

5. Economy

5.1. Introduction

- 5.1.1. A prosperous local economy is vital to achieving the strategic priorities of Dorset Council. The council’s Economic Growth Strategy sets out its ambitions to enable clean, inclusive, sustainable and good quality economic growth across the whole council area, and thereby bring improved standards of living, quality of life, health and wellbeing for all its residents.
- 5.1.2. The local plan can help deliver this sustainable economic growth by enabling development in the right locations, whilst minimising the impact of that activity through the protection and enhancement of Dorset’s unique environment. The Economic Growth Strategy and Local Industrial Strategy reinforce the message that a significant and sustained increase in productivity must not come at the expense of the environment.
- 5.1.3. Delivering sustainable economic growth is fundamental to the future prosperity of Dorset and forms one of the strategic priorities of the local plan.

Strategic Priority	The role of the Local Plan	Relevant Strategic Policies in this Section
Economic Growth We will deliver sustainable economic growth and improved infrastructure across the whole of Dorset, increasing productivity and the number of high quality jobs, creating great	The Local Plan can help to deliver economic growth by enabling sustainable economic development in the right locations and providing homes for those who work in the area. Infrastructure provision to meet the area’s needs is important to facilitating this growth.	Employment sites <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - ECON1: Protection of key employment sites
		Retail / town centres <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - ECON3: Hierarchy of centres and the sequential test - ECON4: Town centre impact assessments
		Tourism <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - ECON6: Supporting Vibrant and Attractive Tourism ECON8: Caravan and Camping Sites

places to live, work and visit.	Around 21,000 new jobs are to be created across the area over the lifetime of this plan.	<p>The Rural Economy</p> <p>ECON₁₀: Diversification of land based rural businesses</p>
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- 5.1.4. The economy and the environment are closely linked. The outstanding natural and historic environment of the local plan area contributes to the economy by making the area an attractive place to live, work and visit. The network of town, district and local centres are not just places where people can access a range of services and facilities. Many centres have links to the past, with listed buildings and other historic features or connections and are places that people identify with strongly. The high quality of the coast and countryside, with its designated landscapes and heritage assets, is particularly valuable for tourism and attracting inward investment.
- 5.1.5. Economic development can also have a significant impact on the quality and character of the area, particularly in residential or rural locations. Although the farming industry and other land based businesses of our rural areas employ a relatively small proportion of the population, the rural economy has a great influence on the landscape and active management of the countryside.
- 5.1.6. Recent significant events such as the declaration of a climate and ecological emergency, Brexit and the Covid-19 pandemic have the potential to profoundly impact the local and wider economy. Although some effects are already becoming apparent there is much uncertainty and it is too early to tell how places and sectors will change as a result of these issues. Further work will be necessary to fully appreciate their implications for the economy.

5.2. The supply of employment land and premises

- 5.2.1. As Dorset's population grows, employment opportunities are vital to the maintenance of balanced, sustainable and prosperous communities. Sufficient land needs to be provided if future economic growth is to be successfully delivered.
- 5.2.2. Our latest projections (December 2019) indicate that between 2018 and 2038, economic growth in the Dorset Council area will lead to the creation of up to 21,000 new jobs (FTE) across all industries. We estimate that this equates to a need for between 131ha and 151ha of employment land for offices, light industrial, general industrial, storage and warehousing (use classes B2 and B8 and former use class B1). However, we are aware that further evidence is needed to evaluate fully the potential impacts of Brexit, the Covid-19 pandemic, and recent changes to the Use Classes

Order on these figures. This will be undertaken prior to the next stage of the local plan production.

- 5.2.3. The scale and type of new employment development should be appropriate to its location and focused in places where it will provide people with the opportunity to work locally, helping to promote social inclusion and reduce the need to travel.
- 5.2.4. The local plan's approach to meeting the projected demand is through supporting the right types of economic development in the most appropriate locations, as set out in the Development Strategy in Section 2. Sites reserved for employment uses have been allocated at several of the larger settlements (summarised in Figure 2.0). Flexible policies for the rural area have been included instead of allocations in and around other settlements. Further employment allocations may come forward in neighbourhood plans.

Protecting employment sites

- 5.2.5. In meeting the future needs of the economy and local communities it is important that an appropriate range of employment facilities is maintained across the plan area.
- 5.2.6. 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.
- 5.2.7. Suitable protection of existing employment sites (taking into account their significance) will help to provide sufficient opportunities for employment needs to be met locally, to reduce the need to travel, and to promote economic growth and social inclusion.
- 5.2.8. In accordance with the National Planning Policy Framework, and based on available evidence, the local plan outlines a strategy for encouraging sustainable economic growth at appropriate locations. While safeguarding land for employment uses is an important part of the strategy, there may be instances where the changes can occur without the need for planning permission.
- 5.2.9. The Town and Country Planning (Use Classes) Order (as amended) puts uses of land and buildings into various categories. The changing of land or a building to a different activity within the same use class does not require planning permission.
- 5.2.10. Use class E was introduced in September 2020. It replaces the former B1 use (offices and light industrial) but also includes the former A1, A2 and A3 uses (shops, financial and professional services, and restaurants), plus clinics, crèches and gyms. Buildings

within this class can move between these uses without the need for planning permission. It also allows for a mix of those uses and permits a building to have a number of uses taking place concurrently or at different times of the day.

- 5.2.11. The changes are not limited by location; they affect any buildings within the relevant uses wherever they are. Consequently, the ability for local plans to control the distribution and retention of these facilities and services is reduced.
- 5.2.12. Permitted development rights may also apply to some buildings on employment sites. These allow conversion to other uses, such as residential, without the need for planning permission. Development allowed under such rights cannot be controlled by local plan policies though may be subject to other conditions and exceptions.

Definition of employment

- 5.2.13. For planning purposes, employment uses have previously been defined as offices, light industrial, general industrial, storage and warehousing. Industries of these types will continue to be supported. However, in recognition of the diverse nature of employment generating development and the wide range of sectors in the plan area that make a contribution to the economy, we have adopted a broader definition of 'employment'.

Figure 5.1: Definition of employment

Employment

Employment uses include development in the B2 and B8 Use Classes (general industrial, storage and distribution), plus similar and compatible sui generis uses such as waste management infrastructure. They also include other development providing direct, on-going local employment opportunities which are appropriately located within an industrial estate/business park. Examples might include offices and research and development facilities.

They do not include businesses such as retail, farming, care homes, tourist accommodation and attractions, or development that indirectly benefits the local economy, such as housing.

5.3. Key employment sites

- 5.3.1. 'Key employment sites' contribute significantly to the supply of employment land for B2 (general industrial), B8 (storage and distribution) and other uses commonly found on industrial estates such as offices and research and development facilities. They

often provide a location for development that is not compatible with residential areas. Key sites are of particular importance for the supply of jobs and their contribution to the economy, making a significant contribution to delivering the economic strategy, meeting anticipated employment needs or those of identified priority sectors. These sites are important for local and inward investment. They generally include larger existing employment sites as well as new sites proposed as part of strategic allocations in the plan (listed at Figure 2.0).

- 5.3.2. In addition to these strategically important key sites there are a number of smaller, locally significant sites. While these sites do not fulfil the same strategic function, they have an important role in servicing the local economy, providing locations to support local businesses or valuable 'bad neighbour' activities. Where the contribution of these sites is considered particularly valuable these have also been defined as 'key'.
- 5.3.3. Some key employment sites can encompass waste facilities. These include waste transfer facilities, scrapyards and sewage treatment works. Such facilities may be defined under B2 or B8 use classes as industrial processes, or may be defined as sui generis uses. Existing waste management facilities meeting specified criteria, and allocated waste sites, are safeguarded by the Bournemouth, Dorset & Poole Waste Plan.

