

## 4 Environmental Capacity: Productive Land

4.1 This chapter considers the environmental capacity of assets that provide mainly provisioning ecosystems services, for example agricultural land and forestry.

### Types of assets and data sources

4.2 **Table 4.1** identifies the assets that have been considered and where the data on those assets has come from.

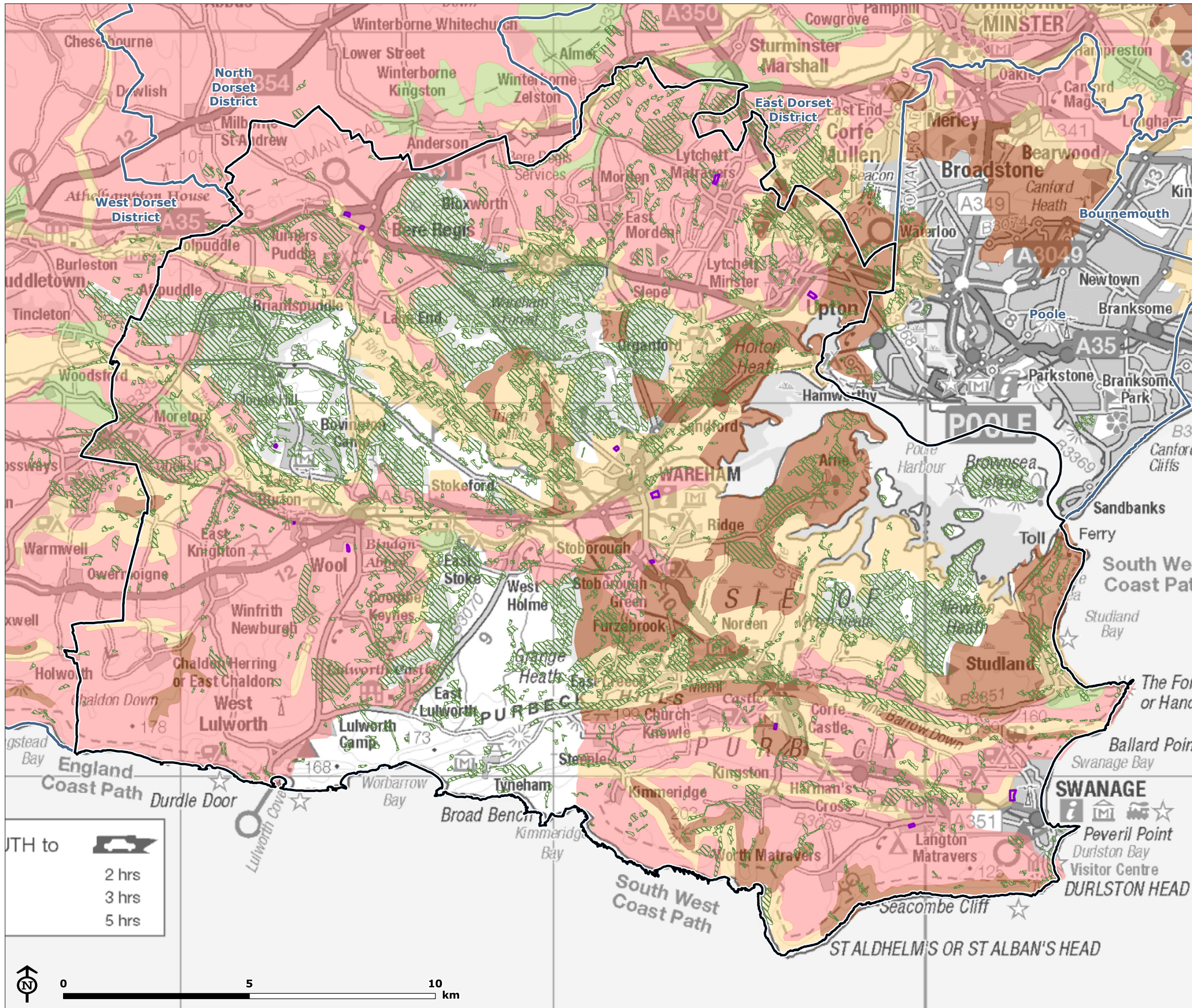
**Table 4.1 Productive land assets and data sources**

Type of asset	Data topic	Data source
Agriculture, forestry and allotments	Agricultural land classification	Natural England
	National Forest Inventory	Forestry Commission
	Allotments	Purbeck DC

4.1 **Figure 4.1** shows the type and location of productive land assets within the District.

