

Dorset Council Local Plan

Strategic Environmental Assessment Scoping Report

Dorset Council

Final report

Prepared by LUC

September 2026



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Contents

Chapter 1	8
Introduction	
The Local Plan area	9
The Dorset Council Local Plan	9
Strategic Environment Assessment	13
Habitat Regulations Assessment	14
National Planning Policy Framework	16
Meeting the requirements of the SEA Regulations	17
Structure of the Scoping Report	22
 Chapter 2	 24
Biodiversity, flora and fauna	
Key messages from other plans, programmes and objectives	25
Baseline information	37
Environmental and sustainability issues and likely evolution of the issues without the Local Plan	55
SEA objectives	56
 Chapter 3	 58
Soil	
Key messages from other plans, programmes and objectives	59
Baseline information	64
Environmental and sustainability issues and likely evolution of the issues without the Local Plan	68
SEA objectives	68
 Chapter 4	 70
Water	
Key messages from other plans, programmes and objectives	71
Baseline information	78

Environmental and sustainability issues and likely evolution of the issues without the Local Plan	86
SEA objectives	87

Chapter 5 **88**

Air

Key messages from other plans, programmes and objectives	89
Baseline information	93
Environmental and sustainability issues and likely evolution of the issues without the Local Plan	96
SEA objectives	96

Chapter 6 **98**

Climatic Factors

Key messages from other plans, programmes and objectives	99
Baseline information	107
Environmental and sustainability issues and likely evolution of the issues without the Local Plan	111
SEA objectives	112

Chapter 7 **113**

Flooding and Coastal Change

Key messages from other plans, programmes and objectives	114
Baseline information	125
Environmental and sustainability issues and likely evolution of the issues without the Local Plan	128
SEA objectives	128

Chapter 8 **130**

Landscape

Key messages from other plans, programmes and objectives	130
Baseline information	134
Environmental and sustainability issues and likely evolution of the issues without the Local Plan	140

SEA objectives	140
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Chapter 9 **142**

Cultural Heritage

Key messages from other plans, programmes and objectives	143
Baseline information	146
Environmental and sustainability issues and likely evolution of the issues without the Local Plan	149
SEA objectives	149

Chapter 10 **151**

Human Health and Population

Key messages from other plans, programmes and objectives	152
Baseline information	159
Environmental and sustainability issues and likely evolution of the issues without the Local Plan	163
SEA objectives	164

Chapter 11 **166**

Material Assets

Key messages from other plans programmes and objectives	167
Baseline information	178
Environmental and sustainability issues and likely evolution of the issues without the Local Plan	183
SEA objectives	184

Chapter 12 **186**

SEA Framework

Consultation and next steps

References **192**

Table of Tables

Table 2.1: Extent of priority habitats within the Dorset Council Local Plan area	37
Table 2.2: A table showing the coverage of wildlife designations within the Dorset Council Local Plan area	38
Table 6.1: A table showing the carbon emissions according to industrial and commercial, domestic and transport sources within the Dorset Council Local Plan area (2016-2024)	109
Table 6.3: Installed capacity of renewable energy (MW) within the Dorset Council Local Plan area in 2026	110
Table 12.1: The SEA framework, including the SEA objectives, decision-making criteria, and SEA topics covered	187

Table of Figures

Figure 1.1: A map showing the Dorset Council Local Plan area, shown within the red line	11
Figure 2.1: The location and extent of international and national wildlife designations in the Dorset Council Local Plan area	41
Figure 2.2: A map showing the extent of the River Avon, River Axe, Chesil and the Fleet, and River Parrett (Somerset Levels) and Poole Harbour catchments	44
Figure 2.3: The location and extent of recreation pressure zones	48
Figure 2.4: The location and extent of the Dorset Heaths buffer zones	49
Figure 2.5: The location and extent of the Fontmell & Melbury Downs SAC, Cerne and Sydling Downs SAC, and Rooksmoor SAC	51
Figure 3.1: The location and extent of agricultural land grades within the Dorset Council Local Plan Area	66
Figure 4.1: The location and extent of Groundwater Source Protection Zones within the Dorset Council Local Plan area	79
Figure 4.2: The chemical status of water bodies in Dorset	81
Figure 4.3: The chemical and quantitative status of groundwater in Dorset	83
Figure 4.4: The ecological status of water bodies in Dorset	85
Figure 5.1: A map showing the extent of the Air Quality Management Area in Chideock	95
Figure 7.1: A map summarising the policy approach towards coastal management in the Poole & Christchurch Bays Shoreline Management Plan Review (2010)	123
Figure 8.1: A map showing the extent of the Dorset National Landscape and Cranborne Chase and West Wiltshire National Landscape and UNESCO World Heritage Site within the Dorset Council Local Plan area	137
Figure 8.2: A map showing the extent of the Green Belt within the Dorset Council Local Plan area	139

Figure 9.1: A map showing the location of listed buildings within the Dorset Council Local Plan Area	147
Figure 9.2: A map showing the extent of heritage assets within the Dorset Council Local Plan Area	148
Figure 10.1: Annual population change (shown by the black line), net migration (shown by the green bar) and natural population change (shown by the orange bar) between 2010-24 within the Dorset Council Local Plan area	160
Figure 10.2: Population demographics in the Dorset Council Local Plan area in 2024 and 2034.	161
Figure 10.3: Crime in the Dorset Council Local Plan area according to the type of offence between 2020/21 and 2024/25	162
Figure 11.1: Dwelling type in the Dorset Plan Area in 2021	179
Figure 11.2: Tenure type in the Dorset Plan Area in 2021	179
Figure 11.3: GVA by industrial sector in Dorset in 2017	181
Figure 11.4: Average number of cars per household in the Dorset Council area in 2021	182

Chapter 1

Introduction

1.1 This SEA Scoping Report has been prepared by LUC on behalf of Dorset Council as the first stage in carrying out the Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) of the new Dorset Council Local Plan.