The appropriateness of the proposed use

- 5.3.4. Given the contribution key sites make to the supply of land for 'traditional industries' and the difficulties associated with these sometimes unneighbourly types of development, B2 and B8 Uses will continue to be supported and protected on key sites.
- 5.3.5. To provide sufficient flexibility to respond to the economy it is appropriate not to limit development on key sites solely to these sectors. In recognition of diverse nature of employment, key employment sites will also be safeguarded for a wider range of employment uses as defined in Figure 4.1.
- 5.3.6. However, the introduction of a broader range of uses to a key employment site has the potential to constrain future activity of the site. Unsuitable development could dictate what future employment uses are acceptable, limiting the operation of existing and future businesses.
- 5.3.7. Uses must be compatible with the key employment function of the site. Development which would result in a material change to the character of the area or prejudice the efficient and effective use of the key site will not be permitted.

- 5.3.8. In considering if an employment use may be appropriately located on a Key Employment Site, regard will be had for whether the proposed use:
- is unneighbourly in character or would be difficult to accommodate in an alternative location;
 - meets an identified need for waste management infrastructure;
 - is a complementary or ancillary use required to meet the needs of workers;
 - has strong trade links to other employment uses on the site;
 - is compatible with the core employment function of the site;
 - demonstrates an economic enhancement (in terms of wage rates, skills levels, job numbers, levels of productivity, etc.);
 - operates in a 'key sector' as identified by the Dorset LEP or Dorset Economic Growth Strategy.
- 5.3.9. Proposals that would help to facilitate suitable economic activity, support businesses or meet an identified need for waste management infrastructure will generally be supported. However, for some uses other policies will also apply. For example, town centre uses should follow the 'town centre first' approach set out in policy ECON3; this requires applicants to demonstrate that no other sequentially preferable sites can be found closer to town centres.
- 5.3.10. The council is committed to supporting sustainable economic growth. Where there are recognised viability issues preventing the delivery of key employment sites, we will work with developers to understand and seek to address potential barriers. However, these sites have an important role in meeting the needs of businesses and providing land for employment purposes, some of which are unneighbourly in character. Consequently, the loss of land on key employment sites to uses that do not

provide direct, on-going local employment opportunities (including retail and residential development) will be resisted.

ECON1: Protection of key employment sites

Within (existing and/or proposed) key employment sites (as identified on the policies map):

- I. employment uses (defined in Figure 4.1) will be permitted providing they are appropriate to the location, would not prejudice the efficient and effective use of the remainder of the employment site, and are in accordance with other planning policies.
- II. development which would lead to the loss of B2, B8 or similar sui generis employment land and/or premises will only be permitted where it can be demonstrated that it would achieve substantial benefits that outweigh the loss.
- III. other uses that do not provide direct, on-going local employment opportunities (including residential development) will not be permitted.

Q: Do you have any comments on the approach taken by policy ECON1, or the sites that have been identified as 'key'?

5.4. Other employment sites

- 5.4.1. There are other employment locations and premises outside the key employment sites. Although they have an important role in providing jobs for local people, a more flexible approach will be taken to the development of these other (non-key) employment sites.

The appropriateness of the proposed use

- 5.4.2. Employment uses (defined in figure 4.1) will be supported on other employment sites, particularly where they facilitate suitable economic activity, support businesses or meet an identified need for waste management infrastructure.
- 5.4.3. In some cases, the size, location and characteristics of a site may mean that more intensive, mixed-use development could provide greater benefit to the community, in terms of addressing local needs, than if the site was retained solely in employment uses. For example, some non-employment development may be necessary to secure additional employment development that would not otherwise be viable.
- 5.4.4. Proposals for mixed-use redevelopment will be expected to retain an equivalent number of jobs on the site (and in the case of vacant or underused sites, consideration will be given to the potential of that site for job creation rather than the existing number of jobs). Where an equivalent proportion of employment is not being retained, the council will need to be satisfied that the non-employment use is the minimum amount required to make the scheme viable.
- 5.4.5. Some existing employment uses may cause significant environmental or amenity problems that cannot be overcome. In such cases the redevelopment of the site for a less harmful employment use will be sought as a first preference. Where it can be demonstrated that alternative employment uses are not suitable or could not be attracted to the site, other more environmentally acceptable uses may be permitted.
- 5.4.6. In some circumstances there may not be a need for an employment site to remain in employment use. There may be sufficient alternatives available in the local area, and it may not be commercially viable to retain or attract employment uses to the site. It would not benefit the local economy and the local environment for such a site to become / remain vacant. Where there is no reasonable prospect of an employment use being delivered on the site, alternative non-employment uses may be considered.
- 5.4.7. A wide range of different uses may be permitted, however in some cases other policies will also apply. For example, policies in Chapter 5 set out the approach to housing development while policyECON3 outlines requirements for retail and other town centre uses.

The acceptability of the scheme

- 5.4.8. Development must be appropriate in nature and scale for its location taking into account the likely effects on, and potential sensitivity of, the site and wider area. Development should not, either on its own or cumulatively with other established or

proposed development in the vicinity, adversely affect the area's landscape, heritage and built environment, or the amenities of the resident population. Any potential increase in vehicle movements generated by development and the impact on the highway network must also be acceptable.

- 5.4.9. Where development is proposed on part of a larger employment area, the proposal must be compatible with any retained employment function on the rest of the site to ensure that it can still be used for employment purposes. Existing businesses and facilities should not have any unreasonable restrictions placed on them as a result of development permitted after they were established. Development which would prejudice the efficient and effective use of the remainder of an employment site will not be permitted.

Information required to support proposals

- 5.4.10. The information required in support of applications may vary depending on the nature of the proposal, its scale and location. Where non-employment uses are proposed, the council will require applicants to demonstrate that a real effort has been made to attract a suitable alternative employment use (defined in Figure 4.1) to that site, having regard to current market trends and the future land needs in that location.
- 5.4.11. Where employment sites are proposed for mixed-use development, the following information will be sought:
- description of community and regeneration benefits;
 - description of economic benefits (for example skills and training provision);
 - any local employment or other development needs addressed by the proposal;
 - existing job numbers (full time and part time) by job type;
 - the amount and type of any employment development to be retained / provided; and
 - expected job numbers (full time and part time) by job type and how this is justified.
- 5.4.12. Where an application is made for a use other than employment, the following information may be sought:
- description of any problems caused by the employment use, the measures considered to mitigate these issues and an explanation of why these problems could not be overcome;
 - any other reasons why the site is thought unsuitable for employment uses;
 - any local development needs addressed by the proposal;

- what other suitable, viable, alternative sites are available locally for employment uses (this should include an assessment of existing sites and premises in addition to land allocated by the local plan); and
- details of how the property has been marketed, over what period and for what price (and how the asking price was calculated), what uses it was marketed for, where it was advertised and whether there have been any offers received.

ECON2: Protection of other employment sites

- I. Outside the key employment sites, proposals leading to the loss of B2, B8 or similar Sui Generis employment land and/or premises will be permitted in accordance with other planning policies where:
 - Development comprises suitable alternative employment uses (defined in Figure 4.1); or
 - the mixed use redevelopment of the site would deliver important benefits with no significant loss of jobs / potential jobs; or
 - the present (or where vacant or derelict, the previous) use causes significant harm to the character or amenities of the surrounding area and it has been demonstrated that alternative employment uses are not suitable or achievable; or
 - it has been demonstrated that no viable employment use could be attracted to the site which has been actively and realistically marketed for re-use / redevelopment for employment use for a suitable period of time and reflecting the market value.

