Cabinet

11 November 2025

Weymouth 2040: Strategic Partnership

For Decision

Cabinet Member:
Cllr R Biggs, Property & Assets and Economic Growth

Local Councillor(s):

Senior Leadership Team:
J Britton, Executive Director for Place Services

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Statutory Authority:

Report status: Public

1. **Executive summary**

Weymouth is entering a transformative phase, guided by a bold regeneration strategy that weaves together heritage, hospitality, housing, skills, and renewable energy. This report sets out the strategic benefits, key risks, and recommended next steps for establishing a long-term Strategic Regeneration Partnership between Dorset Council and Willmott Dixon, in collaboration with Milligan. The proposed partnership offers a clear framework for investment, collaboration, and place-led development.

The overarching ambition is to shape Weymouth into a diverse, resilient coastal town that delivers:

- High-quality public spaces that foster community pride and wellbeing.
- A dynamic mix of residential, commercial, and leisure uses to support a vibrant local economy.
- Improved accessibility and connectivity, both physically and digitally, to unlock opportunity.
- A sustainable and innovative economy, rooted in local skills, clean energy, and inclusive growth.

2. Recommendation(s)

2.1 Strategic Partnership - Willmott Dixon, in partnership with Milligan

That authority be delegated to the Executive Director of Place, in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Assets, Property and Economic Development and Corporate Director Finance & Commercial (Interim s151 Officer) to:

- Assess the potential added value of a long-term Strategic Regeneration Partnership with Willmott Dixon, in partnership with Milligan.
- Finalise the assessment of the use of the Pagabo Developer Led Framework, and decide on whether to appoint Wilmott Dixon directly or run a further competition in accordance with the Framework terms
- Award a contract to undertake the commercial masterplan, high level feasibility studies and strategic business plan for 6 key initial Council-owned development sites up to a value of £250k (plus VAT) with Willmott Dixon or other supplier, with an option to extend the contract for further development works if desired.
- Negotiate the fee structure for the Partnership and next stages; and
- Implement the necessary governance arrangements to support the Partnership.

3. Reason for the recommendation(s)

3.1 The recommendation allows the Council to clarify the partnership structure, fee model, and deliverables to determine whether this collaboration offers added value beyond existing plans and whether it aligns with the Council's governance and procurement frameworks. It also provides the Council with a commercial masterplan, high level feasibility studies and strategic business plan to start the process of unlocking public and private sector investment.

4. Legal Considerations

4.1 Strategic Partnership - Willmott Dixon, in partnership with Milligan

4.1.1 Nature of the Proposal

The Council is ambitious about recognising the full potential of all our town centres - including Weymouth - for the benefit of residents, visitors and businesses.

The Council Plan 2024-2029 sets out the priority to 'grow the economy' which would result in further benefits such as increasing wealth, creating more opportunities, and improving living standards for local people, and boosting funds for public services. 'Kickstarting the regeneration of Weymouth' is identified as a key action to deliver this priority. A further key priority within the

Council Plan is to ‘provide affordable and high-quality housing’, to meet the needs of existing and future residents.

The creation of a long-term Strategic Regeneration Partnership for Weymouth would accelerate this action through building on work carried out to date by the Council and progressing the development of underused sites. This aligns with the Council’s Economic Growth Strategy 2025-2050 which sets out seeking development partners as a step to progressing the regeneration of Weymouth. The emerging new Local Plan and Weymouth Town Centre Masterplan refresh also emphasise these important themes.

The key sites identified for the Partnership at this stage are Commercial Road Car Parks, West Marina Sites (some of the site identified are leased to third parties), Weymouth Bowl, North Quay and The Peninsula. The mix of sites or their red lines may change as a result of the Step One: High Level Feasibility Framework Review (see below).