4.2 For each type of assets the remainder of this Chapter sets out:

- Why the environmental assets are important.
- Current baseline and future trends.
- The sensitivity of the assets.



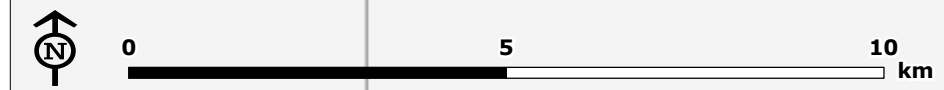
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**Figure 4.1: Productive Land Assets**

- Purbeck District Council
- Other Local Authority boundary
- Agriculture & forestry**
- Agricultural Land Classification**
- Grade 2
- Grade 3
- Grade 4
- Grade 5
- National Forest Inventory
- Other productive land**
- Allotment

DRIVE TIME to

- 2 hrs
- 3 hrs
- 5 hrs



Map Scale @ A3: 1:100,000



## Agriculture, forestry and allotments

### Why are these assets important?

- 4.3 Soil is an invaluable and non-renewable natural resource. The socio-economic and environmental contribution made by soil is often overlooked, but it provides a range of vital ecosystem services including food, timber, wildlife habitats, clean water, run-off and flood management, nutrient cycling, and carbon storage. As set out in the Soil Strategy for England, *“soil is one of the building blocks of life.”*<sup>68</sup>
- 4.4 Agriculture involves the production of crops and the breeding, feeding and raising of livestock that is a source of food. Farming also is an important economic sector within the UK, according to the latest statistics<sup>69</sup>, the total income from farming is £3.8 billion. In terms of ecosystem services, agriculture is part of the provisioning and supporting services as it provides food as well as primary production (please see **Table 2.1**).
- 4.5 In addition to economic input, forestry and woodland form an important resource to the natural environment in relation to its biodiversity, water and flood catchment management qualities and makes way for recreation and tourism. Furthermore, forests and woodland also form a means of carbon storage as well as providing a renewable source of materials and energy. Combining all these non-market benefits of forestry and woodland, it is estimated that forests and woodland in Great Britain have a non-market value of £1.1 billion each year<sup>70</sup>. In relation to ecosystem services, woods and forestry contribute to both the supporting and cultural services (please see **Table 2.1**).
- 4.6 Allotments both hold environmental and social value as people enjoy tending their plot of land, growing fresh produce whilst also socialising with others.

### Legislation

- 4.7 The Town and Country Planning (General Permitted Development) (England) Order 2015 permits certain types of development (without permission from the local authority) on agricultural and forestry land; mainly development that is small in scale and directly connected to the agricultural or forestry operations.
- 4.8 The Forest Reproductive Material Directive 1999/105/EC sets out the marketing procedures and requirements that seek to guarantee the continuous supply of high quality forestry reproductive material within the European Community. Thereby ensuring both the economic stability and productivity of forests as well as ensuring forests are able to be disease resistant and diverse.
- 4.9 Section 8 of the Allotment Act 1925 specifies that land purchased or appropriated by local authorities for use as allotments must not be disposed of without Ministerial consent. The Secretary of State must be satisfied that *“adequate provision will be made for allotment holders displaced by the action of the local authority, or that such provision is unnecessary or not reasonably practicable”*<sup>71</sup>.