Redevelopment of employment sites must not adversely impact upon the amenity and operation of neighbouring properties/businesses and must be appropriate to the location.

Q: Do you have any comments on the approach to the protection of non-key employment taken by policy ECON2? Should the scope of the policy be extended beyond B Class uses to also safeguard 'employment' development as defined in figure 4.1?

5.5. Town centres and retail development

- 5.5.1. Town centres are at the heart of communities, providing accessible shops and services, employment and leisure facilities. Vital and viable centres not only provide economic and social benefits but also help to foster civic pride, promote local identity and contribute towards the aims of sustainable development.
- 5.5.2. Across the UK the impact of COVID-19 on town centres is profound with an accelerated growth in internet sales and a significant reduction in footfall due to home-working and social-distancing. However even before the onslaught of the pandemic town centres were experiencing challenging times, with high street retailers going out of business, increases in long-term vacant premises and a reduction in the numbers of people visiting town centres. The reasons for this are wide-ranging and complex, many being beyond the scope of planning policy, but in the main centre on the long-term major restructuring of the retail and commercial leisure industries. This restructuring has been taking place in response to changing consumer behaviour, itself driven both by technological advances and prevailing economic conditions such as the fallout from the 2008 global financial crisis and more recently uncertainty over Brexit. Increasingly this has led to the need for town centres to be redefined and adapted to support a greater diversification of uses, including residential, to boost visitor numbers and footfall, dwell time and spend as the role of retail as the dominant function of town centres diminishes.
- 5.5.3. National policy requires a town centres first approach to retail (and other town centre uses) whilst acknowledging the significant challenges facing town centres and in particular the retail sector. It recognises that diversification is key to the long-term vitality and viability of town centres to 'respond to rapid changes in the retail and leisure industries'. In support of diversification, and to help town centres recover from the economic impact of Covid-19, the government has recently introduced significant changes to the Use Classes Order aimed at:

'...creating vibrant, mixed use town centres by allowing businesses greater freedom to change to a broader range of compatible uses which communities expect to find on modern high streets, as well as more generally in town and city centres.'¹

¹ Explanatory Memorandum to The Town And Country Planning (Use Classes) (Amendment) (England) Regulations 2020

- 5.5.4. The main change is the creation of a new Class E, 'Commercial, business and service', comprising amongst others shops, financial and professional services, restaurants and cafes, and offices. In addition drinking and hot food takeaway establishments are now identified as uses which do not fall within any use class, i.e. 'sui generis'.

Future Town Centre Need Forecasts

- 5.5.5. National policy requires the need for new town centre uses to be planned for over a minimum ten year period. Evidence to assess the quantitative and qualitative need for retail and commercial leisure floorspace for the local plan area will be refreshed to reflect the major changes to shopping patterns that are impacting significantly on town centres. The evidence will also provide advice on the identification of centre and primary shopping boundaries and local impact thresholds for assessing retail and leisure development proposals outside centres.
- 5.5.6. The forecast need identified within the existing evidence base retail studies for individual centres is set out in the relevant local plan town chapters. The council acknowledges, however, the potential for consistency issues between the studies and also the need to review future floorspace requirements due to the uncertainty in forecasting long-term retail trends and consumer behaviour. Covid -19 is likely to have implications for the relevance of the existing evidence base too both in terms of forecasting and centre health checks. Further evidence is therefore need to inform the next stage of the local plan.

Network and Hierarchy of Centres

- 5.5.7. The definition of a network and hierarchy of centres that is resilient to anticipated future economic changes is a requirement of national policy. For the Dorset Council area a three tier hierarchy of centres has been defined, as set out in Figure 4.2, informed by the existing evidence and previous local plan work. Each centre within the network provides its own distinct mix of retail, service, leisure and cultural services, and/or office employment space. Many of the smaller local centres provide essential roles within their local communities and economies and are equally important as the higher level centres within the hierarchy.
- 5.5.8. Existing out-of-centre developments, comprising or including main town centre uses, do not constitute centres unless identified as such in the local plan and neither are small parades of shops of purely neighbourhood significance. Centres of purely neighbourhood significance identified in neighbourhood plans fall outside the local plan network and hierarchy and are not subject to Policy ECON3. In addition, centres outside the Dorset Local Plan area (such as Yeovil, Salisbury and those within the BCP

Council area) have an important influence on the retail hierarchy but are not covered by Policy ECON3.

Figure 5.2: Network and Hierarchy of Centres

Category	Definition	Centres
Town centres	Town centres are the principal centres within an area. In rural areas they can often be found within market or coastal towns. They function as important service centres, providing a range of facilities and services for extensive rural catchment areas.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Blandford Forum • Bridport • Dorchester • Ferndown • Gillingham • Lyme Regis • Shaftesbury • Sherborne • Sturminster Newton • Swanage • Verwood • Wimborne Minster • Wareham • Weymouth
District centres	District centres will usually comprise groups of shops often containing at least one supermarket or superstore, and a range of non-retail services, such as banks and restaurants, as well as local public facilities such as a library.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Queen Mother Square, Poundbury, Dorchester • Stalbridge • Upton • West Moors
Local centres	Local centres include a range of small shops of a local nature, serving a small catchment. Typically, local centres might include, amongst other shops, a small supermarket, a newsagent, and a pharmacy. Other facilities could include a hot-food takeaway, hairdressers and launderette. In	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Abbotsbury Road, Westham, Weymouth • Beaminster • Bere Regis • Chickerell • Corfe Castle • Corfe Mullen • Easton Square, Easton, Portland

	<p>rural areas, large villages may perform the role of a local centre.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fortuneswell, Portland • Littlemoor Centre, Weymouth • Lodmoor Hill, Weymouth • Lytchett Matravers • Marnhull • Portland Road, Wyke Regis, Weymouth • Southill Centre, Weymouth • West Bay • West Parley • Wool
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Q: Do you agree with the classification of the centres in the proposed hierarchy? Should any be reclassified or deleted? Are there any additional centres that should be included?

Sequential approach

- 5.5.9. Supporting the vitality and viability of existing town, district and local centres means that these centres should be the first priority when locations are being considered for new retail development (or for other town centre uses such as hotels, leisure, tourism development and the arts). Planning applications for main town centre uses outside existing centres will be considered through the sequential approach (Figure 4.3) with settlements higher in the hierarchy being considered first and in preference to smaller centres. Applicants will be expected to carry out a thorough assessment to explore alternative options. Centre boundaries and primary shopping areas are defined on the local plan policies map. In circumstances where no primary shopping area is defined, the boundary for applying the sequential test is the defined centre boundary.
- 5.5.10. The sequential approach means wherever possible seeking to focus new development within, or failing that, on well-located sites on the edge of, existing centres. Only if

centre or 'edge-of-centre'² sites are not available, or expected to become available within a reasonable period, will 'out-of-centre' locations be considered, provided they are acceptable in all other respects including in relation to the impact on existing established centres.

- 5.5.11. As part of the sequential assessment, applicants will need to consider the extent of the catchment area likely to be served by the proposal and identify nearby centres that may represent suitable locations to accommodate the scale and form of development proposed. The appropriate area of search will vary and should be agreed by the council. Some proposals will serve a purely localised need (e.g. local food stores) whereas others are likely to serve a much wider catchment. In some instances it may be appropriate to include centres outside the plan review area, for example Salisbury, Ringwood, Yeovil and centres within BCP council area.

