local plan can reinforce sustainable building codes and standards to reduce emissions coming from new homes and commercial developments. It also has the potential to influence vital carbon sequestration through expanding the green infrastructure network, planting trees, and protecting trees and forests which act as important carbon sinks.

- 1.3.4. Dorset is particularly vulnerable to impacts of climate change due to its coastal location, with both rising sea levels and increasing storm frequency predicted to increase coastal erosion levels. Its high reliance on incomes from the agricultural and tourism sector, which are fragile to changes in climate, also put many of the population's livelihood at risk. The local plan will therefore sit alongside action plans and the work of many external stakeholders to both help mitigate climate change and increase the resilience of both Dorset's residents and its natural environment to climate change.

Fragile natural environment

- 1.3.5. Highly interrelated with climate change is the degradation of the natural environment and for this reason Dorset Council has declared a Climate and Ecological Emergency. Human influences are leading to exploitation of the natural environment through pollution, land degradation and recreation, which is leading to the decline of a variety of ecosystem services on which life depends.
- 1.3.6. Dorset has a range of landscapes, seascapes, habitats and sites that act as 'capital' for economic and social activity. Dorset residents place significant value on being able to access and enjoy the Dorset environment; Dorset's environmental economy has been calculated to be worth approximately £1.5 billion per annum, supporting 30,000 jobs and in total worth about 8%-10% of the area's overall economy each year⁶. Decline of our fragile natural environment will therefore lead to tensions in many regards and hence the plan has an important role to play in protecting it.

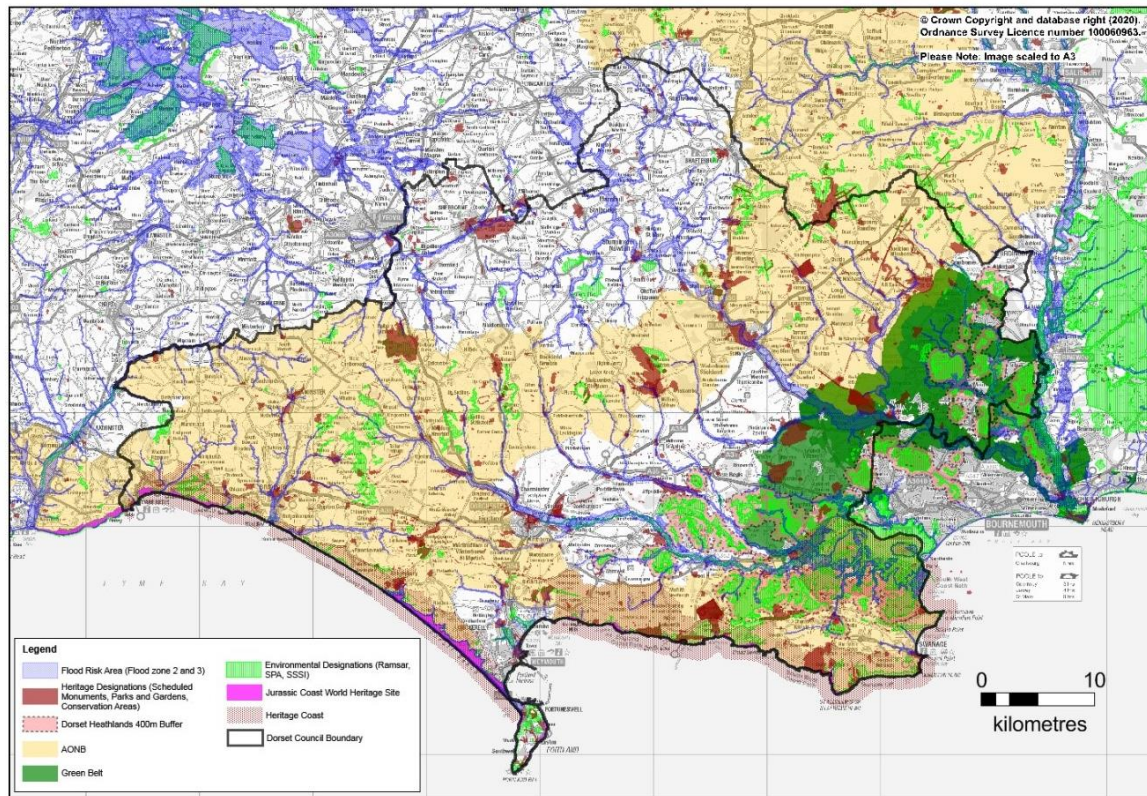
⁶ <https://jurassiccoast.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/02/Dorsets-Environmental-Economy-Final-Report-Dec-2015.pdf>

