



Dorset Council Local Plan

Proposed Local Plan Engagement Strategy

21 September to 26 October 2026

dorsetcouncil.gov.uk/local-plan

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1. Proposed Local Plan Engagement Strategy

1.1. Introduction

- 1.1.1. The council has prepared a draft engagement strategy to set out how consultation will take place as the local plan is prepared. The engagement strategy will be finalised following the scoping consultation.
- 1.1.2. This engagement strategy explains how Dorset Council will involve communities, key stakeholders and statutory bodies in the preparation of the Dorset Council Local Plan.
- 1.1.3. The strategy sets out:
 - key community engagement principles
 - the stages of consultation that will be undertaken
 - how information will be made available
 - how and when stakeholders and communities will be consulted
 - the methods that may be used
 - how responses will be considered at each stage
- 1.1.4. This document is the draft version of the local plan engagement strategy and has full regard to relevant government guidance on plan-making and engagement.
- 1.1.5. The council is seeking input on this engagement strategy through the scoping consultation. We invite people to help shape this strategy by responding with how you would like to be engaged in the local plan production process. This will help inform the next stages of consultation.
- 1.1.6. The strategy will be reviewed and updated where necessary, following each stage of consultation.

1.2. The Plan-Making System

- 1.2.1. Dorset Council is preparing a local plan to guide sustainable development to meet needs. It will set out the spatial strategy for growth, including the location and scale of new housing, employment and infrastructure, alongside policies to protect and enhance Dorset's natural and built environment.
- 1.2.2. From April 2026, local planning authorities can prepare their local plans under a new plan-making system. The Town and Country Planning (Local Planning) (England) Regulations 2026 set out how plans should be prepared under this new plan-making system.¹ The local plan is developed through a process of evidence gathering and consultation, with the new system incorporating three independent 'gateway' reviews with the Planning Inspectorate before the local plan is submitted for examination.
- 1.2.3. Once adopted, it forms the primary basis for determining planning applications, ensuring that development is planned, sustainable and aligned with the council's wider priorities.

1.3. Statement of Community Involvement (SCI)

- 1.3.1. Dorset Council adopted a Statement of Community Involvement (SCI) in 2025. The SCI sets out how the council will engage on different parts of planning, including how we will consult on planning applications.
- 1.3.2. In relation to plan-making, the SCI sets out the council's approach to consultation on local plans prepared under the previous regulations². This engagement strategy has been prepared to support the new plan-making process and the requirements of new regulations³.
- 1.3.3. As this strategy is refined following the current consultation, it will guide engagement activity for the local plan and therefore will supersede the plan-making elements of the SCI. As such, the role and status of the SCI will be kept under review as the local plan progresses.

¹ References to specific regulatory stages in this Engagement Strategy relate to the www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/2026/186/regulation/1/made unless stated otherwise.

² Town & Country Planning (Local Planning) (England) Regulations 2012

³ Town and County Planning (Local Planning) (England) Regulations 2026

1.4. Role of the Engagement Strategy

- 1.4.1. Engagement with a range of stakeholders is fundamental to the plan-making process. It helps to ensure the local plan reflects local needs and priorities whilst working to meet the growth needs of Dorset.
- 1.4.2. The strategy clearly sets out the stages of consultation that will take place through the preparation of the local plan. The strategy ensures that opportunities for participation are clear, transparent and accessible, in line with statutory requirements relating to the availability of documents and information.
- 1.4.3. The strategy also supports the effective delivery of the plan-making process by providing a structured and proportionate framework for engagement across the stages of the local plan. The strategy will establish a consistent approach to recording, analysing and reporting consultation outcomes.
- 1.4.4. Through the strategy, the council wants to ensure that:
 - stakeholders and communities are able to influence the content of the local plan at key stages
 - consultation is proportionate and transparent
 - there is a clear record showing how consultation has informed plan-making
 - the council meets statutory requirements, reducing risk of delay to the local plan production

1.5. Engagement Principles

- 1.5.1. Good quality engagement is essential to provide a strong foundation for the local plan. It is important to engage with a diverse range of groups and people, including residents, bodies with roles such as environmental, housing and transport, parish councils, community organisations, landowners and developers, infrastructure and service providers, businesses and voluntary groups.