1.2 It should be noted that a scoping report for the Dorset Council Local Plan was originally prepared by LUC between April and August 2025. This earlier round of scoping work was undertaken as a Sustainability Appraisal (SA) Scoping Report, before the Government's introduction of a new plan making system in early 2026. The introduction of the new plan making system removed the requirement for SA but maintains the requirement for SEA. The Sustainability Appraisal Scoping Report was subject to consultation with the three statutory consultees (Natural England, Environment Agency and Historic England) during Autumn 2025. Following the introduction of the new plan making system, the scoping report has been reviewed and updated to ensure it continues to meet the requirements for SEA. The update work has also been undertaken to ensure the policy context, baseline information and key environmental and sustainability issues and their likely evolution without the new Local Plan are up to date. The consultation responses provided by the three statutory consultees in 2025 have also been considered as part of the updated work.

1.3 SEA is an assessment process designed to consider and communicate the strategic environmental effects of emerging plans and policies, including their alternatives. SEA iteratively informs the plan-making process by helping to refine the contents of such documents, so that they maximise the benefits of sustainable development and avoid or at least minimise the potential for adverse effects. More explanation of the requirements of SEA is set out later in this chapter.

1.4 The SEA process comprises a number of stages that need to be undertaken alongside the Local Plan preparation:

- Stage A: Setting the context and objectives, establishing the baseline and deciding on the scope of the environmental assessment.
- Stage B: Developing and refining options and assessing effects.
- Stage C: Preparing the Environmental Report.
- Stage D: Consulting on the Local Plan and the Environmental Report.
- Stage E: Monitoring the significant environmental effects of implementing the Local Plan.

1.5 Scoping is the first stage in the SEA process. The purpose of this Scoping Report is to provide the context for, and determine the scope of, the SEA of the new Local Plan and to set out the framework for undertaking the later stages of the SEA.

1.6 It should be noted that this report is in an 'Accessible format', which means it has been formatted to meet the requirements of the Public Sector Bodies (Websites and Mobile Applications) Accessibility Regulations (2018), as set out in the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG 2.1). This means it must have larger font, larger spacing between lines and headings, less information presented in tables, 'alt text' provided for all figures and it is able to be read by screen-reading software.

The Local Plan area

1.7 Dorset is an administrative county located on the south-west coast of England, as presented in Figure 1.1. Approximately half of the county's population live in the south-east Dorset conurbation, which contains three of the county's largest settlements: Bournemouth, Poole, and Christchurch. The remainder of the county is predominately rural, covering some 2,653 km², with the population concentrated in Dorchester (the county town), the seaside town of Weymouth in the south, and the market towns of Ferndown and Wimborne Minster. For local plan making purposes, the administrative county is divided up into two unitary authority areas – the Dorset Council area, which is the subject of this plan, and the Bournemouth, Poole, and Christchurch area. Figure 1.1 shows the two unitary authority areas.

1.8 Dorset is bordered by the local authorities of Devon to the west, Somerset to the north-west, Wiltshire to the north, Hampshire to the east, the Isle of Wight, across the Solent to the south-east, and the English Channel to the south. The county's population is heavily concentrated in the south-east Dorset conurbation, which lies along the south coast. The northern and western edges of the county remain predominantly rural. The rural landscape forms the setting for the rural settlements and villages which characterise a vast number of the county's settlements.

The Dorset Council Local Plan

1.9 The Dorset Council Local Plan will provide the planning policies that will be used to guide decisions on planning applications and set out the locations for future development across the Dorset Council area.

1.10 The Dorset Council Local Plan aims to achieve sustainable development in the Dorset Council area by meeting the housing and employment needs whilst avoiding unacceptable environmental impacts.

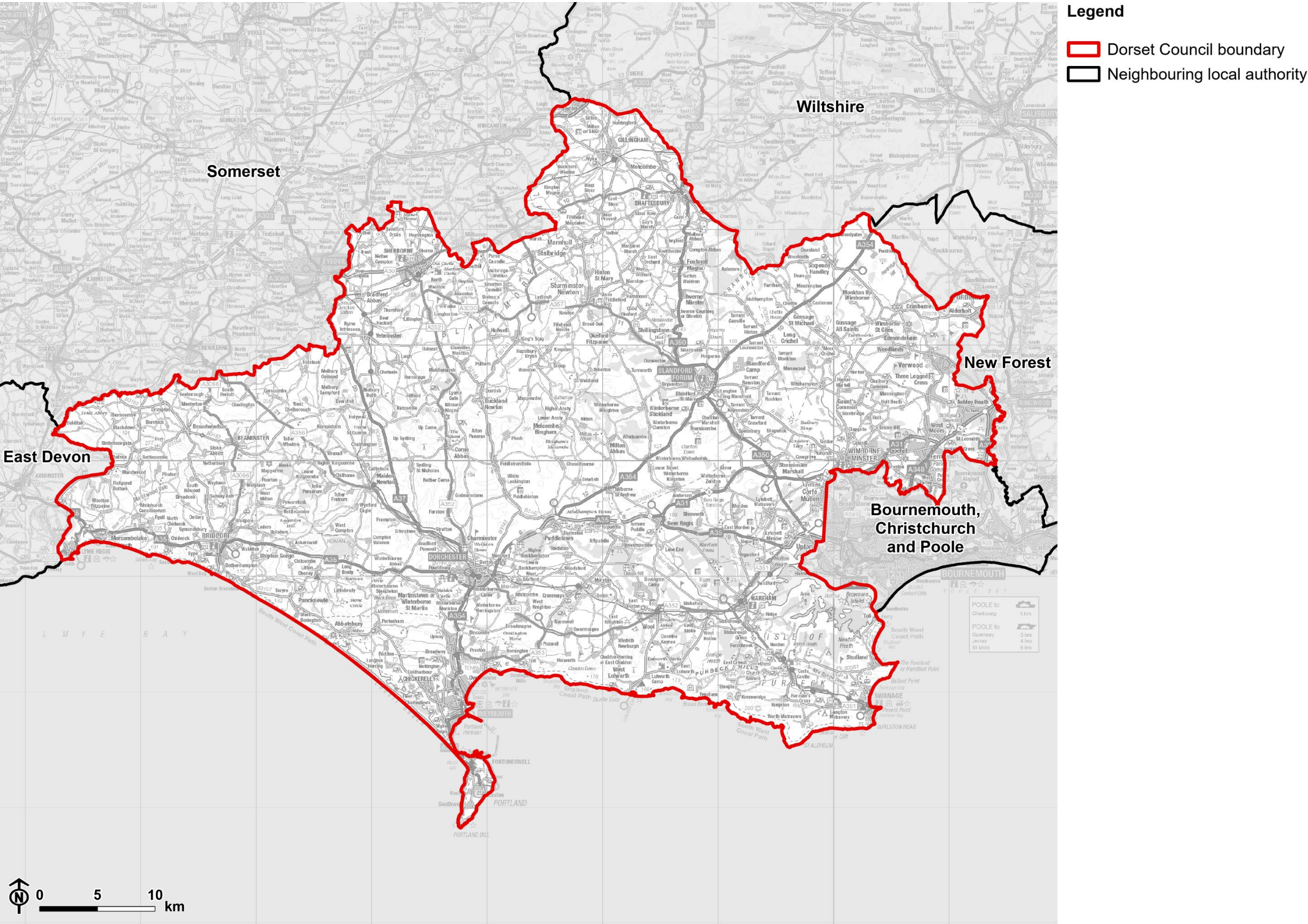
1.11 The Dorset Council Local Plan will cover the entire administrative area of Dorset Council, a unitary council formed on 1st April 2019, bringing together five former districts and boroughs and the majority of the area previously controlled by Dorset Council (Figure 1.1).