- 1.3.7. One of the local plan's priorities is to deliver sustainable development while protecting and enhancing Dorset's environment and this will be ensured throughout a variety of policies which aim to deliver environmental protection and enhancement. The plan also aims to conserve designated landscapes, including the Dorset and Cranborne Chase and West Wiltshire Downs Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty. Key environmental constraints and designations have also been taken into account when developing the spatial strategy and will be followed through in all stages of site development from allocation to design, implementation and delivery. The local plan options document has been produced in collaboration with various Dorset Council teams to ensure that the contributions that it can make to protecting and enhancing the natural environment are maximised in the context of sustainable development.

Coastal change and flooding

- 1.3.8. Dorset's striking coastline attracts an array of visitors annually, however coastal change such as erosion also poses dangers to residents and visitors alike. It is therefore important to get a balance between allowing Dorset's coastline to erode naturally and safeguarding homes and lives. Because coastal processes do not act in isolation, management of the coast in one location will have knock-on impacts further along the coast, and coastal management is therefore a strategic issue. This means that the approach in Dorset has to be developed with its neighbouring authorities including BCP and East Devon District Councils. Coastal defences are in place at key towns including at Swanage, Weymouth, West Bay (Bridport) and Lyme Regis. The remainder of the coast is likely to remain undefended over the lifetime of the local plan, allowing natural processes to take place.
- 1.3.9. Hand in hand with coastal erosion comes flooding, which can be caused by a variety of means including from watercourses, surface water and groundwater. Flooding can also be caused by or exacerbated by the coast. Both flooding and coastal erosion are interrelated to climate change through increased sea levels and the frequency and intensity of storms. The local plan has a role to play in managing flood risk, by ensuring new residential development does not take place in areas at risk of flooding, and that building in one area does not increase flooding risk elsewhere. Similarly, in coastal regions susceptible to erosion, the council will restrict development to manage risk.
- 1.3.10. Figure 1.2 shows the key environmental constraints across the Dorset Council area that have been taken into account during the production of this draft local plan.

Figure 1.2: The Dorset Council area and its main environmental constraints



Social issues

Housing need

1.3.11. House prices in Dorset are relatively high compared with much of the country. In March 2020 the average house price in Dorset was £285,000, compared to £248,000 for England as a whole⁷. These high house prices, combined with a reliance on low-wage economic sectors such as tourism and agriculture, create a high level of affordable housing need. They also contribute to the out-migration of younger people which, combined with an in-migration of older people, results in an ageing population and often makes it difficult for local people to buy or rent houses locally. From 2007-2017 Dorset saw a net loss of 15-19 year olds to other parts of the UK, with net gains mostly among those aged 30+; however the highest gain was in those aged over 65⁸.

⁷ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/uk-house-price-index-england-march-2020/uk-house-price-index-england-march-2020>

⁸ <https://theartsdevelopmentcompany.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/State-of-Dorset-2019-Compilation-document.pdf>

Dorset therefore has an ageing workforce which, coupled with high house prices, often makes it difficult for employers to recruit.

- 1.3.12. The relatively high proportion of second homes in some parts of the area, including within the 'chocolate box' villages of the Isle of Purbeck and sporadic locations along the coast, exacerbates these affordability issues. Due to Dorset's fragile environment there is the need to balance housing provision with safeguarding the natural environment. This high quality environment that is so important for Dorset's economy further constrains opportunities for delivering the much needed housing.
- 1.3.13. Working with town and parish councils and the development industry, Dorset Council will aim to deliver a wide variety of homes in suitable locations to meet the needs of the area.