1.5.2. The approach to engagement will be guided by the following principles:

- **Digital-first but not digital-only** – The Government advocates a ‘digital first’ approach to engagement and presentation of documents⁴. Digital methods will be used as the primary channel to maximise efficiency and accessibility, supported by other methods where this adds value with the aim of helping to reach specific groups to ensure inclusivity.
- **Inclusive, representative, clear and accessible** – By providing clear, plain English information in accessible formats and using methods of consultation to ensure all groups have an opportunity to participate. The council will seek to hear from a broad and diverse range of people who live and work in Dorset.
- **Meaningful and responsive** – Helping people to understand the plan making process and how their feedback and local knowledge will be used to inform the plan at each consultation stage.
- **Place-based and locally relevant** – The local plan should reflect the local challenges and opportunities of the places it affects.
- **Timely and proportionate** – Consultation will be undertaken at the defined stages of plan-making in line with regulatory requirements. Activities will be focused on the key decisions at each stage of the plan-making process, ensuring that they align with the scope of the issues being considered.
- **Transparent** – The council will be clear about the purpose of engagement, the scope for influence and how decisions are made. The purpose of each consultation will be set out and timely feedback will be provided to show how comments are informing the local plan. After each of the three consultations a summary of consultation responses will be published, setting out the key issues and how we intend to respond to them.
- **Collaboration and partnerships** – The council will work with statutory bodies, infrastructure and service providers, parish and town councils, neighbouring authorities and other stakeholders to strengthen relationships and support effective engagement to shape the local plan.

⁴ Local planning authorities should prioritise digital formats and comply with defined data standards.

For information on the defined data standards, see: www.gov.uk/government/publications/publish-your-plan-data/publish-your-plan-data#approved-data-standard

1.6. Governance

- 1.6.1. Throughout the production of the local plan, Dorset Council councillors will be involved. At the relevant stages, decisions will be made by Dorset Council's Cabinet to agree the consultation material. The final consultation will be agreed by the full Council and adoption of the local plan will need to be a decision made collectively by all councillors.
- 1.6.2. During the formation of the consultation material and throughout the process of forming the local plan, an informal cross-party councillor working group will meet regularly to guide its content. This informal working group will not make decisions. The working group will be an opportunity for free discussion and debate and therefore, no minutes will be kept.

1.7. Local Plan Stages and Engagement

- 1.7.1. The preparation of the local plan involves several stages. Before the 30 month plan preparation process starts, an initial 'early preparation' period takes place, which includes evidence gathering, setting up a timetable and project management arrangements, and undertaking a scoping consultation. Two further stages of consultation take place subsequently.



Figure 6: Key stages of the local plan process

- 1.7.2. The full timetable is set out at:
www.dorsetcouncil.gov.uk/documents/d/guest/dorset-council-local-plan-timetable-and-notice.

1.8. Stages of Local Plan Consultation

- 1.8.1. The stages of consultation required are set out in the Town and Country Planning (Local Planning) (England) Regulations (2026).

Scoping Consultation (Regulation 20)

When?

- 1.8.2. This consultation stage takes place after the council publishes a notice of intention to commence local plan preparation, and before 'gateway 1'. The engagement plan for this current stage of consultation is included at Appendix A of the proposed engagement strategy.

Purpose

- 1.8.3. The purpose of this consultation is to invite early engagement around what the local plan should contain and how the local planning authority should engage with people and organisations when preparing the local plan.

Length of consultation

- 1.8.4. 5 weeks (Minimum requirement of 21 days).

Who should be invited to take part?

- 1.8.5. Required (as set out in the regulations):
- specific consultation bodies that may have an interest in the preparation of the local plan
 - general consultation bodies the council considers appropriate
- 1.8.6. Optional:
- other residents or people with an interest in the plan can be invited

Post consultation

- 1.8.7. The Engagement Strategy will be reviewed and finalised. The scoping consultation responses will inform the content of the proposed local plan. A summary of the outcomes of the scoping consultation, and how the council intends to respond, will be prepared and published.

Consultation on Proposed Local Plan Content and Evidence (Regulation 23)

When?

