Shareholder Committee for Dorset Innovation Park Ltd

14 July 2026

Dorset Council Update Report

For Review and Consultation

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

Local Councillor(s):
Cllr L Beddow, Cllr M Baker

Executive Director:
J Britton, Executive Director for Place Services

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Report Status: Public (the exemption paragraph is N/A)

Brief Summary:
This report presents an update on the current position regarding the council's support for Dorset Innovation Park Ltd and the operation of the Dorset Innovation Park.

Recommendation:
Shareholders are asked to note the progress made and support the continued cooperation between the Council and Dorset Innovation Park Ltd.

Reason for Recommendation:
Progress continues to be sustained transition of operational responsibility for the Innovation Park from the Council to the Dorset Innovation Park Company and on aligned projects that will benefit the operation of the Innovation Park, the Council, the Park tenants and wider economic prosperity across Dorset.

1. **Report**

1.1 This report provides an overview of the current position in relation to the Dorset Council support provided to Dorset Innovation Park Ltd (DIP Ltd) and an update on wider progress on strategic actions in relation to economic growth that align with the Innovation Park.

1.2 All the relevant governance documentation for the Company, and its relationship with the Council, is in place and a date for handover of full operational responsibility for the Innovation Park from the Council to the Company has been set as 20th July.

1.3 As laid out in the Services Contract the Council will continue to provide the Company with support for various activities. Officers and the Company staff are currently working through the practicalities of these arrangements to ensure continuation of service delivery. Practical examples include – financial monitoring and VAT reporting, repairs and maintenance contracts, capital project development and delivery.

Finance

1.4 From a financial perspective the 2025/26 year end retained business rates position for the Innovation Park (which, given its Enterprise Zone status, retains 100% of the rates generated over a base level) was better than forecast. Retained rates for 25/26 were £644,612 contributing to an opening 2026/27 retained business rate balance of £976,005, against a forecast of £510,000 in the Company Business Plan.

1.5 Retained business rates fund the Company operating budget and any Innovation Park operating deficit.

Hotel Study

1.6 The commissioned study into a hotel development at the Park, undertaken by Colliers International, has concluded and reported back to officers. As previously reported Colliers consider that the operation of a hotel at DIP would be viable, now a number of funding options have been presented to officers. Each comes with its own level of financial exposure and risk, potential financial and economic benefits, and operational and development control.

1.7 A Green Paper is in development to inform the basis on which the project might proceed.

Devolution Implications

1.8 Conversations continue with partner authorities regarding the Wessex devolution proposals, economic development leads meet regularly and are currently considering a number of strategic issues such as infrastructure requirements, support for business growth, skills and education, and innovation space and other assets.

1.9 Proposals are being considered to align various innovation assets, including the Defence BattleLab, to enable access to services and facilities regardless of where a business might be based within the Wessex geography. This will strengthen our innovation networks and encourage business collaboration, whilst maximising the use of existing facilities and their resources. The practicalities of this are being worked through with an expectation that any combined arrangements might be in place by the end of the year.

Defence sector and investment

1.10 At the time of report drafting the UK Defence Investment Plan has just been published by the government. Officers will review the Plan to establish any positive or negative impact on Dorset and the local defence industrial base.

1.11 Officers and the Company consider that the delay in publication has had an impact on local defence investment and defence sector growth. At least one company based in Dorset is waiting for the MOD to confirm its order and this is adversely impacting on a sizeable investment in capital and jobs.

1.12 This confirms the need for Dorset to continue to maintain a close working relationship with Defence businesses and to collectively lobby MP's and government for ongoing investment in the sector.

1.13 The Council will continue working with the South West Regional Defence and Security Cluster (which consists of over 400 defence related companies in the South West) as a prominent industry body with close relations with the MOD, government agencies and the business community. The MOD has recently allocated core funding to support the cluster activities.