Transport and access issues

- 1.3.14. There are no motorways within the Dorset Council area but direct rail links to London, Salisbury and Bristol. The rural nature of much of Dorset poses some access issues with much of the area, especially in the north and west, having a lack of public transport services or rail connections. This leads to a high reliance on car travel which presents barriers to sustainable development, education and employment opportunities, alongside access to healthcare and other services. The former East Dorset District has the highest number of workers that commute by car or van in England and Wales at 79.5%. Many of Dorset's rural areas are⁹ relatively inaccessible with social isolation and loneliness significant issues for many in rural Dorset¹⁰.
- 1.3.15. The local plan's approach to transport comes hand in hand with its spatial strategy for development. Local and national policy aim to locate housing in sustainable locations. Within the context of Dorset's housing need, sustainable locations include settlements that are situated within 15 minutes' drive or 30 minutes' public transport travel time to larger towns. Providing homes in close proximity to these larger towns where employment and services are generally located, will enable residents to travel shorter distances to meet their everyday needs.

⁹ <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s12061-016-9196-0>

¹⁰

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/784685/future_of_mobility_access.pdf

Health and wellbeing

- 1.3.16. The UK is in the midst of a health crisis, with rates of poor physical and mental health, obesity and many related diseases all increasing. High rates of obesity alone are estimated to cost the NHS and wider society £27 billion annually through lost productivity and sick days¹¹. Health inequalities are also increasing. Poor health is more prevalent among people on lower incomes, in areas of deprivation and where there is limited access to facilities that benefit health, and this affects much of Dorset.
- 1.3.17. As well as ensuring provision of adequate health services, many other factors have impacts on people’s mental and physical health. These wider determinants of health include financial security, housing safety, employment and the environment in which people live. Planning therefore has a large role to play in improving health outcomes and reducing health inequalities.
- 1.3.18. The policies in the local plan will play an important role in enabling healthy lifestyles. This can be achieved, for example, through delivery of safe, well-lit and attractive walking and cycling routes connecting new developments to local services and facilities. Provision of green infrastructure to enable easy access to the natural environment and reducing reliance on car-based travel through provision of good quality walking and cycling routes will also be important. The local plan is being developed in collaboration with Public Health Dorset to ensure that it exploits opportunities for improving health outcomes.

Ageing population

- 1.3.19. Dorset has an older population when compared to England as a whole, with an average age of just under 47 compared with just over 40 for England. In Dorset 29% of the population are aged 65 or over, compared with the national average of 18%. One in three of the population in the east of the area is over 65. Corresponding with the national trends, the population of over 65s is expected to grow at 1.5% annually alongside a marginal decline in working population¹². The impacts of this are vast and will not only be felt through a strain on Dorset’s healthcare services but also as an economic impact as there will be a smaller workforce for employers to recruit from. This will also have implications for housing supply and tenures, as older generations

¹¹ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/health-matters-obesity-and-the-food-environment/health-matters-obesity-and-the-food-environment--2#:~:text=The%20overall%20cost%20of%20obesity,%C2%A349.9%20billion%20per%20year.>

¹² <https://apps.geowessex.com/insights/Topics/Topic/Population>

tend to live in under-occupied homes, either from preference or because they require specially designed or adaptable dwellings.

- 1.3.20. Research shows that 1 in 5 households across Dorset are also vulnerable to social isolation and loneliness. This is partly due to the rural nature of the area and poor transport links, but these issues are also apparent in many of Dorset's better connected towns, showing a more complex set of factors than just a lack of transport links¹³
- 1.3.21. The local plan has a role to play in helping to tackle social isolation and loneliness. The provision of appropriate housing that is adaptable and meets the needs of residents will help address these issues alongside: wider health interventions that encourage people to keep fit and healthy, including information services, such as 'Live Well Dorset'¹⁴, which can be more cost effective than clinical interventions; improvements in accessible green spaces and active travel interventions to keep residents physically active; and the provision of community infrastructure to meet local needs.