1.12 The Dorset Council Local Plan will look ahead until at least 2042 in order to ensure provision for growth for 15 years on adoption.

1.13 Dorset Council published notice of its intention to commence Local Plan preparation on 31st July 2026, with the following timetable:

- Gateway 1: Self Assessment – end November 2026
- Gateway 2: Seek observations and advice from Planning Inspectorate – Summer 2027
- Gateway 3: Seek advice from Planning Inspectorate on whether prescribed requirements have been met – Summer 2028
- Submit plan for Examination – Summer/Autumn 2028
- Adopt Local Plan – February/August 2029.

Figure 1.1: A map showing the Dorset Council Local Plan area, shown within the red line [See reference 1]



Created by LUC - Figure 1.1: Location of Dorset Local Plan Area 09/09/2026
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Likely evolution of the plan area without the Dorset Council Local Plan

1.14 The SEA Regulations require a consideration of “the relevant aspects of the current state of the environment and the likely evolution thereof without implementation of the plan or programme.” This is addressed in detail for each topic in Chapters 2-11 of this Scoping Report. However, it is important to understand how development would be managed if the new Local Plan were not to be progressed. The purpose of the planning system is to contribute to achieving sustainable development and the local plan sets out what that means for the local area. Local Plans set out the locations where development will take place and the policies that will be used to guide decisions on planning applications. They form part of the statutory development plan, meaning that decisions on applications must be made in accordance with them unless material considerations indicate otherwise.

1.15 The Local Plans adopted by the predecessor councils have been carried forward as policies of Dorset Council, and will remain the statutory development plans for their respective areas until they are replaced by a new plan. Therefore, they continue to be the policy framework against which the council will make decisions on planning applications.

1.16 Local Plan policies carry less weight where the plans are more than five years old and where the council is no longer able to provide sufficient land for housing, by being unable to demonstrate that it has the required five-year supply of deliverable sites for housing.

1.17 Considering the current adopted Local Plans in the Dorset Council Local Plan area are more than five years old, the weight that can be attached to their policies is limited. The Purbeck Local Plan was adopted in 2024 and therefore carries full weight as a recently adopted plan.

1.18 Therefore, if a new Local Plan for the Dorset Council area is not taken forward and adopted under the published timetable, the local plans for the entire Dorset Council area would be out of date. Less weight would be given to Local Plan policies in decisions on planning applications, with the national ‘presumption in favour of sustainable development’ applying instead. The council would have a lack of control over development decisions in the Dorset Council area, potentially resulting in unplanned, speculative development coming forward in less sustainable locations. This is likely to result in un-sustainable development, with significant detrimental environmental, social and economic effects in the Dorset Council area.

1.19 A new Local Plan also provides an opportunity to evaluate the focus of the Local Plan and the nature of future development across Dorset, in light of new evidence and changing priorities both nationally and locally. For example, a climate emergency has been declared both by the UK Parliament and by Dorset Council since the adoption of the previous Local Plans. The new Dorset Council Local Plan provides an opportunity to address the climate change issue, and the other issues which have emerged since the adoption of the existing Local Plans. Additionally, the implementation of a new Standard Method for calculating housing need, introduced in the 2026 NPPF, increased the housing needs for Dorset significantly from 1,793 new homes per annum under the old approach, to 2,738 new homes per annum under the new Standard Method. The new Dorset Council Local Plan provides an opportunity to consider new opportunities for meeting the growth needs of Dorset.

Strategic Environment Assessment

1.20 For new Local Plans it is necessary to conduct an environmental assessment in accordance with the requirements of the SEA Directive (European Directive 2001/42/EC), as transposed into law in England by the SEA Regulations [See [reference 2](#)] and which remains in force despite the UK exiting the European Union in January 2020.

1.21 The Levelling-up and Regeneration Act (2023) outlines a number of reforms to the planning system, including the replacement of the current SEA regime with a new requirement for an Environmental Outcomes Report (EOR). Consultation took place in 2023 on the proposals for EORs and the Government published its response in March 2026 along with a roadmap for the introduction of the new system, which is expected to be in place by the end of 2027. The specific requirements will be set out in forthcoming regulations, along with information about transition arrangements; however, at present the requirement for SEA remains as set out in existing legislation. Any changes to the legal framework for carrying out SEA will be addressed as appropriate as the Local Plan is prepared. The potential change to EORs has been considered as far as possible during the preparation of this report, for example the baseline information has been presented in terms of quantifiable indicators where possible. At the time of writing, Government guidance on the new plan-making system continues to refer to the requirement for SEA, noting that "your plan will need to carry out SEA if it meets criteria set out in regulation 5 of The Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes Regulations 2004. We expect that all local plans will need to carry out SEA."