### National planning policy

- 4.10 Section 11 of the NPPF states that:

*“The planning system should contribute to and enhance the natural and local environment by: (...) protecting and enhancing (...) soils; preventing both new and existing development from contributing to or being put at unacceptable risk from, or being adversely affected by unacceptable levels of soil (...) pollution or land instability.”*

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<sup>68</sup> Safeguarding our soils: A strategy for England, DEFRA (2009)

<sup>69</sup> Agriculture in the United Kingdom, DEFRA (2015)

[https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/557993/AUK-2015-05oct16.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/557993/AUK-2015-05oct16.pdf)

<sup>70</sup> The UK Forestry Standard: The government's approach to sustainable forestry, Forestry Commission (2011)

<https://www.forestry.gov.uk/theukforestrystandard>

<sup>71</sup> Allotments Act 1925

- 4.11 The NPPF encourages the effective use of land<sup>72</sup>, it also provides guidance in relation to locating development on agricultural land:

*"Local planning authorities should take into account the economic and other benefits of the best and most versatile agricultural land. Where significant development of agricultural land is demonstrated to be necessary, local planning authorities should seek to use areas of poorer quality land in preference to that of a higher quality."*<sup>73</sup>

#### *Local planning policy*

- 4.12 The aim of Policy CO: Countryside is to protect the countryside from inappropriate development and farm diversification proposals will only be permitted if:

- *"Agriculture, forestry or horticulture is still the primary purpose of the enterprise;*
- *Diversification will support the current agriculture, forestry or horticulture."*<sup>74</sup>

- 4.13 Although allotments are not specifically mentioned in Policy GI: Green Infrastructure, Recreation and Sports Facilities, its supporting text notes that along with other elements of GI, existing allotments areas are to be safeguarded and new development is to either improve or create new areas<sup>75</sup>. In other words, development can be permitted if loss of allotments would not lead to a current or future shortfall in provision and / or suitable replacement facilities are provided.

#### **Current baseline and future trends**

- 4.14 Purbeck's productive land assets are summarised below, along with an indication of how they might be expected to change in the future.

#### *Agricultural land*

- 4.15 Agricultural land is classified from Grade 1 (excellent) to Grade 5 (poor), with Grade 3 subdivided into 3a (good) and 3b (moderate). Grades 1 to 3a are identified in the NPPF as the best and most versatile agricultural land classifications<sup>76</sup>, and this land is considered to be the:

*"most flexible, productive and efficient in response to inputs and which can best deliver future crops for food and non food uses such as biomass, fibres and pharmaceuticals."*<sup>77</sup>

- 4.16 The data used in this study does not distinguish between Grade 3a and 3b, therefore the sensitivity applied reflects the fact that Grade 3a/3b land falls between low and high sensitivity (see **Table 4.2**).
- 4.17 High quality agricultural land cannot be replaced, therefore the NPPF requires local planning authorities to favour poorer quality land for development over higher quality grades<sup>78</sup>.
- 4.18 As a predominantly rural District, a large area of Purbeck is classified as agricultural land; only Swanage is classified as urban. There are three large areas of non-agricultural land located on MOD land, Newton Heath, Wareham Forest and the tank grounds and plantations north of Bovington Camp.
- 4.19 There are only six pockets of Grade 2 classified land, the highest grade in the District. The Grade 2 classified land is located around Philliols Farm (near Lane End) close to Moreton, East Stoke, Morden, land due south of Studland, land on the District boundary just south of Sturminster Marshall and land just within the District boundary near West Gate on Hurst Heath.
- 4.20 The two main threats to agriculture are<sup>79</sup>:
- a movement from traditional, lower intensity farming practices which leads to unmanaged land; and

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<sup>72</sup> National Planning Policy Framework, CLG (2012) paragraph 111

<sup>73</sup> National Planning Policy Framework, CLG (2012) paragraph 112

<sup>74</sup> Purbeck Local Plan Part 1: Planning Purbeck's Future (2012), page 72

<sup>75</sup> Purbeck Local Plan Part 1: Planning Purbeck's Future (2012), page 87

<sup>76</sup> National Planning Policy Framework, CLG (2012) Annex 2

<sup>77</sup> Agricultural Land Classification: protecting the best and most versatile agricultural land: Natural England Technical Information Note TIN049, Natural England (2012) <http://publications.naturalengland.org.uk/file/4424325>

<sup>78</sup> National Planning Policy Framework, CLG (2012) paragraph 112

<sup>79</sup> Topic Action Plan: Agriculture, Dorset Wildlife Trust (no date) <https://www.dorsetwildlifetrust.org.uk/hres/06ch23.pdf>

- previous intensive agricultural activity has resulted in habitat loss, fragmentation and change.