1.8.8. This consultation stage takes place after 'gateway 1'.

Purpose

1.8.9. The purpose of this consultation is to share the proposed content of the local plan and evidence that has been prepared to support the local plan. This, as a minimum, would include:

- a proposed vision and measurable outcomes
- any proposed aims and objectives
- proposed spatial strategy approach
- summary of evidence we intend to gather and details of any evidence we already have

1.8.10. This is also an opportunity to consult on site options. A draft policies map would be available.

Length of consultation

1.8.11. Minimum of 6 weeks.

Who should be invited to take part?

1.8.12. Required (as set out in the regulations):

- specific consultation bodies that may have an interest in the preparation of the local plan
- general consultation bodies the council considers appropriate
- residents or people carrying out business in the area that the council considers it appropriate to notify
- anyone who requested to be notified of this consultation

Post consultation

1.8.13. A summary of the outcomes of the consultation, and how the council intends to respond to the issues raised, will be prepared and published. This will inform the content of the proposed local plan.

Consultation on the proposed local plan (Regulation 27)

When?

1.8.14. This consultation stage takes place after 'gateway 2'.

Purpose

1.8.15. The purpose of this consultation is to publish the proposed final draft of the local plan. A map of proposed local plan policies and any evidence reports are also published, as well as any other supporting documents that will be submitted to the Planning Inspectorate.

Length of consultation

1.8.16. 8 weeks.

Who should be invited to take part?

1.8.17. Required (as set out in the regulations):

- specific consultation bodies that may have an interest in the preparation of the local plan
- the authority who published or adopted the spatial development strategy (where one is in place)
- general consultation bodies the council considers appropriate
- residents or people carrying out business in the area that the council considers it appropriate to notify
- anyone who requested to be notified of this consultation

Post consultation

1.8.18. A summary of the outcomes of the consultation and how the council will have regard to the comments received will be published. The council will make any updates necessary to the local plan and supporting evidence and will then move on to 'gateway 3', before submitting the local plan to the Planning Inspectorate for examination.

Outcomes of consultations

1.8.19. After each consultation stage, the council will prepare a summary report explaining what actions were taken to involve people and gather views; a summary of the feedback received, and an explanation of how the council has considered the responses. The summary reports will be published in accordance with the timetable on our website.

- 1.8.20. The report will also suggest how we could improve our approach to consultation for the next stage of the plan-making process, where necessary.
- 1.8.21. At the end of the process, we will produce a final Consultation and Engagement Statement. This will bring together all the consultation work carried out during the plan's preparation. It will be submitted with the local plan when it is sent for examination.

1.9. Stakeholders

- 1.9.1. Dorset Council want to engage with a range of 'stakeholders', including residents, bodies with roles such as environmental, housing and transport, parish councils, community organisations, landowners and developers, infrastructure and service providers, businesses, voluntary groups and residents. The Town and Country Planning Regulations 2026 set out certain organisations we are required to consult, referred to as specific consultation bodies, relevant consultation bodies and general consultation bodies. The regulations also place a requirement for different stakeholders to be consulted at different parts of the process.

Specific Consultation Bodies

- 1.9.2. Specific consultation bodies include statutory organisations, neighbouring local authorities, other public organisations and certain infrastructure providers such as those responsible for utilities.
- 1.9.3. Consulting with the Local Education Authority, Lead Local Flood Authority and considering the Local Nature Recovery Strategy are required where they sit within a different organisation. However, in Dorset Council's case they are within the same authority.

Relevant Consultation Bodies

- 1.9.4. These include neighbouring local planning authorities, minerals and waste planning authorities, parish councils and police.

General Consultation Bodies

- 1.9.5. General consultation bodies are organisations whose activities benefit the plan area, organisations which represent those who share a protected characteristic⁵ in the area, or those who represent those who carry on business in the area.
- 1.9.6. The council does not have to consult every organisation in these groups. It will focus on those that are likely to be interested in, or affected by, the local plan. Engagement will be focused on key issues where coordination is needed to help ensure the local plan is effective.
- 1.9.7. The council commissions Volunteer Centre Dorset to support Dorset's voluntary and community sector. The Centre facilitates a number of community networks, including Dorset Connect and Jurassic Coast Community Links. The council also works the Community Action Network, an organisation championing Dorset's voluntary and community sector, and with Help and Kindness, a Community Interest Company supporting grass-roots projects and organisations across all age ranges and sectors of society. We will seek to coordinate engagement activities with the Volunteer Centre, Community Action Network and Help and Kindness to share information, including to particular audiences.