1.22 Local Plans being prepared under the new system are no longer required to be subject to Sustainability Appraisal, as was previously required under the Planning

and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 for Local Plans prepared under the legacy system. Under the new plan-making system, only SEA is legally required to be prepared, although LPAs can still choose to undertake a voluntary SA if they wish. The two processes are very similar; since the implementation in 2004/05 of the SEA Regulations and the Planning & Compulsory Purchase Act (which made SA mandatory) SA and SEA have been undertaken as a single integrated assessment for Local Plans. SEA is slightly narrower in scope than SA, focussing on assessing the potential for 'environmental' effects only. However, the SEA Regulations require topics such as 'population', 'human health' and 'material assets' to be addressed. Due to the cross-cutting nature of these topics, social and economic considerations are still reflected within the SEA where relevant, and the assessment of the Dorset Council Local Plan will continue to undertake an integrated approach, i.e. an 'SEA incorporating SA'.

Habitat Regulations Assessment

1.23 Schedule 2 of the SEA Regulations requires environmental reports to set out the existing environmental problems relevant to the plan including, in particular, those relating to any areas of a particular environmental importance, such as areas designated pursuant to the conservation of wild birds and the Habitats Directive.

1.24 The requirement to undertake HRA of development plans was confirmed by the amendments to the Habitats Regulations published for England and Wales in 2007 [\[See reference 3\]](#); the currently applicable version is the Habitats Regulations 2017, as amended [\[See reference 4\]](#). When preparing the development plan, Dorset Council is therefore required by law to carry out an HRA. The requirement for authorities to comply with the Habitats Regulations when preparing a plan is also noted in the Government's PPG [\[See reference 5\]](#).

1.25 HRA refers to the assessment of the potential effects of a development plan on one or more sites afforded the highest level of protection in the UK: Special Protection Areas (SPAs) and Special Areas of Conservation (SACs). These were classified under European Union (EU) legislation but, since 1 January 2021, are protected in the UK by the Habitats Regulations 2017 (as amended). Although the EU Directives from which the UK's Habitats Regulations originally derived are no longer binding, the Regulations still make reference to the lists of habitats and species that the sites were designated for, which are listed in annexes to the EU Directives:

- SACs are designated for particular habitat types (specified in Annex 1 of the EU Habitats Directive [\[See reference 6\]](#)) and species (Annex II).

- SPAs are classified for rare and vulnerable birds (Annex I of the EU Birds Directive [\[See reference 7\]](#)), and for regularly occurring migratory species not listed in Annex I.

1.26 The term 'European sites' was previously commonly used in HRA to refer to 'Natura 2000' sites [\[See reference 8\]](#) and Ramsar sites (international designated under the Ramsar Convention). However, a Government Policy Paper [\[See reference 9\]](#) on changes to the Habitats Regulations 2017 post-Brexit states that:

- Any references to Natura 2000 in the 2017 Regulations and in guidance now refers to the new 'national site network'.
- The national site network includes existing SACs and SPAs; and new SACs and SPAs designated under these regulations.

1.27 Designated Wetlands of International Importance (known as 'Ramsar sites') do not form part of the national site network. Many Ramsar sites overlap with SACs and SPAs and may be designated for the same or different species and habitats.

1.28 Although Ramsar sites do not form part of the national site network, the Government Policy Paper [\[See reference 10\]](#) confirms that all Ramsar sites remain protected in the same way as SACs and SPAs. In LUC's view and unless the Government provides any guidance to the contrary, potential effects on Ramsar sites should continue to form part of the HRA of plans and projects since the requirement for HRA of plans and projects that might adversely affect Ramsar sites forms an essential part of the protection confirmed by the Government Policy Paper. Furthermore, the NPPF [\[See reference 11\]](#) and PPG [\[See reference 12\]](#) currently still state that competent authorities responsible for carrying out HRA should treat Ramsar sites in the same way as SACs and SPAs.

1.29 The requirement for HRA does not apply to other nationally designated wildlife sites such as Sites of Special Scientific Interest or National Nature Reserves; therefore, for clarity, this report uses the term 'Habitats sites' rather than 'national site network'.

1.30 The overall purpose of the HRA is to conclude whether or not a proposal or policy, or whole development plan would adversely affect the integrity of the site in question. This is judged in terms of the implications of the plan for a site's 'qualifying features' (i.e. those Annex I habitats, Annex II species, and Annex I bird populations for which it has been designated). Significantly, HRA is based on the precautionary principle. Where uncertainty or doubt remains, an adverse effect should be assumed.

1.31 The HRA is being undertaken separately but the findings, once available, will be considered in the SEA where relevant, for example to inform judgements about the likely effects of potential development locations on biodiversity.

National Planning Policy Framework

1.32 The NPPF [See reference 13] is the overarching planning framework which provides national planning policy and principles for the planning system in England. The NPPF was originally published in March 2012 and has since been updated and revised several times, with the most recent version published in August 2026.

1.33 The three overarching objectives of the planning system are set out in the NPPF. These should be pursued in mutually supportive ways so that net gains are achieved across each of the different objectives:

- “an economic objective – to help build a strong, responsive and competitive economy, by ensuring that sufficient land of the right types is available in the right places and at the right time to support growth, innovation and improved productivity; and by identifying and coordinating the provision of infrastructure;
- a social objective – to support strong, vibrant and healthy communities, by ensuring that a sufficient number and range of homes can be provided to meet the needs of present and future generations; and by fostering well-designed, beautiful and safe places, with accessible community facilities, public service infrastructure and open spaces that reflect current and future needs and support communities’ health, social and cultural well-being; and
- an environmental objective – to support efforts to mitigate and adapt to climate change, including moving to a low carbon economy; and to protect and enhance our natural, built and historic environment, including making effective use of land, improving biodiversity, using natural resources prudently, and minimising waste and pollution.”

1.34 The NPPF sets out that Spatial Development Strategies (SDSs) will form part of the development plan for each area, along with the Local Plan. The Wessex SDS will cover the Council areas of Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole, Dorset, Somerset and Wiltshire.

1.35 NPPF Policy PM1: Spatial development strategies sets out the need for spatial development strategies to set a positive vision for future growth and change at a sub-regional scale and provide a clear spatial framework for investment and growth, including for new housing. Their content should be genuinely strategic in nature and

allow for more detailed issues to be considered and addressed through other parts of the development plan.