² Defined in NPPF 2019 Annex 2: Glossary

Figure 5.3: The sequential approach

Preference	Sequential Test location	Retail Uses	Main Town Centre Uses
Highest	↓	↓	↓
	↓	↓	↓
	↓	↓	↓
	↓	↓	↓
Lowest	↓	↓	↓

- 5.5.12. Some larger settlements may have more than one centre. In such settlements, where development cannot be located within or on the edge of the town centre, the other local centres should be looked at in preference to an out-of-centre site. All development will be expected to be appropriate in scale and type to the centre in which it would be located and also to the centre’s function.
- 5.5.13. The sequential assessment should include details on the availability, suitability and viability of potential alternative town centre sites and where no available sites exist appropriate, edge-of- centre sites.

ECON3: Hierarchy of Centres and the sequential test

- I. Town, district and local centres (identified in Figure 4.2) are the focus for town centre uses. Their vitality and viability will be strongly supported and promoted through planning decisions.
- II. New centres will be supported where they are of a scale and type to serve local needs and do not adversely affect the vitality and viability of any centres.
- III. In order to sustain and enhance the vitality and viability of centres, new proposals for town centre uses will be permitted in accordance with the sequential approach as set out in Figure 4.3. Development will be directed firstly towards 'in-centre' locations, followed by 'edge-of-centre' locations. Only if no town centre or edge of centre locations are available, should 'out-of-centre' sites that are, or will be, well served by a choice of sustainable modes of transport be considered.
- IV. Applications for town centre uses that do not pass the sequential test will be refused.
- V. The sequential approach will not be applied to applications for small-scale rural development (including offices), rural tourism, small-scale community facilities or trade-related uses on employment sites.

5.6. Town centre impact assessments

- 5.6.1. Applicants should carry out an impact test where new retail or leisure development above a certain size is proposed outside centres. The purpose of such a test is to determine whether a proposal for new retail or leisure development in certain locations would impact, on its own or cumulatively with other commitments, on existing and committed public and private investment or on the role of any defined centre in the local plan area.
- 5.6.2. Edge and out-of-centre stores of greater sizes potentially have greater adverse implications for the viability and delivery of new or extended floorspace in the local plan's existing centres. National policy sets a default (floorspace-based) impact threshold of 2,500 m² gross, above which an impact test will be required, but allows a lower threshold to be set locally. Figure 4.4 sets out the local thresholds suggested by existing evidence. Further understanding of retail impact assessment thresholds across the area will be undertaken to inform the next stage of the plan's production.

Figure 5.4: Local impact thresholds

Local impact threshold (Gross floorspace)	Centre	Proposed centres hierarchy position
200 m ²	Swanage, Upton, Wareham	Town centre
	Bere Regis, Corfe Castle, Lytchett Matravers, Wool	Local centre
300 m ²	Blandford Forum, Bridport, Dorchester, Gillingham, Lyme Regis, Shaftesbury, Sherborne, Sturminster Newton, Weymouth	Town centre
	Queen Mother Square (Poundbury, Dorchester), Stalbridge	District centre
	Abbotsbury Road (Westham, Weymouth), Beaminster, Chickerell, Easton Square (Easton, Portland), Fortuneswell (Portland), Littlemoor Centre (Weymouth), Lodmoor Hill (Weymouth), Portland Road (Wyke Regis, Weymouth), Southill Centre (Weymouth), West Bay	Local centre
500 m ²	Verwood	Town centre
	West Moors, West Parley	District centre
1,000 m ²	Ferndown, Wimborne Minster	Town centre

5.6.3. Where retail or leisure development is proposed outside a town centre area, the council will consider whether there is a need for an impact assessment³ to be submitted if the proposed gross floorspace is over the minimum relevant local threshold, and encourage applicants to engage proactively with the council early on in the planning process. Impact assessments will not be limited to new development; they may also be required for extensions, redevelopment or the variation of conditions where this would alter the effects of a development. The scope of the

³ The steps needed to be taken in applying the impact test are set out in PPG Paragraph: 018 Reference ID: 2b-018-20190722 (Revision date: 22 07 2019)

impact assessment and level of detail required should be proportionate and will vary according to local circumstance.

- 5.6.4. Where a proposal is likely to lead to significant adverse impacts, the application should be refused. What constitutes a significant adverse impact will be based on the circumstances of each case. The cumulative impact of recent / committed proposals may also be relevant. Where the evidence shows there is no significant adverse impact, the positive and negative effects of the proposal will be balanced, together with locational and other considerations, to reach an overall judgement.

ECON₄: Town centre impact assessments

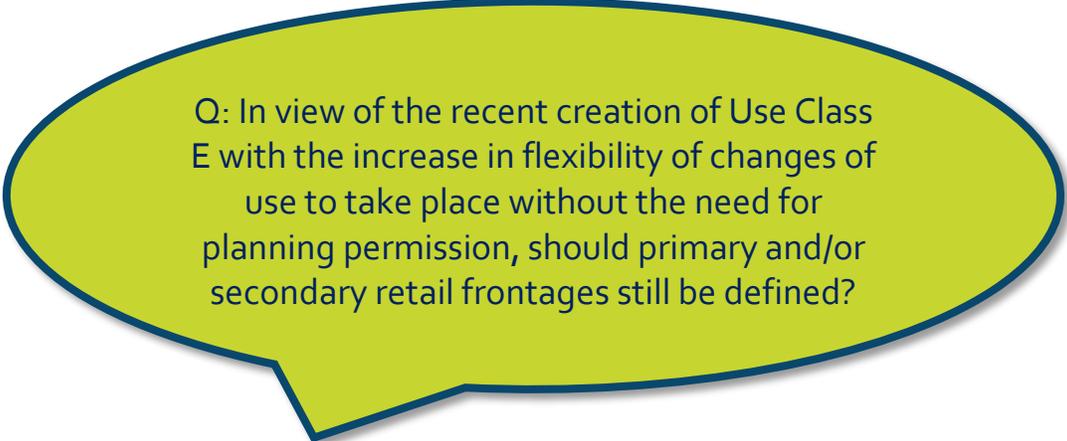
- I. Proposals for retail and leisure development above minimum local gross floorspace thresholds, in locations outside of the town centre areas shown on the policies map are required to submit an impact test to support the proposal.
- II. Development likely to lead to a significant adverse impact on existing centres will be refused.

Q: Do you have any comments to make on Policy ECON₄?

5.7. Management of Centres and Primary Shopping Areas

- 5.7.1. National policy requires the extent of centres, predominantly occupied by main town centre uses, to be defined along with the identification of primary shopping areas where retail uses are concentrated. These boundaries are needed in the application of the sequential approach set out in Policy ECON₃. The extent of these areas for each of the centres is defined on the Local Plan Policies Map but may be amended through a made Neighbourhood Plan. Where an individually defined primary shopping area is not defined, then the full extent of the defined centre boundary should be treated as a primary shopping area.

- 5.7.2. Although not a requirement of national policy, national planning guidance allows for primary and secondary retail frontages to be defined 'where *their use can be justified in supporting the vitality and viability of particular centres*'. The aim of primary retail frontages is to maintain the predominance of retail uses, whilst the aim of secondary retail frontages is to maintain a mix of retail and non-retail uses with the opportunity for a diversity of uses such as restaurants, cinemas and businesses. Frontages are currently defined for larger centres within the Dorset Council area in the existing adopted local plans and neighbourhood plans.