Strategic co-operation and cross boundary working

- 1.9.8. Planning in a coordinated way across local authority boundaries is an important part of delivering sustainable growth. In preparing the local plan, Dorset Council will work collaboratively with neighbouring authorities, infrastructure providers and other relevant bodies to address matters that operate across boundaries. Key cross-boundary matters include meeting housing needs across the housing market area, strategic transport connectivity and the provision of strategic infrastructure. Many of these strategic matters will be addressed through the Spatial Development Strategy but during its formation, there will be a need for conversations about these issues relative to Dorset.

⁵ See para. 1.9.18

- 1.9.9. Previously there was a statutory Duty to Cooperate requiring this cross-boundary cooperation. This has now been removed as a legislative requirement and is now embedded in the tests that the local plan will undergo during examination at the end of the process. Strategic cooperation will therefore form an integral part of demonstrating a sound local plan and will be demonstrated through the production of statements of common ground where necessary.
- 1.9.10. Dorset Council will work collaboratively with neighbouring local planning authorities and strategic bodies to identify and address cross-boundary matters. This will be achieved through:
- engagement with infrastructure providers, regional authorities, neighbouring local authorities and other relevant organisations to inform the spatial strategy
 - identification and delivery of strategic infrastructure requirements to support sustainable growth through engagement with infrastructure providers
 - developing policy approaches through engagement with key stakeholders to ensure consistency and coordination across boundaries

Engaging with site promoters

- 1.9.11. Meeting the growth needs of Dorset is a fundamental requirement of the local plan. Site promoters and developers are key in delivering growth through the development sites and therefore it is important that the council engage proactively to achieve the desired outcomes.
- 1.9.12. The council will undertake a call for sites as part of the plan making process to ensure a good understanding of the available development options. The council will publish guidance on submission requirements and assessment criteria to support this process. All submissions will be recorded, and an objective assessment of suitability will be published.
- 1.9.13. Whilst the council cannot prevent promoters from submitting sites at any point within the plan making process, the emphasis will be on the submission as part of the call for sites process as this enables timely opportunities for site assessment. Sites submitted outside of this process may not be considered and assessed, instead being treated as 'omission sites' for consideration through the examination of the local plan.
- 1.9.14. Site promoters will be encouraged to engage with the various consultations that form part of the local plan process. Detailed evidence studies and

assessments to support site promotion should be submitted as part of the ongoing negotiations with site developers and not as part of the formal consultation stages.

Residents and engaging under-represented groups

Local communities profile

- 1.9.15. Residents are important in providing knowledge of local issues and lived experiences. The council has prepared a Local Communities Profile using available demographic data⁶ to help us understand our target audiences and how we can best meet their engagement needs. At each stage, we will use this information to monitor our approach to consultation and the consultation response, to identify opportunities to improve our engagement. The profile will be reviewed, and if necessary updated, before each stage of consultation.
- 1.9.16. The council holds a database of organisations and residents who wish to be notified of consultations on the local plan. Anyone can sign up to be notified of the progression of the local plan – see section 1.12.7.

Local Communities Profile

Dorset is a large and varied area, featuring many different communities. Known for its rurality, which brings its own strengths and challenges, Dorset also includes larger towns (such as Weymouth and Dorchester), smaller towns (such as Lyme Regis, Sturminster Newton Wimborne Minster and Shaftesbury) and several towns and villages that have a strong relationship with the Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole conurbation (such as Upton, Ferndown, Wimborne Minster and Verwood).

Population densities vary significantly, resulting in highly varied daily lives across the authority area. For example, Dorchester has population density of just over 3,000 people per square kilometre, while rural parishes, which cover much of Dorset, can have fewer than 20 per square kilometre.

Mobile internet connectivity is also highly variable across Dorset. While Ofcom identifies that 96% of Dorset is likely to benefit from 4G connectivity from at least one provider indoors, only 57% is identified to have coverage from all four of the main providers indoors⁷. Dorset Council is working with Streetwave to better understand coverage, street-by-street.

⁶ Unless otherwise stated, this data has been sourced from the 2021 Census, Office for National Statistics.