The new Local Plan must be consistent with the requirements of the NPPF, which states in Policy PM2: Local Plans that 'Local Plans should set out a positive vision and spatial strategy which supports the delivery of the spatial development strategy for their area, and should set out specific proposals for accommodating development needs and conserving and improving the environment at a local level'.

1.36 Policies PM6 – PM13 set out policies relating to how plans should be prepared and address matters including general principles for plan-making, evidence for plan-making, identifying and assessing land for development and maintaining and demonstrating co-operation between plan-making authorities.

1.37 The updated NPPF now includes a suite of procedural and thematic policies, which are separated into policies for plan-making and policies for decision-making. The policies for plan-making must be taken into account in preparing any part of the development plan.

1.38 Separate Planning Practice Guidance (PPG) [\[See reference 14\]](#) provides guidance for how the Government's planning policies for England are expected to be applied. Sitting alongside the NPPF, it provides an online resource that is updated on a regular basis for the benefit of planning practitioners.

1.39 The overarching nature of the NPPF means that its implications for the SEA relate to multiple topics which this report seeks to address. Considering the importance of the NPPF to the English planning system, the relevance of the framework and its implications for the plan-making process and the SEA is considered in more detail below.

Meeting the requirements of the SEA Regulations

1.40 The relevant sections of this Scoping Report that are considered to meet the SEA Regulations' requirements are signposted below (the remainder will be met during subsequent stages of the SEA of the Dorset Council Local Plan). This section will be included in the full SEA Report at each stage of the plan-making process to show how the requirements of the SEA Regulations have been met through the SEA process.

Environmental report

1.41 The SEA Regulations [\[See reference 15\]](#) require the responsible authority to prepare, or secure the preparation of, an 'environmental report', which in this case will comprise the SEA Report. The report shall identify, describe and evaluate the likely significant effects on the environment of the following (requirements in green shaded text and where each requirement is met is provided in bullets below):

An outline of the contents, main objectives of the plan or programme, and relationship with other relevant plans and programmes.

- Covered in Chapters 1-11.

The relevant aspects of the current state of the environment and the likely evolution thereof without implementation of the plan or programme.

- Covered in Chapters 2-11. General note on likely evolution of the plan area without the new Local Plan provided in Chapter 1 above.

The environmental characteristics of areas likely to be significantly affected.

- Covered in Chapters 2-8.

Any existing environmental problems which are relevant to the plan or programme including, in particular, those relating to any areas of a particular environmental importance, such as a European site (within the meaning of regulation 8 of the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017).

- Covered in Chapters 2-11.

The environmental protection objectives, established at international, Community or national level, which are relevant to the plan or programme and the way those objectives and any environmental considerations have been taken into account during its preparation.

- Covered in Chapters 2-11.

The likely significant effects on the environment, including short, medium and long-term effects, permanent and temporary effects, positive and negative effects, and secondary, cumulative and synergistic effects, on issues such as – (a) biodiversity; (b) population; (c) human health; (d) fauna; (e) flora; (f) soil; (g) water; (h) air; (i) climatic factors; (j) material assets; (k) cultural heritage, including architectural and archaeological heritage; (l) landscape; and (m) the interrelationship between these issues.

- Requirement will be met at a later stage in the SEA process.

The measures envisaged to prevent, reduce and as fully as possible offset any significant adverse effects on the environment of implementing the plan or programme.

- Requirement will be met at a later stage in the SEA process.

An outline of the reasons for selecting the alternatives dealt with, and a description of how the assessment was undertaken including any difficulties (such as technical deficiencies or lack of know-how) encountered in compiling the required information.

- Requirement will be met at a later stage in the SEA process.

A description of measures envisaged concerning monitoring in accordance with regulation 17.

- Requirement will be met at a later stage in the SEA process.

A non-technical summary of the information provided under paragraphs 1 to 9 [of Schedule 2 of the SEA Regulations].

- Requirement will be met at a later stage in the SEA process.

The report shall include the information referred to in Schedule 2 to these Regulations as may reasonably be required, taking account of:

- current knowledge and methods of assessment;

- the contents and level of detail in the plan or programme;
- its stage of the plan or programme in the decision-making process; and
- the extent to which certain matters are more appropriately assessed at different levels in that process to avoid duplication of the assessment.
- - Regulation 12(3)

- This Scoping Report and future environmental reports will adhere to this requirement.

In terms of consultation, the SEA Regulations require that:

- When deciding on the scope and level of detail of the information that must be included in the report, the responsible authority shall consult the consultation bodies.
- - Regulation 12(5)

- This Scoping Report is being made available at the same time as the Local Plan Scoping consultation. As required by the SEA Regulations, it will be sent to the statutory bodies (the Environment Agency, Historic England and Natural England) for comment.

Every draft plan or programme for which an environmental report has been prepared in accordance with Regulation 12 and its accompanying environmental report (“the relevant documents”) shall be made available for the purposes of consultation in accordance with the following provisions of this regulation.
[Provisions relate to timing and process for consultation.]

- Regulation 13(1)(2)(3)

- Public consultation on the Local Plan and accompanying SEA Reports will take places as the Local Plan develops. The intended programme and key stages for plan preparation are set out in the Local Plan timetable.

Where a responsible authority, other than the Secretary of State, is of the opinion that a plan or programme for which it is the responsible authority is likely to have significant effects on the environment of a Member State, it shall, as soon as reasonably practicable after forming that opinion:

- notify the Secretary of State of its opinion and of the reasons for it; and

- supply the Secretary of State with a copy of the plan or programme concerned, and of the accompanying environmental report.

- Regulation 14(1)

- Unlikely to be relevant to the Dorset Council Local Plan, as there will be no effects beyond the UK.

1.42 In terms of taking the SEA Report and the results of the consultations into account in decision-making, the SEA Regulations require (relevant extracts of Regulation 16):

As soon as reasonably practicable after the adoption of a plan or programme for which an environmental assessment has been carried out under these Regulations, the responsible authority shall:

- publish the plan or programme, as adopted, its accompanying environmental report and a statement containing the particulars specified in paragraph (4) (“the relevant adoption documents”) on a public website at which the documents may be viewed and downloaded free of charge;
- provide a copy of the relevant adoption documents by email to any person who requests a copy, as soon as reasonably practicable after receipt of that person’s request;
- provide one copy of the relevant adoption documents by post to any person who requests a copy, as soon as reasonably practicable after receipt of that person’s request, unless it is not reasonably practicable to provide a copy by post for reasons connected to the effects of coronavirus, including restrictions on movement;
- make available a telephone number for the public to make enquiries in relation to the relevant adoption documents.