The Peninsula, with the exception of the Pavilion area and any other harbour land proposed to be disposed of harbour land will have to be in the best interests of the harbour and the land must not be needed for harbour purposes. All proceeds must go to the harbour. The proposal would have to go through the Harbour Advisory Committee (with consultation with the Weymouth Harbour Consultative Group), for recommendation to Cabinet

The Partnership would look to rapidly develop a commercially led masterplan, establishing the best use and delivery method for how these Council-owned sites can be successfully developed to regenerate and drive growth in Weymouth. This will in turn allow the Council to:

- Improve the offer and vibrancy of the town, bringing significant economic benefits to the town centre and wider area
- Accelerate delivery of these key sites through establishing viability and/or funding solutions, both private and public sector (see below).
- Help drive Weymouth forward as a destination for inward investment, assisting on issues such as strategic master planning, transport and infrastructure, working closely with key stakeholders such as Highways.
- Coordinate the Council’s investment ask of local and national public sector funders (via grants, loans etc)
- Deliver sustainable change in alignment with the Council’s commitment to the Natural Environment, Climate and Ecology Strategy 2023-25 Refresh. This will be achieved through making green buildings the heart of the community alongside delivering enhanced social value and inward investment for the local communities.
- Put Weymouth on the map as a destination, both as a place to live and for tourism and leisure.
- Demonstrate real progress to residents and public and private sector stakeholders and investors alike.

These initial sites may also form part of broader area-based programmes in conjunction with other landowners / partners, helping to unlock holistic regeneration. Other site opportunities for the Partnership may also be identified by the Council at a later date if these initial sites are progressed successfully.

The recognition of Weymouth's regeneration as a key priority in existing and emerging strategies/policies, provides a strong foundation for the Partnership to drive change. This alignment creates an opportunity to accelerate regeneration and attract significant public and private sector investment to Weymouth. It also builds on previously secured support, including the £19.5m in Government funding secured in 2023 to revitalise Weymouth's Waterside Economy, including several of the above sites.

4.1.2 **Procurement Route**

The proposed route to select a Regeneration Partner is through the Pagabo Developer Led Framework (the Framework).

The Framework was established by Pagabo in December 2020 and may continue until April 2026 (if Pagabo take the final extension period). The Host contracting authority is Cumbria Northumberland Tyne and Wear NHS Foundation Trust which means this is a compliant framework in accordance with the Public Contract Regulations 2015.

The Framework offers a compliant route to market for the council in accordance with the Public Contract Regulations 2015 as long as the council complies with the requirements of the Framework when entering into a call off contract.

The Framework allows Direct Awards to Developers when the council is able to determine from the Framework tender price and quality responses which developer is best placed to deliver the requirements, and where the template call off contract can be used without substantial amendment.

Over 75 Developers bid to get onto the Framework initially and only 28 were appointed. Of this 28 Developers through Willmott Dixon achieved the highest overall Evaluation score with a combined value of 87.03 %. This was split with a commercial score of 31.83 (out of 40) and a Quality Score of 55.20 (out of 60).

The next steps are to review the call off contract documentation to ensure they meet our needs without substantial modification. If they can, then the agreements would be entered into with Wilmott Dixon.

If the conditions for direct award are not met, the council will have to run a further competition under the Framework.

Pagabo assists in the procurement process which reduces the need of for specialist procurement support in house or externally which should reduce the

Councils cost throughout the process. Template Head of Terms are also available within the Framework to reduce legal timescales and costs.

4.1.3 Legal and Commercial Risks

Potential loss of traction from work already undertaken by Dorset Council and Stantec/Vail Williams. This can be mitigated by Willmott Dixon taking on Stantec/Vail Williams as part of its professional team.

No guarantee of delivery: Willmott Dixon/Milligan will consider but is not obliged to invest directly; Dorset Council remains reliant on market appetite and viability. This can be mitigated by the track record demonstrated by Willmott Dixon, with Milligan, operating similar Partnerships. Any commercial structure potentially negotiated in due course would incentivise delivery.

Risk of confusing stakeholders with introduction of a new delivery partner. This can be mitigated by a clear communications strategy worked up and implemented collaboratively by the Council, Willmott Dixon and Miligan.

Time/resource investment: Legal, procurement, and officer time will be needed to establish and manage the Partnership. This can be mitigated by the support and standard materials (e.g. template Heads of Terms) provided by the Pagabo Framework.

Potential financial exposure: Dorset Council may be asked to underwrite or loan-fund unviable schemes, which is common in regeneration, but carries reputational and financial risk. This can be mitigated by Willmott Dixon's strong track record in securing external grant funding.

Direct appointment may prevent other bidders: Willmott Dixon, in partnership with Milligan, has demonstrated significant relevant experience, both locally and further afield, with a particular understanding of tackling the challenges of coastal communities. A market review would be undertaken before committing to a Partnership. The feasibility studies may lead to a conclusion to work with other smaller local developers on aspects of these initial developments.