#### *Plantations and forestry land*

- 4.21 Many of Purbeck's wooded areas have licences to fell trees by the Forestry Commission<sup>80</sup>. The largest licenced areas are around Arne, Studland, Bovington Camp, Winfrith and Stoborough Heath. However, there are also many other large areas of woodland that have not been licenced by the Forestry Commission but which may include timber production as part of their management, including Wareham Forest, Bere Wood, Rempstone, Hethfelton and Moreton.
- 4.22 We have therefore used National Forest Inventory data to map the presence of forestry / woodland. This data does not indicate the importance of commercial forestry at each of those sites, but does allow sites where commercial forestry may be in operation to be identified.
- 4.23 The Forestry Commission has produced a revised Purbeck Forest Design Plan<sup>81</sup> (FDP) that covers a group of Dorset woodlands, 2972ha in area, which lie in Purbeck to the south of the A35/A31 between Poole Harbour and Puddletown. The FDP aims to restore 194.7ha of existing forest to heathland within these seven Forest Blocks, six of which are located in Purbeck:
- Purbeck Forest– also known as Rempstone;
  - Wareham Forest;
  - Gore Heath;
  - Hethfelton;
  - Affpuddle;
  - Moreton.
- 4.24 Although this practise results in a direct loss to woodland and forestry, there is a drive to compensate for these losses by creating higher value woodland at different locations<sup>82</sup>.
- 4.25 Fragmentation and isolation of forests within Dorset are considered to be a key issue along with the rise in the sika deer population, colonisation of invasive species and lack of appropriate management<sup>83</sup>.
- 4.26 Climate change is also a threat to woodland and forestry as the reduced rainfall in the summer combined with potential water logging in the winter months can lead to tree stress. Trees under stress are more susceptible to disease and pest infestations<sup>84</sup>. Furthermore, the warmer winters can result in earlier bud burst that prevent the trees from producing as many seeds.
- 4.27 While the loss of commercial forestry should ideally be avoided and may have related impacts on biodiversity or recreation access, impacts on its function as a productive (economic) resource can be mitigated, for example through financial compensation.

#### *Allotments*

- 4.28 Purbeck has 12 allotment sites<sup>85</sup> that provide residents of some of the District's villages and towns with opportunities for growing food.
- 4.29 Consultation responses to the recent Local Plan Review Options Consultation<sup>86</sup> reflected concern over new development proposals in North Wareham which would result in the loss of allotments. The most common concern in relation to this site was the loss of allotments which consultees cites as being 'detrimental' given the high value of the existing allotment site and importance in the

<sup>80</sup> <http://magic.defra.gov.uk/MagicMap.aspx>

<sup>81</sup> Purbeck Forest Design Plan: Phase F South England Forest District, Forestry Commission (2013).

[https://www.forestry.gov.uk/pdf/Introduction.pdf/\\$file/Introduction.pdf](https://www.forestry.gov.uk/pdf/Introduction.pdf/$file/Introduction.pdf)

<sup>82</sup> Conservation management of Purbeck's woodlands in the face of climate change, Wild Purbeck Nature Improvement Area (no date) [http://www.dorsetaonb.org.uk/assets/downloads/wild-purbeck/Wild\\_Purbeck-WOODLANDS.pdf](http://www.dorsetaonb.org.uk/assets/downloads/wild-purbeck/Wild_Purbeck-WOODLANDS.pdf)

<sup>83</sup> Topic Action Plan: Forestry and Woodland, Dorset Wildlife Trust (no date) <https://www.dorsetwildlifetrust.org.uk/hres/05ch22.pdf>

<sup>84</sup> Conservation management of Purbeck's woodlands in the face of climate change, Wild Purbeck Nature Improvement Area (no date) [http://www.dorsetaonb.org.uk/assets/downloads/wild-purbeck/Wild\\_Purbeck-WOODLANDS.pdf](http://www.dorsetaonb.org.uk/assets/downloads/wild-purbeck/Wild_Purbeck-WOODLANDS.pdf)

<sup>85</sup> Allotment sites in Purbeck are administered by the local town or parish council.