- Regulation 16(1)

- Requirement will be met at a later stage in the SEA process.

As soon as reasonably practicable after the adoption of a plan or programme: (a) the responsible authority shall inform: (i) the consultation bodies; (ii) the persons who, in relation to the plan or programme, were public consultees for the purposes of regulation 13; and (iii) where the responsible authority is not the

Secretary of State, the Secretary of State, that the plan or programme has been adopted, and a statement containing the following particulars:

- how environmental considerations have been integrated into the plan or programme;
- how the environmental report has been taken into account;
- how opinions expressed in response to (i) the invitation referred to in regulation 13(2)(d); (ii) action taken by the responsible authority in accordance with regulation 13(4), have been taken into account;
- how the results of any consultations entered into under regulation 14(4) have been taken into account;
- the reasons for choosing the plan or programme as adopted, in the light of the other reasonable alternatives dealt with; and
- the measures that are to be taken to monitor the significant environmental effects of the implementation of the plan or programme.

- Requirement will be met at a later stage in the SEA process.

1.43 The SEA Regulations also require that the responsible authority shall monitor the significant effects of the implementation of each plan or programme with the purpose of identifying unforeseen adverse effects at an early stage and being unable to undertake appropriate remedial action (Regulation 17(1)). This requirement will be met after adoption of the Local Plan.

Structure of the Scoping Report

1.44 This chapter describes the background to the production of the Dorset Council Local Plan and the requirement to undertake SEA and other assessment processes. The remainder of this Scoping Report is structured around the SEA topics listed in Schedule 2 of the SEA Regulations. Given the cross-cutting nature of some of the SEA topics, including those relating to population, human health, material assets and climatic factors, the Scoping Report draws out the full range of environmental and sustainability issues facing Dorset and the Dorset Council Local Plan's influence on them.

1.45 Each chapter sets out the policy context, baseline, environmental and sustainability issues (including their evolution without the plan) and SEA objectives for each subject area. The subject area chapters are as follows:

- Chapter 2: Biodiversity, flora and fauna;

- Chapter 3: Soil;
- Chapter 4: Water;
- Chapter 5: Air;
- Chapter 6: Climatic factors;
- Chapter 7: Flooding and coastal change;
- Chapter 8: Landscape;
- Chapter 9: Cultural heritage
- Chapter 10: Human health and population;
- Chapter 11: Material assets

1.46 SEA guidance recognises that data gaps will exist but suggests that where baseline information is unavailable or unsatisfactory, authorities should consider how it will affect their assessments and determine how to improve it for use in the assessment of future plans. The collection and analysis of baseline data is regarded as a continual and evolving process, given that information can change or be updated on a regular basis.

1.47 Relevant baseline information will be updated during the SEA process as and when data is published.

1.48 Chapter 12 draws together all the SEA objectives defined at the end of each chapter to present the full SEA framework for the assessment of the Dorset Council Local Plan and its reasonable alternatives, including key assumptions to be used to assess site options. It also describes the next steps to be undertaken in the SEA of the Dorset Council Local Plan.

Chapter 2

Biodiversity, flora and fauna

2.1 This chapter sets out the baseline and policy context for biodiversity, flora and fauna in Dorset. The SEA will consider how the Local Plan can help to protect and enhance biodiversity, as it supports resilient ecosystems and healthy places, while also contributing to climate adaptation, landscape quality, water management and people's physical and mental well-being.

2.2 Biodiversity is a measure of the 'diversity of species' [See reference 16]. It is therefore a term which refers to the variation of life, including both plants ('flora') and animals ('fauna').

2.3 Each species, irrespective of how small and seemingly insignificant, plays a role in maintaining a well-balanced, healthy and functioning ecosystem. This is because species are dependent on one another for survival. The absence of a species, perhaps through extinction or the loss of a local population, can throw an ecosystem out of balance with far reaching consequences upon the habitat and remaining species and the wider environment due to degrading air, soil and water quality and the cycling of nutrients.

2.4 A biologically diverse ecosystem also has widespread social and economic benefits by providing the biological resources for trade (such as wood), agriculture and fisheries, ecotourism and recreation, medicine production and scientific research. These multiple, interlinked benefits are known as Ecosystem Services. Plants and species also have a great cultural and spiritual importance amongst many communities.

2.5 There has been an alarming trend towards a loss in biodiversity in recent history. This decline in biodiversity is largely attributed to human actions, resulting in overexploitation, pollution and land use change. Given the reliance of environmental, social and economic systems upon biodiversity, it is imperative that biodiversity is safeguarded to prevent widespread catastrophic problems.

Key messages from other plans, programmes and objectives

International

2.6 The [United Nations Declaration on Forests and Land Use \(COP26 Declaration\) \(2021\)](#) **[See reference 17]** is an international commitment to halt and reverse forest loss and land degradation by 2030 while delivering sustainable development and promoting an inclusive rural transformation.

2.7 The United Nations developed a series of global development goals which aim to deliver sustainable development in the document titled [Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development \(2015\)](#). **[See reference 18]** One such goal is:

“Protect, restore and promote sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems, sustainably manage forests, combat desertification, and halt and reverse land degradation and halt biodiversity loss.”

2.8 The [European Bird Directive \(2009\)](#) **[See reference 19]** requires the maintenance of all species of naturally occurring birds in the wild state in the European territory at a level which corresponds in particular to ecological, scientific and cultural requirements, while taking account of economic and recreational requirements.

2.9 The **International Convention on Biological Diversity (1992)** is an international commitment to biodiversity conservation through national strategies and action plans.

2.10 The **European Convention on the Conservation of European Wildlife and Natural Habitats (Bern Convention) (1979)** seeks to ensure conservation and protection of wild plant and animal species and their natural habitats, to increase cooperation between contracting parties, and to regulate the exploitation of those species (including migratory species).

