

**West Dorset District Council**  
West Dorset Urban Extensions Study  
Executive Summary  
FINAL ISSUE  
December 2008

**Halcrow Group Ltd**

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# West Dorset District Council

## West Dorset Urban Extensions Study

### Executive Summary

#### Contents Amendment Record

This report has been issued and amended as follows:

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1	0	Final working draft	19.09.08	K. Berry
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# Executive summary

## *Introduction*

Halcrow Group Ltd was commissioned by West Dorset District Council and the South West Regional Assembly to study the deliverability of significant urban extensions in the West Dorset District, which were proposed by the Panel Report on the draft Regional Spatial Strategy for the South West (RSS) and subsequently adopted in the Proposed Changes to the RSS.

The purpose of the West Dorset Urban Extensions Study is to:

- Assess objectively the deliverability of proposed significant urban extensions;
- Identify any deliverability constraints or thresholds that would affect what can be delivered (or the timing of delivery);
- Identify the physical and community infrastructure required to deliver the urban extensions; and
- Confirm that development can meet the likely infrastructure requirements and remain financially viable.

The study forms part of the evidence base which will assist West Dorset District Council and its partner planning authorities to make a sound and reasoned response to the Secretary of State.

The study report comprises of two main documents; [Volume 1](#) is the main summary report and provides a narrative to the study methodology and findings, [Volume 2](#) presents the detailed evidence base and reasoning upon which the study is based, including mapped constraints, consultation responses, assessment results and economic appraisal data.

## *Background*

The South West RSS will set the regional context for planning until 2026 and will replace Regional Planning Guidance for the South West (RPG10). The Panel Report on the draft RSS proposed very significant increases in total housing numbers in West Dorset, including recommendations for new large urban extensions of 3000 dwellings at Dorchester and 700 dwellings at Weymouth within West Dorset District.

The Proposed Changes to the draft RSS were published by Secretary of State on 22<sup>nd</sup> July 2008, adopting the Panel Report's proposed numbers of new urban extension dwellings in West Dorset District.

## *Study approach*

The study methodology that has been followed provides an evidence-based assessment of the strategic constraints and opportunities for urban extension development. The study reports provide a clear audit trail of the assessment process, beginning with broad Areas of Search (AoS) and progressing through a detailed assessment of the suitability of land parcels, going on to identify a range of potential development options and finally

undertaking an economic appraisal of those options. This structure is such that, should the District Council wish to explore alternative development options in the future, the underlying evidence base can be re-visited to explore the potential impacts.

The framework for assessing the suitability of land for urban extensions was developed based upon an appraisal of planning policy and the need to satisfy two major objectives:

- Avoiding land with risks or constraints and preserving assets
- Prioritising areas of suitability and/or opportunity

Three broad AoS were drawn; one surrounding Dorchester and one each at Littlemoor and Chickerell adjacent to Weymouth. Thorough data collection has been undertaken including literature reviews, mapping, desk studies, site visits and stakeholder consultation. The information gathered has been used to establish the existing conditions within the three AoS, assess development constraints and opportunities and identify potentially suitable areas of land.

A total of eight urban extension development options were identified for further assessment - five at Dorchester and three at Weymouth. Economic appraisal was undertaken to test whether the development options are likely to be deliverable and viable within the timeframe of the RSS. The dwelling capacity and the strategic infrastructure required to deliver development was estimated from the assessment data and from further consultation with stakeholders.

The relationship between the cost and phasing of strategic infrastructure and the resultant housing capacity released over the timescale of the RSS was examined to determine:

- The scale of investment in key infrastructure that is required.
- The housing capacity likely to be achieved as a consequence of the investment.
- The likely phasing constraints associated with key infrastructure.
- The constraints to housing capacity as a consequence of infrastructure phasing.

Further to this development threshold analysis, a simplified net present value (npv) model was used to give an indication of the viability of each of the development options.

## ***Results and conclusions***

### **Dorchester**

The assessment identified that there are several fundamental constraints to urban extension development at Dorchester; most notably the capacity of the strategic and local highway networks, but also the capacity of the strategic electrical distribution and sewage treatment infrastructure. The extent of suitable development land at Dorchester is also limited by the sensitive built and natural environment surrounding the town and the wide River Frome flood plain to the north.

In the absence of spare capacity, significant highway network improvements are required to deliver even modest levels of development and such improvements would have to be provided before development could proceed.

Land to the north of the Frome floodplain and land surrounding Charminster village are the only areas that could potentially accommodate an urban extension of 3000 dwellings or greater. Development in these areas would require a new northern bypass linking east-to-west between the existing highway network, with indicative costs in excess of £100

million. The large scale of road network improvements could have significant environmental impacts, in particular on landscape character and flood risk. Such impacts would need to be scoped in consultation with statutory consultees including the Environment Agency. Achieving an urban extension that is well-integrated with the existing town could be challenging due to the distance from the town centre and the physical barrier of the River Frome floodplain.

Elsewhere around Dorchester the development options have land areas that in isolation are insufficient to meet the target of 3000 dwellings. Land to the west of the Poundbury development could achieve no more than 1000 additional dwellings and is located outside of the A37 road. Achieving an urban extension that is well-integrated with the existing town could be challenging due to the distance from the town centre and the physical barrier of the A37.

Land to the south east of Dorchester could accommodate in the region of 2000 dwellings. The land is located relatively close to existing community facilities, but is segregated by the A35 bypass and so it could be challenging to achieve an urban extension that is well-connected with the existing settlement across the trunk road.

The threshold analysis indicated that the target of 3000 dwellings could not be achieved within the RSS plan period. At a development rate of 150 dwellings per year, and given a requirement to provide highway network infrastructure in advance, an urban extension development at Dorchester is expected at best to yield no more than 1000 dwellings by the year 2026.

The viability assessment indicated that the net present value (npv) Residual Values of the development options to the north of Dorchester were negative. The npv Residual Values of the other smaller development options were marginally positive. The significant infrastructure required for an urban extension to the north of Dorchester could not be funded solely by development proceeds; to do so would require unfeasible levels of developer contributions.

## **Weymouth**

The assessment identified that there were a limited number of constraints to urban extension development at Littlemoor; notably that development would be within the Dorset AONB and would require the Weymouth Relief Road to be in place and accessible. The location of the Littlemoor area presents the opportunity to provide high quality public transport services and the development could also be extended to incorporate some land within Weymouth and Portland District.

In the case of Chickerell, the key constraint identified was the impact that development could have on the sensitive environmental areas at The Fleet and Chesil Beach. No significant strategic infrastructure constraints have been identified at either Littlemoor or Chickerell and there is a good prospect for an urban extension at either location to integrate well with the existing settlements.

The threshold analysis indicated that the target of 700 dwellings could be achieved within the RSS plan period, given a development rate of 150 dwellings per year. An urban extension of greater than 700 dwellings could potentially be accommodated, but consideration should also be given to the need to balance housing with the provision of employment land.

The viability assessment indicated that all of the Weymouth development options had net present value (npv) Residual Values that were positive.



# Volume 1 – Study report

## **Volume 2 – Evidence base**