Q: In view of the recent creation of Use Class E with the increase in flexibility of changes of use to take place without the need for planning permission, should primary and/or secondary retail frontages still be defined?

- 5.7.3. The recent creation of Class E under the new Use Class system allows far greater flexibility to change uses, with, for example, a retail shop being changed into a restaurant, office or gym, and vice versa, without the need to apply for planning permission. Whilst this is not a concern in some parts of some town centres, where the additional flexibility is supported, it does inhibit the ability to manage the mix of ground floor uses. Further understanding of the role of primary and secondary retail frontages will be examined as this plan progresses.
- 5.7.4. The ability to support primary shopping areas is also inhibited, with changes of use allowed under Class E potentially leading in time to a gradual blending of primary shopping areas with the wider town centre area. Nevertheless strong support will still be given to retail and closely related uses in primary shopping areas, where defined.
- 5.7.5. In order to maintain a lively street scene within primary shopping areas and promote a safer and more secure environment, development proposals will be expected to retain or provide good quality active frontages at ground floor level having regard to Policy ENV10 This would include the where the building is proposed to change to alternative uses away from retail. Consideration should also be given to how proposals may enhance the public realm to increase footfall and enhance vibrancy. Proposals for hot food takeaways will be acceptable in accordance with Policy COM5 and Policy ENV11.

- 5.7.6. The use of upper floors for offices or residential uses is encouraged as it adds vitality to town centres without fragmenting the retail and services on the ground floors.

Markets

- 5.7.7. Markets support town centre diversity and provide low risk opportunities for new enterprises to establish themselves. They can also generate footfall, enhance vibrancy, provide access to affordable goods, attract tourists and contribute to a town's identity. They are places of social interaction, facilitating community cohesion and social inclusion. The importance of markets is recognised in national policy which suggests that they should be retained and enhanced so that they remain attractive and competitive. The council will seek to ensure that any proposals (for example town centre enhancements) for sites where outdoor markets take place do not prejudice their future operation
- 5.7.8. In seeking the retention and enhancement of markets the council accepts that markets evolve over time and may need to expand or move. To guide the moving or introduction of markets, preference will be given to sites within primary shopping areas in prominent and accessible locations.

ECON5: Management of centres, primary shopping areas and markets

- I. The boundaries of town centre areas and primary shopping areas are defined on the Policies Map.
- II. Development proposals for town centres uses will be supported if of a type and scale appropriate to the size, role and function of the centre.
- III. Development proposals for retail and other town centre uses in primary shopping areas will be supported where:
 - a positive contribution is made to the vitality, viability and diversity of the primary shopping area and centre; and
 - an active ground floor use is maintained or provided.
- IV. New or relocated markets should be directed towards the primary shopping areas in prominent and accessible locations. Proposals that prejudice the future operation of existing markets should be refused.
- V. Public realm improvement measures intended to enhance the vitality of centres and to increase footfall are encouraged.
- VI. The use of upper floors of premises in centres for residential or other uses will be encouraged subject to the ground floor use not being undermined and, where possible, separate access to the upper floors being provided.
- VII. Planning conditions and / or planning obligations will be used where necessary and justified to prevent town centre uses being located outside centres and to maintain the predominant retail function of primary shopping areas.

Q: Retail

- 1: Do you agree with the suggested approach and what it is trying to achieve?
- 2: What about the suggested policy wording?
- 3: Could any amendments improve the policy or its strategy?

5.8. Tourism Developments

5.8.1. Tourism is a key part of the local economy and is a growing sector which plays an important role in creating jobs and sustaining the local economy. There are many different tourist attractions within the local plan area, including: Corfe Castle, Weymouth Sea Life Centre; Abbotsbury Swannery; the fossil museum in Lyme Regis; Moors Valley Country Park; the many harbours and beaches such as Durdle Door; and the historic towns and villages such as Sherborne, Shaftesbury, Kingston, Cerne Abbas and Milton Abbas. The area also serves as an important base for visiting tourist destinations elsewhere, such as the New Forest National Park and Bournemouth and Poole.

Tourism

For the purposes of the local plan, tourism refers to all activities of visitors, including overnight visitors and same-day visitors, visits for business purposes as well as for holidays and recreation.

5.8.2. The attractive designated landscapes, towns and villages make the area popular with visitors but also sensitive to the pressures that tourist activities can cause. Tourism provides 43,118 jobs, equivalent to 12% of all employment within the area, and contributes approximately £863 million to the local economy annually via visitor expenditure from day trips and longer-stay accommodation. The importance of tourism to the area's economy is recognised and the council will look favourably on

investment in new and improved attractions, facilities and accommodation so the tourism industry can remain vibrant and competitive.

- 5.8.3. The area's designated landscapes, important natural features and historic settlements are particularly valuable in attracting visitors, but also bring visitor pressures which need to be managed. High numbers of visitors can put pressure on some locations in terms of their tranquillity, appearance and by physical erosion. It is important that tourist related development takes place in a sustainable manner so as to ensure positive benefits whilst avoiding adverse impacts on the local environment or existing infrastructure.

Supporting vibrant and attractive tourism

- 5.8.4. The local plan sets out a positive framework for consideration of tourism proposals to appropriately manage their growth and development and protect the area's natural and built environment, in accordance with the provisions for ensuring the protection of national and international sites. Tourism development will be expected to be focused at the most sustainable locations in the area, as set out in tier one and tier two of the settlement hierarchy (Figure 1.3) unless there is a justifiable functional need for it to be located elsewhere.
- 5.8.5. Tourism development is regarded as a town centre use and the preferred location for large new tourist attractions and facilities, which are compatible with urban areas, are town centres. Locating attractions and facilities in town centres helps to support town centre economies and will often be more sustainable in transport terms, especially where a town centre is served by a range of transport options. The sequential test, as set out in policy ECON3, will be applied to tourist attractions and facilities which are compatible with urban areas.
- 5.8.6. In addition to attractions and facilities, to continue to be vibrant and competitive the tourism sector needs good quality tourist accommodation to cater for the diverse needs of a range of visitors. The local plan differentiates between types of accommodation of a more permanent construction (built accommodation) and those of a more temporary nature (such as caravans and tents). Policy ECON8 sets out the requirements in relation to the latter. The preference is for large new hotels and guest houses (which are considered to be town centre uses) to be located within town centres, where tourist attractions are concentrated. The sequential test will be applied to proposals for development of this kind.
- 5.8.7. Some tourism developments attract huge numbers of visitors annually, appealing to national and international markets. The council is conscious that large scale

development can put undue pressure on our resources and depending on the location can potentially undermine the vitality and viability of our defined centres. Therefore, proposals for large scale development (i.e. tourism developments exceeding the floorspace thresholds established through policy ECON₄) will need to be accompanied by a Town Centre Impact Assessment. Where large scale developments are proposed, transport impacts will also be taken into account and the council will expect the application to be accompanied by a transport plan.