5. Financial implications

The proposal from Willmott Dixon, in partnership with Milligan, is for an initial fee of up to £250k (plus VAT) to undertake the Stage 1 works as outlined in Appendix A. The £250k will be funded within the existing revenue budget as the Place directorate is currently forecasting an end of year underspend.

This fee includes professional advisor roles but excludes any Pagabo procurement fee(paid by Willmott Dixon) Council staff time and any Council legal costs associated with this initial commission.

5. **Appendices**

- Appendix A: Willmott Dixon Strategic Partnership Note – 8 August 2025

6. **Report sign-off**

6.1 This report has been through the internal report clearance process and has been signed off by the Director for Legal and Democratic (Monitoring Officer), the Executive Director for Corporate Development (Section 151 Officer) and the appropriate Portfolio Holder(s)

Appendix A: Strategic Regeneration Partnership with Willmott Dixon

Overview

Willmott Dixon, in partnership with Milligan, has proposed a Strategic Regeneration Partnership (SRP) with Dorset Council focused on delivering transformational change in Weymouth. The proposal outlines a collaborative model to develop a Commercial Masterplan, high-level feasibility studies for six key initial Council-owned sites, and a strategic business plan to guide investment and delivery.

Willmott Dixon / Milligan Track Record

Willmott Dixon is a large, family-owned UK construction company founded in 1852. They have experience building a range of uses for public and private sector clients including large regeneration projects and are committed to becoming Zero Carbon in their operations by 2030. Their strong balance sheet and commercial expertise has led to them becoming developers and development managers for a growing number of these clients.

Milligan is a UK-based property development and investment company with strong expertise delivering regeneration, mixed-use and retail developments, in partnership with local authorities and institutional investors.

Willmott Dixon, in partnership with Milligan, operates successful Strategic Regeneration Partnerships in other locations, such as Torbay locally, with a new Partnership currently being formed in Dover.

Partnership Structure

Rather than forming a new LLP (as seen in Bournemouth's Development Company), the proposal suggests a Strategic Regeneration Partnership is formed by way of a joint venture agreement. Dorset Council would contribute political leadership, land, and potentially access to PWLB funding or covenant strength to unlock private sector investment. Willmott Dixon would provide development management, design and build expertise, and market engagement. Milligan would lead placemaking, retail strategy, and investment planning.

This approach means that the Council can:

- Retain full ownership of land assets until appropriate delivery arrangements for each project (Hold/JV/Sell/Develop etc) are agreed in due course;
- As landowner, collaboratively work with its Partner to establish the uses and set the quality of development for each site; and
- Achieve a transfer of risk to the developer partner at the appropriate stage.