⁷ Connected Nations: Interactive report 2025, Ofcom.

Population

In 2021, Dorset had a total population of 389,947 people. The population is broadly balanced by sex, with 51.5% female and 48.5% male.

With just over 30% of Dorset's population being aged 65 and over, we have a larger proportion of people in this age group than any other unitary authority in England (the average being just under 20%)⁸. As a result of this, Dorset also has a greater proportion of one and two person households than average, and a decreasing population of people of working age, particularly residents aged between 18 and 39⁹.

Dorset's overall population is also less ethnically diverse than England as a whole, with only 6.1% classifying themselves as non-white British, and a greater proportion have English as one of their main languages (98.2%) than the country average. However, there are some locations that have notably higher levels of diversity than the rest of Dorset, including Dorchester, Sturminster Newton and Melcombe Regis which have 9.8%, 12.3% and 15.4% identifying as non-white British respectively.

In terms of religions and beliefs, the majority of Dorset residents either define themselves as Christian (59%) or as having no religion (40.1%). 1.8% recognised themselves as belonging to another religion or faith group, while 6.5% preferred not to state their religion.

Deprivation

In terms of overall deprivation, Dorset is less deprived than most English authority areas, being ranked 180th out of 296¹⁰. However, deprivation levels are not evenly spread, with several neighbourhoods being in the top 10% or 20% most deprived nationally. Many of these pockets are within Weymouth and Portland, although there are also areas in Ferndown and Bridport.

Self-reported health also varies depending on location. The 80.7% share of Dorset residents who report themselves to be very well or well broadly aligns with the England average, but there are locations where this proportion drops notably. This figure drops to 72.4% in Melcombe Regis ward in Weymouth for example. 9.7% of residents aged 5 and over provide unpaid care.

In terms of earnings, Dorset's residents earn around 10% less than the national average, and the amount of money generated for the economy per hour worked is about 15% less. 43% of Dorset's residents are in employment. Dorset and BCP have over 6,000 serving personnel in the UK armed forces across 4 bases, equating to around 0.8% of

⁸ Dorset Council Plan 2024 to 2029

⁹ Dorset Council Plan 2024 to 2029

¹⁰ English indices of deprivation 2025

the population of both authority areas¹¹, while 22,884 residents in the Dorset Council area have previously served, equivalent to around 7.1% of Dorset residents aged 16 and over.

Access to transport is also relevant. 13.7% of Dorset's residents do not own a car, and while some locations benefit from good public transport options, many areas within Dorset have limited provision.

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- 1.9.17. The profile suggests that a hybrid approach is necessary in Dorset to enable both online and traditional engagement and response methods. Use of local libraries and in person events are likely to be helpful to ensure older people are reached. Any events would be focussed on settlements with proposed growth with information available via local libraries and we will ask for the assistance of parish councils to help reach those in rural areas. Section 1.12: 'How we will engage' summarises methods of engagement that may be used.

Protected characteristics

- 1.9.18. The Equality Act 2010 protects people from discrimination based on nine protected characteristics: age, disability, gender reassignment, pregnancy and maternity, marriage and civil partnership, race, religion or belief, sex, and sexual orientation.
- 1.9.19. When carrying out its functions, Dorset Council must have regard to the Public Sector Equality Duty (Section 149 of the Equality Act 2010). This requires the council to:
- eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation
 - advance equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not
 - foster good relations between different groups of people
- 1.9.20. These duties will be an important consideration throughout local plan consultation and engagement activities.
- 1.9.21. In addition, Dorset Council's Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Strategy and Action Plan 2024-2027 identifies other factors that may affect people's ability to access services or participate in public life. These include people who are care experienced, carers, those affected by rural isolation, people facing socio-economic disadvantage, lone parents, members of the armed forces

¹¹ Dorset Council Armed Forces Covenant factsheet

community, and people with diverse gender identities. These factors will also be considered when developing the local plan engagement approach.

Dorset Council Priorities

- 1.9.22. The local plan engagement approach will also have regard to relevant Dorset Council Plan priorities. The priorities are summarised in section 3 of the scoping consultation document (spatial vision and objectives) and they can help identify communities, places and stakeholders who may be particularly affected by local plan issues. The priorities highlight the importance of aiming to engage with working age residents, those with disabilities, organisations representing businesses, young people, rural communities, low-income households and ethnic minorities. These groups are reflected in table 1.