Economic issues

Employment

- 1.3.22. Dorset's unemployment rate in 2019 was 2.5%, compared with 4.2% in the BCP conurbation and 3.8% over England as a whole. Dorset's unemployment rate is comparatively low, nevertheless there are pockets with higher rates throughout the area. A relatively high proportion of the workforce is employed in lower-skilled occupations like farming and tourism, associated with the rural and coastal nature of the area. Wages are consequently below the regional average.

Figure 1.3: Comparison of average salaries in Dorset, BCP, and England

	Dorset	BCP	England
Average Salary	£33.0k	£36.5k	£37.4k

- 1.3.23. Dorset Local Enterprise Partnership data estimates gross value added (GVA) at £28.20 per hour in the county of Dorset compared with £32.58 in the UK. This results in an output gap of £2.5 billion¹⁵. Investment in skills and training as well as infrastructure

¹³ <https://moderngov.dorsetcouncil.gov.uk/Data/252/201809051000/Agenda/Social%20Isolation%20V2.2.pdf>

¹⁴ <https://www.livewelldorset.co.uk/>

¹⁵ <https://www.dorsetlep.co.uk/invest-in-dorset>

and transport is a major factor in creating a highly employable, higher-skilled local population.

- 1.3.24. The balance of jobs and housing varies across Dorset. Some towns such as Bridport have relatively balanced levels of jobs and housing whereas other towns, most notably Weymouth and Dorchester have a significant imbalance. Weymouth has a significant amount of outward commuting to Dorchester for jobs, and Dorchester relies on a much wider area for its workforce. Many Portlanders have had to look for job opportunities on the mainland and some of the employment opportunities created on the island do not match the skills of the local workforce. In the eastern part of the council area, there is a net out-migration from the area with a pull to the BCP conurbation for work. In Sherborne there is an inward flow of lesser-skilled workers who cannot afford the local house prices and an outward flow of the higher-skilled workforce to jobs elsewhere outside the town.
- 1.3.25. Dorset Innovation Park at Winfrith, Dorset's Enterprise Zone, is an advanced engineering cluster of excellence for the South West, building on strengths in the marine, defence and energy sectors. It offers a secure facility and the presence of two world leaders in defence technology – Atlas Elektronik and QinetiQ.

Broadband infrastructure

- 1.3.26. Much of Dorset, especially in the north and west, is very rural and can feel disconnected to the wider area. With working practices changing and the world becoming ever more digitised, a fast connection to the internet is important. Superfast Dorset is working to ensure that all of Dorset has access to superfast broadband and around 90% of Dorset's households currently have a superfast connection. The next step for Dorset is to upgrade to ultrafast broadband.
- 1.3.27. The local plan will seek to ensure that all new homes come with full fibre broadband to each premises and work alongside the Digital Infrastructure Strategy with the aim of transforming Dorset into a digital economy and community. This will be achieved through the creation of world-class, future-proof digital connectivity, thereby giving opportunities to create new products and open access to new markets and business opportunities.

Town centres

- 1.3.28. Due to changing population structures, national trends, and COVID-19, many facilities within town and local centres are struggling. The provision and retention of accessible local facilities for the general public within town and local centres are key to reducing social isolation and providing access to everyday facilities whilst minimising the need

to travel longer distances. Continued support for these facilities and town centres is an important element of the local plan.

- 1.3.29. A significant recent change from central government has been the introduction of the new Enterprise (E) Use Class which merges the previous town centre use classes (such as shops, financial and professional services, restaurants, cafes, gyms, offices etc.) into one. This allows greater flexibility for these types of premises to change between uses without requiring planning consent.
- 1.3.30. A further change to the use classes regulations has been the expansion of uses that fall under the category of 'sui generis' which now includes pubs/drinking establishments, hot food takeaways, cinemas, concert venues and bingo and dance halls. Any change of use to one of these uses will now require planning consent. This allows for more control over both the distribution of these uses and the amenity and health implications that come with some of them.