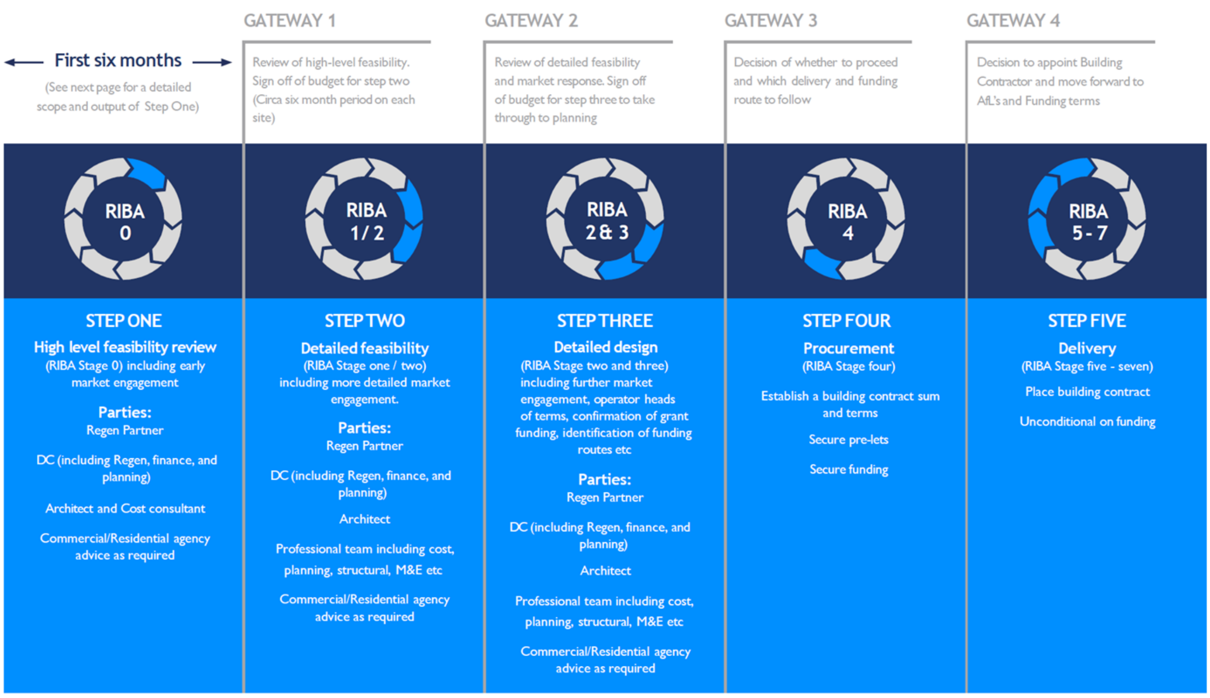
Other Options Considered

In recommending the Partnership, other options considered and ruled out include:

- Continue with Dorset Council’s existing strategy using internal teams and direct procurement. There is scope to bring added capacity and accelerate delivery through the Partnership;
- Formal Development Agreements with selected developers on individual sites. This does not harness the skills of a single partner considering holistically how all of these projects come together to maximise benefits and make a strategic case to public and private sector investors; and
- Creation of an LLP with shared risk/reward, though this is complex and costly to run compared with a joint venture agreement.

Stages and scope of Work

The proposal from Willmott Dixon, in partnership with Milligan, envisages 5 stages as summarised in the following diagram.



Whilst the Council explores the potential of the full Partnership the initial Stage 1 six-month workstream allows progress to be made including:

- A Commercial Masterplan for Weymouth.
- High level feasibility studies for six Council-owned sites: Commercial Road Car Parks, West Marina, Weymouth Bowl, North Quay, and the Peninsula.
- Working with architects to produce a capacity check on a range of masterplan and site delivery options taking a ‘whole town’ approach.

- Market / demand research to understand local supply/needs/ demands across a range of uses.
- Procuring valuation agents' advice and soft market testing with potential occupiers / operators to ensure the commercial masterplan is deliverable
- Testing of physical constraints and drawing on Willmott Dixon's buildability experience to identify delivery cost for each site
- Identify any land acquisition required and a strategy for this
- Preparation of outline risk register for the masterplan and the sites
- Develop an overarching programme for delivery of the masterplan. Identify the first sites to come forward and produce a plan to deliver those sites through the following period.
- Strategic business plan with site-specific recommendations (Hold/JV/Sell/Develop etc).
- Establish and scope out funding / grant applications
- Promotion/press/PR of the investment case and Partnership
- Stakeholder mapping and initial engagement
- Support the Council in preparing internal business cases/papers
- Stakeholder engagement and placemaking strategy including review of active travel, public transport, and wayfinding.

Governance and Delivery

A Partnership Board - comprising representatives of the Council, Willmott Dixon and Milligan - would oversee strategic direction, supported by operational boards for individual sites. The SRP would not directly invest in development but facilitate delivery through market engagement and Council-led funding or disposal. Success depends on viability, market appetite, the ability to secure external grants and the Council's ability to underwrite or support development risk.

Advantages

- Accelerates delivery through structured governance and defined milestones.
- Leverages Willmott Dixon's construction and development expertise.
- Enhances credibility and market confidence in Dorset Council's regeneration ambitions.
- Reduces internal resource pressure by outsourcing feasibility and master planning.
- Provides access to investor networks and learning from similar projects in Dover and Torbay.

Next Steps

- Secure approval and commit to Stage 1 of work (as above)
- Request clarification on fee structure and draft Heads of Terms for long term Partnership.

- Engage with Torbay and Dover Councils to understand their experience working with Willmott Dixon / Milligan.
- Consider how the work undertaken to date and existing professional team could be taken on by Willmott Dixon / Milligan
- Review other delivery models and consider market testing before committing to exclusive Partnership.