2.11 The **International Convention on Wetlands (Ramsar Convention) (1976)** is an international agreement with the aim of conserving and managing the use of wetlands and their resources.

National

2.12 [The UK National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan \(2025\)](#) [See reference 20] sets out how the four countries of the UK will work together to address biodiversity. The document reflects shared ambition to protect and restore nature and confirms the UK's pledge to meet all 23 targets of the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework within its own borders. The document outlines four long-term global goals:

- Protect and restore;
- Prosper with nature;
- Share benefits fairly; and
- Invest and collaborate.

The [NPPF \(2026\)](#) sets out the approach that Local Plans should have in relation to biodiversity and the landscape, particularly through plan-making policy N1: Improving the natural environment, which states that plans should “set out the hierarchy of international, national and locally designated sites and areas of importance for their landscape, geodiversity or biodiversity in the plan area, and identify other features which require particular consideration in managing development due to their environmental value such as chalk streams.” Plans should also identify opportunities for the “conservation, enhancement and recovery of landscapes, sensitive waterbodies, habitats and priority or threatened species, including through habitat restoration, the use of nature-based solutions, and the creation and strengthening of ecological networks that are more resilient to current and future pressures (including opportunities which exist at a catchment or landscape scale across plan boundaries)” [See reference 21].

2.13 The Local Plan, through its review of the spatial strategy, should seek to maximise any opportunities arising for local economies, communities and health as well as biodiversity. This should be inclusive of approaches which are supportive of enhancing the connectivity of green infrastructure and promoting the achievement of biodiversity net gain. The SEA process should support the identification and maximisation of potential benefits through the consideration of alternatives and assessment of both negative and positive significant effects.

2.14 The [Environmental Improvement Plan 2025](#) [See reference 22] seeks to restore nature, improve environmental quality and security, build a circular economy and make nature easier for everyone to access. The plan contains ten goals and provides a clear plan for how we will deliver them:

- Goal 1: Restored nature – We will create a network of bigger, better and more resilient habitats to help nature thrive.
- Goal 2: Air – We will achieve clean air.
- Goal 3: Water – We will ensure English waters are clean, resilient and plentiful.
- Goal 4: Chemicals and pesticides – We will minimise environmental risks from chemicals and pesticides.
- Goal 5: Waste – We will minimise waste by designing it out of the system, reusing and recycling materials wherever possible.
- Goal 6: Resources – We will ensure that natural resources are produced, managed and consumed sustainably.
- Goal 7: Climate change – We will reduce greenhouse gas emissions to accelerate to net zero and work to prepare the natural environment for the effects of climate change.
- Goal 8: Reducing environmental hazards – We will reduce the risk of harm to people, the environment and the economy from natural hazards.
- Goal 9: Biosecurity – We will enhance biosecurity to protect our natural environment and boost the health and resilience of plants, animals, ecosystems and people.
- Goal 10: Access to nature – We will ensure inclusive access to nature and protect nature's beauty and heritage.

2.15 [The 25 Year Environment Plan: progress reports \(2023\)](#) [See reference 23] sets out the progress made in improving the environment through the 25 Year Plan and the indicator framework, which contains 66 indicators arranged into 10 broad themes.

2.16 [Working with nature \(2022\)](#) [See reference 24] discusses the importance of nature in providing ecosystem services and presents recent and historical trends in biodiversity. It outlines some of the main pressures affecting England's habitats, wildlife and ecosystems: land use; climate change; pollution; invasive non-native species; and hydrological change.

2.17 [Defra, Establishing the Best Available Techniques for the UK \(UK BAT\) \(2022\)](#) [See reference 25] sets out a new framework that aims to improve industrial emissions and protect the environment through the introduction of a UK BAT regime. It aims to set up a new structure of governance with a new independent body in the form of Standards Council and the Regulators Group, consisting of government officials and expert regulators from all UK nations. It aims to also establish a new UK

Air Quality Governance Group to oversee the work of the Standards Council and the delivery of the requirements under this new framework. It is anticipated that the BATC for the first four industry sectors will be published in the second half of 2023.

2.18 [The Environment Act 2021](#) [See reference 26] sets statutory targets for the recovery of the natural world in four priority areas: air quality, biodiversity, water, and resource efficiency and waste reduction. Biodiversity elements in the Act include:

- Strengthened biodiversity duty. Both onsite and offsite enhancements must be maintained for at least 30 years after completion of a development.
- Biodiversity net gain to ensure developments deliver at least 10% increase in biodiversity
- Local Nature Recovery Strategies to support a Nature Recovery Network.
- Duty upon Local Authorities to consult on street tree felling.
- Strengthen woodland protection enforcement measures.
- Conservation Covenants.
- Protected Site Strategies and Species Conservation Strategies to support the design and delivery of strategic approaches to deliver better outcomes for nature.
- Prohibit larger UK businesses from using commodities associated with wide-scale deforestation.
- Requires regulated businesses to establish a system of due diligence for each regulated commodity used in their supply chain, requires regulated businesses to report on their due diligence, introduces a due diligence enforcement system.

2.19 [The National Chalk Streams Strategy \(2021\)](#) [See reference 27] was built around the “trinity of ecological health”: water quantity, water quality and habitat quality and included 30+ recommendations to Defra, the Environment Agency, Natural England, the water companies, NGOs and stakeholders.

2.20 [The Climate Change Adaptation Manual \(2020\)](#) [See reference 28] supports practical and pragmatic decision-making relating to climate change adaptation. The manual brings together recent science, experience and case studies to be used by managers of nature reserves and other protected sites, conservation and land management advisors, and environmental consultants.

2.21 The Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017 [See reference 29], as amended by [the Conservation of Habitats and Species \(Amendment\) \(EU Exit\) Regulations 2019](#) [See reference 30] protects biodiversity through the

conservation of natural habitats and species of wild fauna and flora, including birds. The Regulations lay down rules for the protection, management and exploitation of such habitats and species, including how adverse effects on such habitats and species should be avoided, minimised and reported.