1.10. Reaching under-represented groups

- 1.10.1. Dorset Council has an Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Panel, which comprises the following organisations: Dorset Blind, Space Youth Project, SENDme2work, Citizens Advice in East Dorset and Purbeck, DorPip, PramaLife and Dorset Race Equality Council. The Panel will be asked to review the draft engagement strategy. Additionally, Dorset Council has a number of employee networks¹² that support equality, diversity, inclusion and employee wellbeing at the council. Information on our consultations will be shared through these networks whenever possible.
- 1.10.2. Using digital methods is most cost effective and enables quick engagement by a wide range of people. We will adopt a digital first approach, however this is not necessarily accessible for all users and adjustments may be needed in terms of consultation locations, methods and formats to ensure that all groups, particularly those with protected characteristics, are appropriately and inclusively engaged in the process of producing the local plan.
- 1.10.3. Table 1 sets out some suggested engagement approaches that could be beneficial to particular groups. The suggested methods are indicative of the approaches which may be used where relevant, proportionate and deliverable within the consultation timetable and available resources. The council may adapt these approaches in response to feedback, resource availability, safeguarding requirements and advice from community partners.

¹² Dorset Council Employee Networks comprise: Armed Forces Community, Carers, Disability, Ethnic Diversity, LGBTQI+, Men's and Women's networks.

Table 1: Examples of possible targeted engagement approaches

Protected Characteristic or Group	Potential approaches
Age – Children and Young People	Engagement through schools, colleges and youth groups; youth democracy networks; visual and interactive activities; digital, interactive, map based and mobile-friendly material.
Age – Working age	Major local employers; sports clubs; local events; online engagement; short videos; social media; topic-based workshops; a range of event times and formats.
Age – Older People	Engage with local organisations and community networks; accessible venues; large print or alternative formats where appropriate; paper response options.
Pregnancy, Maternity, Lone Parents and Carers	Seek input through existing family and carers' organisations; digital and mobile participation options.
Disability	Accessible materials and venues; Easy Read formats; captioned videos; reasonable adjustments on request.
Sexual Orientation, Gender Reassignment and Gender Identity	Engage with representative organisations and networks; inclusive materials; appropriate language.
Sex	Engagement through relevant community and support organisations.
Marriage and Civil Partnership	Engagement through relevant community and support organisations.
Race and Ethnicity	Seek input through existing community and voluntary organisations and networks; translation where appropriate; plain English; community-based engagement.
Gypsies, travellers and travelling showpeople	Engagement with representative organisation, i.e. Kushti Bok; plain English; community-based engagement.
Religion or Belief	Information shared through places of worship and faith networks; translation where appropriate.

Socio-Economic Disadvantage	Events in accessible local locations; partnership with support organisations; plain English materials; online and non-digital participation options.
Care Experience	Seek input through care-experienced networks and support services; interactive and accessible engagement methods.
Rural Isolation	Engagement through parish councils and local community networks; geographically distributed events; local information channels.
Armed Forces Community	Connect with existing Armed Forces and veterans' organisations; digital engagement; targeted communication through established networks.
Business Owners	Engagement through representative organisations.

1.11. How we will engage

- 1.11.1. There are a range of ways for communities and stakeholders to get involved in preparing the local plan. The minimum requirements for consultation and making documents available are set out in the regulations.
- 1.11.2. In line with national guidance, the council will use a 'digital first' approach to our consultations. Digital first means making all relevant documentation available in a digital format on the council's website and enabling an easy and convenient approach to commenting on this content. More traditional approaches to consultation will also be used.
- 1.11.3. The Dorset Council Local Plan webpages at www.dorsetcouncil.gov.uk/dorset-council-local-plan-consultation will provide core information at each stage of consultation and throughout the local plan process to enable broad, ongoing engagement. This will include notices, timetable, evidence and consultation content and questions, as well as a place where people can sign up to be kept informed of the local plan. Making this data available in a digital form is a requirement of the regulations that govern the plan-making process. The council's consultation platform offers a way to complete surveys and comment on policies and sites online and this will be used at each stage.
- 1.11.4. For each stage of consultation, as a minimum the council will:
 - publish the consultation material on the council's website and consultation platform

- invite consultees to respond as set out under 'Who should be invited to take part'
- publish a notice on our website and display this at County Hall in Dorchester
- make a printed copy of the consultation material available to view at County Hall

1.11.5. Other methods of engagement for each stage may also include those set out in Table 2 and will be used where relevant, proportionate and deliverable within the consultation timetable and with available resources.