Sustainable rural tourism

- 5.8.8. Sustainable rural tourism is an important part of a prosperous rural economy. The coast and countryside with its landscape and wildlife designations and extensive public rights of way network are attractions in their own right. While the benefits of locating tourist attractions, facilities and accommodation in town centres and at other settlements are acknowledged, it is also recognised that some tourism developments by their very nature will not lend themselves to a town or village location and may require a more rural site.
- 5.8.9. However, the attractive landscapes that make the rural area popular with visitors are also sensitive to the pressures that tourist activities can cause. It is unlikely that major new tourism development can be accommodated in sensitive areas such as the Heritage Coast and AONB without harming the landscape character and consequently is unlikely to be supported in these locations. Applications should demonstrate that alternative locations have been fully and rigorously explored, providing clear evidence to justify why the alternatives would be inappropriate. In such instances any harm to the sensitive environment should be avoided and where residual impacts exist, significant mitigation will be required.
- 5.8.10. Proposals for sustainable rural tourism development which respects the character of the countryside will be supported. Well-designed development of an appropriate scale in suitable locations can spread the benefits of tourism, reduce the impacts on important natural features, and reduce the pressure on sensitive areas and habitats elsewhere.
- 5.8.11. Outside the main settlements, proposals for new development should normally include a clear justification of why such a location is needed, information on the long term viability of the enterprise and the benefits to the local economy. In order to be in keeping with the rural character such development will usually be small in scale and must be well designed. Where built tourist accommodation is permitted in a location where open market housing would normally be refused, the council will look to secure

appropriate arrangements to ensure it remains in use as tourist accommodation and does not become part of the local housing stock. In cases where staff accommodation is required to provide 24-hour supervision for a rural tourism business, this may be permitted as an occupational dwelling under Policy HOUS8.

- 5.8.12. Existing rural buildings that are no longer needed for their original purpose provide an opportunity for development without the impact that new buildings would have on the surrounding landscape. In rural areas, the conversion of existing buildings to tourism uses (other than tourist accommodation) may be permitted but must also be in accordance with Policy HOUSg (The Re-use of Buildings Outside Settlement Boundaries).
- 5.8.13. In order to support existing businesses, the replacement and expansion of existing tourism attractions, facilities and accommodation will be allowed where this improves the quality of the tourism offer and the appearance of the site, provided there is no significant harm.
- 5.8.14. An increasing number of farmers are looking to diversify to supplement their farming businesses. New development for tourism uses proposed as part of a diversification scheme for a land based rural business will be supported if sufficient evidence can be provided that the development would make an ongoing contribution to the business and would be in keeping with the rural character.

Acceptability of the scheme

- 5.8.15. As with any other form of development, the acceptability of proposals for tourism development will need to be considered against all other relevant planning policies, including those relating to design, amenity and the protection of the environment.
- 5.8.16. Whatever the location, tourism development must fit well with its immediate surroundings, be sympathetic to the wider environment and be of an appropriate scale and design for the area. Proposals should be considered in conjunction with the existing built form to avoid a potential cumulative impact. The visual, environmental and infrastructure impact of development will be carefully assessed especially in isolated or more sensitive locations.
- 5.8.17. Within the plan area there are opportunities for the provision of high quality tourism development which will enhance the visitor economy for example low impact accommodation, study centres and accommodation for disabled visitors. Some developments, such as arts and cultural tourism, help widen the appeal of the area beyond the traditional tourist season. Proposals which will increase the quality and diversity of the tourism offer will be supported.

- 5.8.18. In some cases development may offer wider benefits such as a new recreational facility that will be used by the local community or helping to maintain an historic building. The wider benefits to the community and the environment created by the development will be taken into account and weighed against its impacts, including any disadvantages arising from its location.

ECON6. Supporting vibrant and attractive tourism

- I. Tourism development should be focused at the most sustainable locations in accordance with the settlement hierarchy. Major development in the countryside within an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty or the Heritage Coast is unlikely to be permitted.

5.9. Loss of built tourist accommodation

- 5.9.1. Tourist accommodation serves tourist attractions and facilities and contributes to the economy through its support of retail, food and drink and travel services. A vibrant and competitive the tourism sector needs good quality tourist accommodation to cater for the diverse needs of a range of visitors. Its loss can detrimentally affect the economy.
- 5.9.2. It would be inappropriate to try to resist the loss of all hotel and guesthouse accommodation. The council recognises that some premises may become less attractive to visitors making them unviable to maintain or improve. Although there may be some flexibility regarding the change of use of smaller hotels and guesthouses, the loss of larger hotels and guesthouses with at least 6 guest bedrooms will be resisted. The loss of such premises may have a significant impact on the tourist sector especially if they are in prominent tourist locations.
- 5.9.3. Any proposal for the loss or reduction in size of larger premises will be required to demonstrate that real effort has been made to retain the tourist accommodation. Facilities will be expected to have been realistically marketed without success for an appropriate continuous period of time prior to the application being submitted. Evidence submitted should typically include:
- reasons why there is no longer a market for the premises in its tourist function;
 - details of how the property has been marketed, the length of time that the marketing was active and any changes during this period, the asking price and any adjustments to this asking price, the level of interest generated and any offers received; and

- where a reduction in size is proposed, the economic impact on the ongoing viability of the business and the effect on its continuing tourism function.

ECON7: Loss of tourist accommodation

Proposals that would lead to the loss or reduction in size of a hotel or other accommodation in Use Class C1 will only be permitted:

- I. where the proposal would affect five or fewer lettable bedrooms or facilities available to residents, and the loss would not affect the ongoing viability, attractiveness or operation of the retained tourist accommodation; or
- II. where it has been demonstrated that the existing use is not viable and there is no market interest in acquisition or investment to allow the continued profitable operation of the business.
- III. Larger tourist attractions, facilities and built accommodation should locate within town centres, followed by edge of centre locations before out of centre sites are considered (in accordance with policy ECON3). Tourism development above the thresholds established in policy ECON4 should provide an impact statement and transport plan.
- IV. Outside development boundaries, tourism development will be required to:
 - demonstrate that the countryside location is essential, the development is viable in the long-term and would benefit the local economy; or
 - comprise the reuse or replacement of a rural building (in accordance with policy HOUS9); or
 - comprise alteration or extension to improve existing tourism development and enhance the appearance of the site; or
 - be part of a diversification scheme for land based rural businesses (in accordance with policy ECON10)
- V. All proposals must be of a scale, type and appearance appropriate to the location.
- VI. Development needs to be sympathetic to the wider environment and must not result in an adverse impact, individually or cumulatively, upon designated landscapes and sites of biodiversity importance.
- VII. Development that results in harmful impacts on local services, roads and other infrastructure will not be permitted.
- VIII. Development to enhance the visitor economy and increase the quality and diversity of the tourism offer in the local area will be supported. Proposals that deliver a wider environmental or community benefits will be encouraged.

Q: Do you have any comments on the approach taken by policy ECON7 to the loss of tourist accommodation?

Q: Do you think important areas of highly concentrated serviced tourist accommodation should be designated and afforded additional protection?

5.10. Caravan and camping

- 5.10.1. Caravan and camping sites are key components of the area's stock of self-catering tourist accommodation. The council will support appropriate improvements in the quality of accommodation on offer and proposals that enable existing sites to extend the visitor season.
- 5.10.2. New caravan and camping sites should be well located in relation to existing facilities. A more flexible approach may be taken where an existing site could be made more self-sufficient by having its own on-site facilities, especially where these facilities would be available to be used by the local community. However, any increase in built form would need to mitigate any impact on the landscape and is unlikely to be acceptable within the AONBs or Heritage Coast.
- 5.10.3. A new caravan or camping site may be provided as part of a diversification project for a farm or other land-based rural business. Proposals may be acceptable provided that it is directly linked to the existing business,

Caravan and camping sites

For purposes of the local plan, caravan and camping sites are those which primarily provide for accommodation in temporary and mobile units such as caravans (static, touring and twin unit), tents or yurts.