<sup>86</sup> The Purbeck Local Plan Partial Review Options consultation ran between June and August 2016.

local community<sup>87</sup>. Natural England also objected to the proposed eastern extent of the proposal owing to the loss of allotments.

- 4.30 Where loss of allotments is unavoidable, it may be possible to compensate with alternative provision elsewhere.

### Sensitivity of assets

- 4.31 The capacity of each asset to withstand change, their significance and their overall sensitivity is summarised in **Table 4.2**.

**Table 4.2 Sensitivity of agriculture and forestry assets**

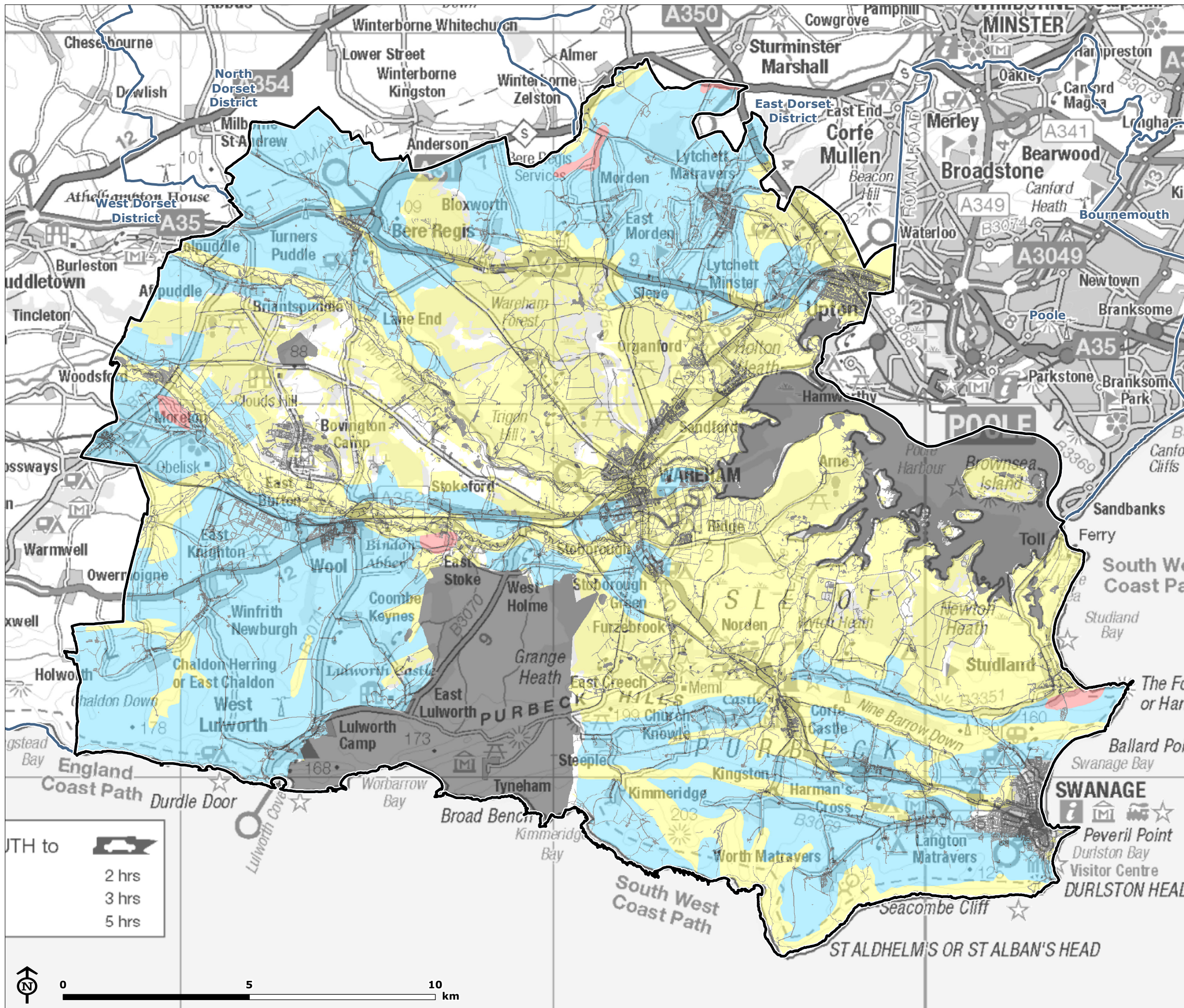
Asset	Capacity to withstand change	Significance	Sensitivity
Agricultural land (Grade 1-2)	<i>Susceptible</i> Higher grade agricultural land, of which there is a very limited supply in the District is highly susceptible to change.	<i>National</i> The NPPF encourages the use of poorer quality land for development in preference to the best and most versatile land (Grades 1-3a)	<b>High</b> Avoid residential development
Agricultural land (Grade 3a and 3b)	<i>More robust</i> Good to moderate quality agricultural land of which there is a greater supply within the District.	<i>National</i> The NPPF encourages the use of poorer quality land for development in preference to the best and most versatile land (Grades 1-3a). Grade 3b is not considered to be the best and most versatile land <sup>88</sup> . The higher significance has been used as the two categories are grouped together in the data.	<b>Moderate</b> Residential development may be possible in some locations
Agricultural land (Grade 4-5)	<i>More robust</i> Lower grade agricultural land which is considered more preferable for development compared to the higher grades of agricultural land by the NPPF.	<i>Local</i> Not afforded any protection but may contribute to the local economy.	<b>Low</b> Residential development possible
Allotments	<i>More robust</i> It is likely that alternative allotment sites could be provided if any of the existing provision was lost.	<i>Local</i> New allotments are encouraged through local Policy GI, as part of the green infrastructure network.	<b>Low</b> Residential development possible (mitigation required)
National Forest Inventory (commercial forestry)	<i>More robust</i> Commercial forestry may pose a constraint at some NFI sites, however loss of commercial sites could be mitigated financially.	<i>Local</i> Commercial forestry is not afforded any specific protection but may contribute to the local economy.	<b>Low</b> Residential development possible