Table 2: Potential engagement methods

Channel	Potential Method
Digital	• E-newsletters • Social media • Dorset Council employee networks • Webinars and online workshops • Use of map-based content • Use of image-based content
Press	• Press releases • Dorset Council magazine (published bi-annually) • Releases for parish and town council magazines and newsletters
Printed materials	• Displaying information and access to consultation materials in libraries • Making printed copies of consultation information upon request for those who are unable to access the internet, e.g. for age and/or disability reasons • Making paper surveys and response forms available for those who are unable to access the internet, e.g. for age and/or disability reasons
In person events	• Public exhibitions or drop in events in accessible venues including, where possible, family friendly venues

	• Engagement with Dorset Youth Council • Agents' forum • Town and Parish Council workshops / forums • Meetings with stakeholders and community groups
Other	• Daytime, evening and weekend engagement opportunities where possible • Promotion of consultations through relevant networks and organisations, such as Community Action Network and Volunteer Centre Dorset • Share information through and seek input from Dorset Council Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Panel

Accessible information

- 1.11.6. To improve access to and participation in the local plan process, consultation documents will use plain English and accessible language where possible. In addition, reasonable adjustments and alternative formats will be provided on request where practical and proportionate. Individuals or groups requiring support should email planningpolicyconsult@dorsetcouncil.gov.uk or phone 01305 838334.

How to be kept informed

- 1.11.7. To receive updates about the local plan, including consultations, you can request to be added to the council's mailing list at [Planning Policy Updates Signup Form](#). Alternatively, for those who are unable to access this website, please phone 01305 838334.
- 1.11.8. People can unsubscribe from the mailing list at any time.
- 1.11.9. If a response is made to a consultation on the local plan, we will keep your representation for the duration of the plan preparation period even if you unsubscribe from the mailing list.

How to make your involvement effective

- 1.11.10. When responding to a consultation people should:
- use the online survey wherever possible
 - submit comments by the closing date

- give their name and contact details. Anonymous responses will not be accepted
- be courteous and respectful of other people's views. The council reserves the right not to accept comments that could be considered offensive
- be aware that local plans and decisions need to be legal and consistent with government policy

1.12. Data protection

- 1.12.1. The council's privacy notice is available on our website:
www.dorsetcouncil.gov.uk/planning-policy-privacy-notice. Data collected during local plan consultations will follow this privacy notice. If you provide your contact details through a consultation or survey, your data will only be used for the purpose it was originally gathered for.
- 1.12.2. Responses to consultations will be used by the council to inform the next stages of producing the local plan. Responses will be summarised and may be published in full. All responses and information within them will be in the public domain and may be disclosed if requested under the Freedom of Information Act/Environmental Information Regulations. Any published information will exclude individuals' contact information but will identify individuals by name.
- 1.12.3. Information submitted, including personal information, will be retained by the council in line with its information retention schedule:
www.dorsetcouncil.gov.uk/retention-schedule.

1.13. Use of Artificial Intelligence

- 1.13.1. The council may use artificial intelligence (AI) tools to assist with analysis of consultation responses, preparation of summary reports, accessibility improvements and other engagement activities. AI will not however determine planning policy or replace officer judgement. Outputs generated by AI will be reviewed by officers before being relied upon. The council will ensure that any use of AI complies with data protection legislation, information governance requirements and the council's corporate Artificial Intelligence Policy.

1.14. Monitoring and Feedback

- 1.14.1. The council will review engagement activity following each consultation to support the continuous improvement and understanding of who is and isn't taking part. Where gaps in participation are identified, the strategy may be reviewed.