Where a site is permitted in a location where open market housing would normally be refused, the councils will restrict its occupancy to ensure it remains in use as tourist accommodation.

would not form a separate enterprise and it can be demonstrated that it would materially assist in maintaining the long-term viability of the existing business. In order to be in keeping with the rural character, such diversification projects should normally be small in scale both in terms of the number of units / pitches being proposed, the scale of the ancillary buildings and the area used for such purposes.

- 5.10.4. Operators may come forward with proposals to expand, intensify or reorganise existing sites to make them more attractive to visitors. Proposals of this nature should also result in an improvement in the appearance of the accommodation itself and reduce the appearance of the site overall in the wider landscape. To achieve this, such proposals should form part of a long-term management plan and will be required to include an appropriate landscape scheme, with provision for its ongoing maintenance.
- 5.10.5. The use of an existing site may be intensified through the provision of enhanced facilities, for entertainment or other purposes, especially on larger holiday parks. However, the visual impact of any such development, particularly in open landscapes and coastal areas, will need to be carefully assessed. Intensification of built form within the AONBs or within the Heritage Coast is unlikely to be acceptable.
- 5.10.6. The internal reorganisation of existing sites to improve their attractiveness to visitors and reduce visual impact will be encouraged. Such a proposal that would require an increase in the overall site area will be given careful consideration and may be permitted if the benefit, in terms of the overall reduction in visual impact, outweighs any adverse impacts associated with the increase in site size.
- 5.10.7. The change of use of a site, either wholly or in part, from touring accommodation to static accommodation is unlikely to result in an improvement in the appearance of the accommodation itself or the appearance of the site in the wider landscape. However, where static caravans already exist, it may be possible to significantly reduce visual impact through refurbishment or replacement with alternative mobile units. Such proposals will be looked upon favourably.
- 5.10.8. Some sites, especially the larger coastal ones, can be visually intrusive in the landscape. In considering proposals for caravan and camping sites in isolated or sensitive locations these impacts must all be taken into account, weighing up the benefits of development against any disadvantages arising from the location.
- 5.10.9. It is unlikely that new sites will be able to be accommodated within the Heritage Coast area without harming the landscape character, so such proposals are only likely to be permitted in very exceptional circumstances. Within the AONBs, proposals for new camping sites would need to be small in scale and appropriately located to minimise

the impact on the landscape. Sites for caravans and camping conflict directly with the aims of the Green Belt and will not be permitted within the Green Belt. Sites located within 400m of the Dorset Heathlands habitats sites must also be avoided.

ECON8: Caravan and Camping Sites

- I. New caravan and camping sites should be well located in relation to existing facilities. The appropriate provision of facilities on existing sites may be permitted, to make them more self-sufficient.
- II. Farm diversification projects (for agricultural and other land-based rural businesses) for new caravan and camping sites will be supported, provided the development would make an on-going contribution to the business that is diversifying and would be in keeping with the rural character.
- III. Proposals for the expansion, intensification or reorganisation of existing sites must clearly demonstrate that development forms part of a long term management plan to improve the quality and appearance of the accommodation and site.
- IV. All development (including the change of use from touring to static units) must not, individually or cumulatively, have a significant adverse impact on the distinctive characteristics of the area's landscape, important wildlife habitats, heritage or built environment.
- V. New sites or extensions to sites for static or touring caravans, tents, chalets or cabins for holiday use will not be permitted within the green belt or within sites of biodiversity importance or within 400m of protected heathland sites. Proposals in the Heritage Coast and AONBs are unlikely to be supported and will only be permitted where they do not harm the special character of the area.
- VI. Development proposals must include an appropriate landscape scheme and provision for its ongoing maintenance.

Q: Do you have any comments on the approach taken by policy ECON8 on caravan and camping sites?

Q: Should larger (0.1ha+) caravan and camping sites in less accessible locations provide a transport assessment and additional amenities?

5.11. Farming and diversification

New agricultural buildings

- 5.11.1. Many new agricultural buildings can be built under permitted development rights but larger agricultural buildings are controlled by the planning system.
- 5.11.2. Proposals for new agricultural buildings in the South East Dorset Green Belt will be considered against both national policy on Green Belts and any other relevant policies. National policy regards the construction of new buildings for agriculture and forestry as appropriate development in the green belt.
- 5.11.3. Where a new agricultural building is proposed, the council will wish to be satisfied that there are no existing buildings that can be re-used for agricultural purposes. It is recognised that many traditional farm buildings will not be compatible with modern farming practices, but these buildings, particularly those that make a positive contribution to local character, are a valuable resource and can be re-used in accordance with Policy DEV8.
- 5.11.4. Larger agricultural buildings can have an industrial appearance and a significant adverse impact on the local landscape character. Applicants will be encouraged to locate any new agricultural building where it would not impact on the openness and attractive character of the countryside, for example by locating it close to an existing

building or on an area of existing hard standing. The impact on residential amenity, including that arising from farm traffic movements, will also be a consideration.

ECON9. New agricultural buildings

- I. New agricultural buildings, or extensions to existing agricultural buildings, will be permitted where the development is necessary for the purposes of agriculture on the unit, or locally where facilities are to be shared, and there are no existing buildings on the unit which are capable of re-use for agricultural purposes.
- II. The scale, siting, design and external appearance of any new agricultural building (or extension) should be designed to minimise adverse impact on the landscape character and residential amenity.

The diversification of agricultural and other land-based rural businesses

- 5.11.5. Diversification is where a farm or other land-based rural business branches out into different kinds of activities to support the existing business. The local plan supports diversification, where this will help to support the business to which the diversification proposal is linked.
- 5.11.6. Diversification projects include small scale retail outlets and catering (e.g. a farm shop), training and promotion of rural crafts (e.g. craft workshops), or tourism, including tourist attractions, bed and breakfast, and camping and caravanning sites. Diversification proposals for caravans and camping will be considered against Policy ECON10.
- 5.11.7. Diversification may also be land-based and could include agricultural activities, such as the production and selling of specialist livestock products, or the growing and selling specialist crops. It could also include taking land out of agricultural production, or low intervention management to deliver biodiversity net gain for development elsewhere.
- 5.11.8. Proposals for farm diversification in the green belt will be considered against both national policy on green belts and any other relevant policy.
- 5.11.9. Where a diversification project requires a building, an existing building on-site should be re-used wherever possible. Such proposals will be considered against Policy HOUS9.
- 5.11.10. The replacement of an existing building to facilitate a diversification project will be acceptable, but only if the building to be replaced does not make a positive contribution to the rural character. The loss of such buildings will be resisted.

- 5.11.11. In the green belt, the replacement of an existing building would only be considered to be appropriate development if the new building is in the same use and not materially larger than the one it replaces.

New built development

- 5.11.12. New built development may be permitted as part of a diversification scheme if there are no existing buildings capable of reuse and it would not be appropriate to replace an existing building because of the contribution it makes to rural character. Any new build element should relate well to existing development and should be designed, in form and function, to be ancillary to the existing enterprise.
- 5.11.13. The construction of a new building for farm diversification is unlikely to be acceptable in the green belt. If it is considered to be inappropriate development which is, by definition harmful to the green belt it will only be approved (exceptionally) in very special circumstances.

Supporting an existing enterprise

- 5.11.14. Any diversification project must be directly linked to the existing business and should not form a separate enterprise. It must be demonstrated that the project would materially assist in maintaining the long-term viability of the existing business. Any diversification project will usually be tied by legal agreement to the business that is diversifying to prevent it from becoming a separate enterprise, especially if the project is located in an area where it would not normally be permitted.