<sup>87</sup> Purbeck Local Plan Partial Review: Partial Review Options Consultation Report January 2017. <https://www.dorsetforyou.gov.uk/purbeck-partial-review>

<sup>88</sup> Note that if data was available to distinguish between Grade 3a and 3b, Grade 3a would be higher owing to its protection under the NPPF and therefore have a high sensitivity and Grade 3b would be considered as having a lower sensitivity.

## Environmental capacity of the District

- 4.32 **Figure 4.2** shows that the least environmentally constrained areas are located in the northwest and central areas of the District.
- 4.33 There are five small areas which are of higher sensitivity as these are classified as Grade 2 land by the Agricultural Land Classification (ALC). The NPPF defines this as best and most versatile land and other lower quality land areas should be considered for development in preference of these areas.
- 4.34 Much of the land to the north, south west and large pockets to the south east of Purbeck have moderate sensitivity as the ALC has recorded these areas as Grade 3 land. The distinction between grade 3a and 3b land is currently unknown but development on grade 3a land should be avoided unless needed and therefore have a higher sensitivity, whereas development on grade 3b land would be considered as having a lower sensitivity.
- 4.35** The sensitivity of the District, taking into account all environmental assets is presented in **Chapter 6**.



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**Figure 4.2: Productive Land Assets and Their Sensitivity**

- Purbeck District Council
  - Other Local Authority boundary
  - Physical constraint
- Sensitivity value**
- Higher
  - Moderate
  - Lower

**NOTE:**  
**Higher sensitivity areas:** Agricultural land (grade 1-2)  
**Moderate sensitivity areas:** Agricultural land (grade 3)  
**Lower sensitivity areas:** Agricultural land (grade 4-5), allotments and National Forest Inventory  
**Physical constraint:** Roads, railway, buildings, water bodies, military firing range areas and coastal erosion zones.

Map Scale @ A3: 1:100,000