Table 3: Engagement Monitoring

Indicator	What will be monitored
Diversity	Participation levels for protected characteristics and local characteristics, including response method (where voluntarily provided through the surveys).
Geographic reach	Geographic spread of respondents across towns, villages, rural areas and coastal communities will be reviewed.
Response methods	Proportion of responses by method, including online, paper, email, event feedback, workshops and stakeholder submissions.
Transparency and feedback	Publication of consultation summaries in line with published timetable.

1.15. Appendix A: Engagement Plan for the Scoping Consultation

Introduction

- 1.15.1. This engagement plan is for the scoping consultation on the Dorset Council Local Plan.
- 1.15.2. The scoping consultation takes place under Regulation 20 of the Town and Country Planning (Local Planning) (England) Regulations 2026 and is informed by government guidance set out at: Create or update a local plan using the new system - GOV.UK
- 1.15.3. As part of the scoping consultation, the council has prepared a draft engagement strategy which sets out key principles (with input from elected members and internal communications and engagement teams). This engagement plan for the scoping consultation has been informed by that draft strategy.

Purpose of the consultation

- 1.15.4. The purpose of this consultation is to invite early engagement around what the local plan should contain and how the local planning authority should engage with people and organisations when preparing the local plan. The intended outcome is to gather information to help establish the scope of the Dorset Council Local Plan.

Objectives of the consultation

- gather views on the scope of the local plan
- consider themes for the local plan's vision and objectives
- consider approaches to developing a spatial strategy
- identify key planning issues for the Dorset Council area
- identify what further evidence is needed, missing or needs updating to inform the local plan
- identify how stakeholders prefer to be engaged
- identify underrepresented groups before later plan stages and improve involvement by underrepresented groups and those with protected characteristics
- test preferred engagement methods

- 1.15.5. The scoping consultation itself will set out clearly what the consultation covers and what it does not – for example, at this stage, the council are not asking for views on specific sites. Questions will be clear and in plain English.

Target audience

- 1.15.6. Appropriate specific consultation bodies, relevant consultation bodies and general consultation bodies including environmental bodies, infrastructure providers, developers, parish and town councils, groups representing those with protected characteristics and groups representing communities.
- 1.15.7. The Dorset local communities profile set out in section 1.10 of the draft engagement strategy is up to date. It has been used, along with regulatory requirements, to identify the target audience and possible challenges to their engagement within the scoping consultation.
- 1.15.8. The key challenges are considered to be engaging with the ageing population, a diverse range of consultees and those from pockets of deprivation. The county is primarily rural with many areas having limited public transport provision. Mobile phone coverage across Dorset is highly variable, with notable gaps and inconsistent service in many rural areas in particular.
- 1.15.9. The Equality Act 2010 protects people from discrimination, and the council wishes to engage with underrepresented groups through targeted methods as outlined below.

Consultation period

- 1.15.10. The consultation will run for 5 weeks – 21 September to 26 October 2026.

Consultation methods

- 1.15.11. The government advocates a ‘digital first’ approach to engagement and presentation of documents, however this will be supported by other methods to help ensure inclusivity.

General

- online consultation and survey using the council's consultation platform
- consultation material available on Dorset Council website
- consultation material available to view in paper form at County Hall, Dorchester and Dorset libraries. Libraries also have computers where the digital material and online survey can be accessed
- publish a notice of scoping consultation on the council's website and at County Hall, Dorchester
- email notifications to those signed up to the local plan mailing list
- Dorset Council e-newsletter bulletin
- press release
- parish and town council briefing
- agents' forum
- forum for housing registered providers
- paper response forms available

Targeted engagement

1.15.12. Outreach to groups identified through the Dorset demographic baseline and those with protected and locally protected characteristics:

- Dorset Youth Voice workshop
- meetings with representatives from groups with protected characteristics where possible
- engagement with Dorset Council Equality, Diversity & Inclusion Panel
- share information through Dorset Council employee networks
- share information through networks such as Volunteer Centre Dorset, Community Action Network and Help and Kindness
- alternative formats available on request

1.15.13. There will not be public exhibitions or drop-in events scheduled for this stage of consultation as the emphasis will be on statutory consultees and representative groups and focussed on what the plan should address rather than specific proposals.

Post consultation

1.15.14. The engagement strategy will be reviewed and finalised. The scoping consultation will inform the content of the proposed local plan. A summary of the outcomes of the scoping consultation will be prepared and published.



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