ECON10: Diversification of land-based rural businesses

- I. Diversification projects (for agricultural and other land-based rural businesses) for the use of land or buildings outside settlement boundaries for non-agricultural employment purposes will be supported, provided they are in keeping with the rural character and comprise:
 - the use of land; or
 - the reuse of an existing building, or the replacement of an existing building which does not make a positive contribution to the local character; or

- new ancillary development that relates well to existing development provided that there are no redundant buildings capable of reuse / suitable for replacement.
- II. The proposed diversification project must make an on-going contribution to sustaining the existing enterprise.

5.12. Equestrian developments

- 5.12.1. Riding and horse keeping are popular leisure activities across Dorset. There are many types of development associated with horses, from purely grazing and smaller scale private livery yards to equestrian centres, stud farms and commercial livery yards / equine training facilities.
- 5.12.2. Proposals for equine-related development in the green belt will be considered against both national policy on green belts and Policy ECON11.
- 5.12.3. A key consideration will be whether a proposed equine-related development constitutes appropriate facilities (in connection with the existing use of land or a change of use) for outdoor sport or outdoor recreation. Such proposals will not be considered inappropriate development, provided they preserve the openness of the green belt and do not conflict with the purposes of including land within it⁴. Any equine-related proposals that are judged to be inappropriate development would, by definition be harmful to the green belt and will not be approved except in very special circumstances.

General Issues

- 5.12.4. Any land associated with an equine-related development should be inherently suitable for keeping horses and should be managed to maintain environmental quality, countryside character, the amenity of local residents and the welfare of the horses themselves.
- 5.12.5. The potential impacts of exercising horses off-site will be a consideration, particularly any impacts (such as soil erosion) on nearby bridleways or areas of open land; highway safety issues where riding is likely to take place on public roads; and impacts on

⁴ As set out in Paragraph 134 of the NPPF (February 2019)

wildlife interests especially internationally protected wildlife sites, for example through damage to vegetation.

- 5.12.6. The type and volume of traffic accessing a site will also be a consideration, especially for larger commercial facilities. Any site where horses are kept should be capable of being safely accessed by larger vehicles such as towed horse boxes, horse lorries and / or other larger vehicles. The access to a site should also be capable of accommodating any increased volume of traffic without damaging the access itself, the route to the site, or the character of the route.
- 5.12.7. Concentrations of equine-related developments could give rise to cumulative impacts, for example on the character of the countryside or on highway safety. The council will have regard to any such cumulative impacts when considering proposals for new or expanded equine-related developments.
- 5.12.8. Private recreational uses generally include small-scale developments such as field shelters and stables. These will generally be permitted where they are intended to be used by horses that are currently present on the site or where it is intended to graze / keep horses on a site for private recreational use (provided that they are suitably designed and located). Field shelters and / or stables should be designed using timber or lightweight materials that complement the landscape and can be removed when they are no longer needed. A separate ancillary structure of similar construction to store tack, feed and/or bedding may be permitted. The amount of tack stored on site should be kept to a minimum for security reasons.

Commercial recreation and leisure equine-related development

- 5.12.9. Commercial recreation or leisure equine-related developments (such as livery stables and riding schools) and commercial training or breeding equine-related developments (such as racing stables and stud farms) can help to diversify individual farms and the wider rural economy.
- 5.12.10. The preference is for commercial equine-related developments to re-use existing buildings, although it is recognised that it may not be possible to accommodate businesses of this scale wholly in existing buildings. An existing building or group of buildings should form the basis for a development of this nature, wherever possible. New buildings may be permitted where there is a proven essential need and no existing building is suitable. Elements of new buildings that are disproportionate in scale to or out of character with the existing buildings or have a significant impact on the landscape especially within the AONBs, are unlikely to be acceptable.

- 5.12.11. A riding arena (sand school / manège) or other exercise facilities (such as horse exercisers) may be permitted in association with a commercial equine-related development or for private recreation or leisure use. The council will expect a developer or private individual to be able to explain why an arena or other facility is needed and to be able to justify its intended size and scale. An arena and / or other exercise facilities should be sited close to the buildings to which it relates as this will limit impact on the landscape. Other key design issues include hard landscaping such as fencing and surfacing, landscape planting, drainage and the potential impacts on the amenity of nearby residents.
- 5.12.12. Approvals for riding arenas or other exercise facilities for private recreation or leisure use will be subject to conditions to prevent them from being used commercially. If a riding arena is currently used for private uses an application would be required prior to any change, as an arena (or other facility) used for commercial purposes has a far greater neighbouring amenity impact than one used solely for private recreation and leisure purposes.

Viability and Occupational Dwellings

- 5.12.13. The council will wish to ensure that any commercial equine-related development is likely to be viable before allowing it. Such proposals should be supported by a business plan that shows the proposed enterprise has a sound financial basis. The council may permit occupational dwellings related to commercial equine-related enterprises but will not permit such dwellings to enable people to live close to horses that are kept for private recreation or leisure use. Applications for occupational dwellings will be determined under Policy HOUS8.
- 5.12.14. In the event that a commercial equine-related business fails, the owner or occupier will need to produce evidence that the business is not viable, or cannot be made viable, before a change of use may be permitted. Policy HOUS also sets out how proposals for the removal of occupancy conditions for essential rural workers will be considered.

ECON11. Equestrian development

Equine-related developments that respect the character of the countryside will be permitted provided that:

- I. adequate provision has been made for the exercising of horses without causing harm to rights of way, other equestrian routes, habitats sites or other areas that will be used for exercise;
- II. vehicular access to the site and the road network in the vicinity are capable of accommodating horse-related transport in a safe manner;
- III. the cumulative impacts of concentrations of equine-related developments, for example on the character of the countryside, on habitats sites or on highway safety, have been considered.
- IV. In the case of a new field shelter or stable used for private recreation or leisure use:
 - it will be for the exclusive use of and should be of a scale that reflects the number of horses to be kept or grazed on site;
 - it should be built of materials that are capable of being easily removed if the equine-related use ceases; and
 - any ancillary use, such as a tack room or food storage structure, should be the minimum required to meet the functional needs of the horses on site and should not give rise to security issues.
- V. In the case of commercial recreation, leisure, training or breeding enterprises, the development should re-use an existing building (or group of buildings) in the countryside. An element of new building or buildings may also be permitted alongside the reuse of an existing building (or group of buildings), provided that:
 - it can be demonstrated that no other building (or group of buildings) is available that is capable of accommodating the proposed equine-related use;
 - the element of new building is the minimum required to accommodate the proposed equine-related use (over and above the requirement to re-use the existing building or group of buildings); and
 - any new buildings and ancillary facilities would be erected to integrate with the existing building (or group of buildings) minimising impact on the landscape and local character.

VI. In the case of a riding arena or other exercise facility:

- it is of a size and scale appropriate to the existing commercial enterprise, or the number of privately kept horses that will use the facility; and
- it is located close to other buildings on the site and is not visually intrusive in the landscape.

Proposals to re-use or adapt substantial purpose-built equestrian holdings for non-equestrian uses will only be permitted where it can be demonstrated that continued equestrian use is inappropriate or unviable. Proposed alternative uses must accord with other policies in the local plan.

Q: Equestrian development

- 1: Do you agree with the suggested approach and what it is trying to achieve?
- 2: What about the suggested policy wording?
- 3: Could any amendments improve the policy or its strategy?