1.14 The Cluster has strong political connections and lobbying potential, but there is a strong emphasis on naval activity and geographic focus on Plymouth and surrounds. Recently the council has provided officer capacity and funding to demonstrate Dorset's support for the sector and to influence the activities undertaken by the Cluster. The Head of Growth and Regeneration has recently been appointed to the Cluster Steering

Group which oversees the work and function of the cluster and the allocation of cluster funding.

Winfrith Nuclear Site and Nuclear Restoration Services planning application

1.15 The Winfrith Nuclear Licensed Site, which covers approximately 128 hectares (see appendix 1), is managed by Nuclear Restoration Services (NRS) on behalf of the Nuclear Decommissioning Authority (NDA). An agreed "End State" dating from 2005–06, established with the former Purbeck District Council, proposed restoration of the site to heathland, reflecting the policy and economic context at that time.

1.16 However, this context has changed significantly, with increasing national emphasis on energy security, clean growth, and nuclear innovation. In early 2025, Dorset Council met with the NDA to highlight this shift and to propose a shared opportunity to explore a clean, green, energy-led future for the site.

1.17 In support of this evolving position, Dorset Council commissioned a masterplan to guide the site's future development. The emerging proposals prioritise clean energy-led employment, including opportunities in nuclear, hydrogen, advanced engineering, and research and development. It also seeks to ensure the effective use of previously developed land for economic growth while retaining over 100 hectares of heathland and protected habitats.

1.18 Approximately 21.6 hectares have been identified for potential development, excluding internationally designated habitats. See appendix 1 for maps of the development areas. This emerging masterplan will be subject to public engagement during the autumn which will inform the final version as part of the process of progressing towards Cabinet endorsement. It is hoped that the masterplan will be a material consideration in future planning decisions.

1.19 In spring 2026, NRS submitted a planning application to Dorset Council comprising three main elements:

a) the removal of above-ground structures;

b) the disposal of demolition material below ground, and;

c) land regrading and drainage works intended to deliver full heathland restoration.

1.20 The economic growth service supports the principle of decommissioning and restoration. However the proposals set out in Part (c) risk locking the site into an end state that no longer reflects current economic, environmental, or policy priorities. Part (c) proposes significant landform changes including the creation of a more and water-holding areas which, in the opinion of the economic growth service, would inhibit the potential for the site to be utilised for employment uses in the future.

1.21 A representation, from an economic growth perspective, to the planning application will be submitted under the authority of the Strategic Director Weymouth 2040 and the Cabinet Member for Property Assets & Economic Growth.

1.22 Other council departments will be consultees on this application and will be making their own representation. The application will be determined by the council in its local planning authority capacity and determination will consider representations made to the local planning authority and the current planning policy position.

2. Alternative Options Considered

2.1 Not applicable

3. Legal Implications

3.1 No decisions are requested from this report, consequently there are no specific legal implications arising from this report. Where projects referenced in the report require a formal decision to proceed or to agree any council involvement, advice from legal colleagues will be sought at an early stage to inform Green Papers or decision reports.

4. Financial Implications

4.1 There are no specific financial implications or decisions arising from this report. Where projects referenced in the report require a formal decision to proceed or to agree any council involvement, advice from financial colleagues will be sought at an early stage to inform Green Papers or decision reports.

5. Natural Environment, Climate & Ecology Implications

5.1 There are no specific environmental implications arising from this report.

6. Well-being and Health Implications

6.1 N/A

7. Other Implications

7.1 There are no other implications arising from this report.

8. Risk Assessment

8.1 There are no specific risk implications arising from this report.

9. Equalities Impact Assessment

9.1 No decisions are requested from this report. As such, an Equality Impact Assessment is not required. Where projects referenced in the report require a formal decision to proceed or to agree any council involvement, an equalities impact assessment will be undertaken at an early stage to inform Green Papers or decision reports.

10. Appendices

Appendix 1 – Plan of the Winfrith Nuclear Decommissioning Agency land and draft Winfrith Vision development plots.

11. Background Papers

N/A

12. Report Sign Off

12.1 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)