2.22 [A Green Future: Our 25 Year Plan to Improve the Environment \(2018\)](#) [See [reference 31](#)], also known as the 25 Year Environment Plan, sets out the UK government action to help the natural world regain and retain good health. The plan sets a series of goals for improving the environment within a generation and leaving it in a better state than we found it, and includes the following objectives and actions relating to biodiversity, flora and fauna:

“We will achieve a growing and resilient network of land, water and sea that is richer in plants and wildlife”.

- At sea, we will do this by:
 - reversing the loss of marine biodiversity and, where practicable, restoring it;
 - increasing the proportion of protected and well-managed seas, and better managing existing protected sites;
 - making sure populations of key species are sustainable with appropriate age structures;
 - ensuring seafloor habitats are productive and sufficiently extensive to support healthy, sustainable ecosystems.
- On land and in freshwaters, we will do this by:
 - restoring 75% of our one million hectares of terrestrial and freshwater protected sites to favourable condition, securing their wildlife value for the long term;
 - creating or restoring 500,000 hectares of wildlife-rich habitat outside the protected site network, focusing on priority habitats as part of a wider set of land management changes providing extensive benefits;
 - taking action to recover threatened, iconic or economically important species of animals, plants and fungi, and where possible to prevent human induced extinction or loss of known threatened species in England and the Overseas Territories; and
 - increasing woodland in England in line with our aspiration of 12% cover by 2060: this would involve planting 180,000 hectares by end of 2042.

“We will enhance biosecurity to protect our wildlife and livestock, and boost the resilience of plants and trees”.

- We will do this by:
 - managing and reducing the impact of existing plant and animal diseases; lowering the risk of new ones and tackling invasive non-native species;
 - reaching the detailed goals to be set out in the Tree Health Resilience Plan of 2018;
 - ensuring strong biosecurity protection at our borders, drawing on the opportunities leaving the EU provides; and
 - working with industry to reduce the impact of endemic disease.

2.23 [The Environmental Damage \(Prevention and Remediation\) Regulations 2015](#)

[See reference 32]oblige those who create environmental damage, whether by water pollution, adversely affecting protected species or sites of special scientific interest (SSSIs), or by land pollution that causes risks to human health, to not only cease the damage, but also to implement a wide variety of remedial measures to restore affected areas.

2.24 [The Biodiversity offsetting in England Green Paper \(2013\)](#) **[See reference 33]**

sets out a framework for offsetting. Biodiversity offsets are conservation activities designed to compensate for residual losses.

2.25 [The Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act \(2006\)](#) **[See reference 34]**

places a duty on public bodies to conserve biodiversity.

2.26 [The Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 \(as amended\)](#) **[See reference 35]** was enacted primarily to implement the Birds Directive and Bern Convention in Great Britain. The Act received royal assent on 30 October 1981 and was brought into force in incremental steps. It is supplemented by the Wildlife and Countryside (Service of Notices) Act 1985, which relates to notices served under the 1981 Act. The act contains four parts and 17 schedules, which cover:

- Part 1: Wildlife (includes protection of birds, animals and plants; and measures to prevent the establishment of non-native species which may be detrimental to native wildlife).
- Part 2: Nature conservation, the countryside and National Parks (including the designation of protected areas).
- Part 3: Public rights of way.

- Part 4: Miscellaneous provisions of the Act.

Local

2.27 The [Dorset Local Nature Recovery Strategy \(2025\)](#) [See reference 36] provides a 10-year spatial framework for nature recovery across Dorset. It identifies priorities, activities and a local habitat map to guide nature recovery, supporting the '30by30' target (30% of land and sea for nature by 2030) and helping to inform biodiversity enhancement, climate resilience and sustainable land-use decisions.

2.28 Dorset Council's [Natural Environment, Climate and Ecology Strategy 2023 to 25 \(refresh\) \(2025\)](#) [See reference 37] aims to create a carbon neutral, nature positive, and resilient Dorset through a clean, green, and fair transition that supports prosperous, stronger, and healthier communities. It focuses on three main challenges: reducing greenhouse gas emissions to address climate change, protecting and enhancing ecosystems to reverse biodiversity loss, and adapting to unavoidable environmental impacts to build resilience. The strategy has four broad outcomes it aims to achieve:

- Net Zero Council 2040 and Net Zero Dorset 2050: Net zero emissions from power, heat, transport, construction, food, consumables and waste;
- Nature Positive Dorset 2030: At least 30% of our land, rivers and seas and nature-positive by 2030;
- Prosperity through green growth: Green jobs, skills and investment for low carbon and nature sectors; and
- Stronger, healthier communities: Healthier, cheaper to run homes and safer more resilient communities.

2.29 [The Dorset Local Nature Partnership's Vision and Strategy \(2023\)](#) [See reference 38] sets out the following strategic priorities for the partnership, which include the following strategic pillars relating to biodiversity:

- Natural capital – increasing investment: Dorset has some exceptional natural assets which already underpin the economic and social wellbeing of the county, yet it is still declining in quality and quantity and needs greater investment. We will facilitate funding and lobby for more;
- Natural economy– adding value: A healthy environment is a pre-requisite for a healthy economy globally and locally, it offers opportunities for sustainable economic resilience which does not erode our natural capital. We will support

the development of nature-based economic schemes and maximise green finance opportunities;

- **Naturally healthy** – developing Dorset’s ‘natural health service’: Working with the healthcare system, providers, and land managers, we will aid collaboration to improve access to and connection with nature, build green infrastructure and support better information on how to use the natural world to live better and reduce inequalities.
- **Natural resilience** – improving environmental and community resilience: In the light of a challenging future, and the impact on health, we will work collaboratively to improve both resilience against and adaption to climate change to enable a sustainable future. We will support local schemes to improve diets and reduce food waste, sensitive farming practices and facilitate greater engagement with the soil that sustains us all.
- **Natural understanding** – improving engagement in Dorset’s environment: Dorset residents and visitors already value their environment. We will support and develop greater understanding of the impacts we have on the terrestrial and marine environment to ensure good stewardship now and in the future.
- **Naturally influence** – embedding natural value in policy and decision-making: A founding principle of all LNPs is that we will promote the value of the natural environment in decisions and inform local and national policy making.

2.30 [The Poole Harbour and Dorset Stour Catchment Strategy 2022 – 2027 \(2022\)](#)

[See reference 39] sets out the high level priorities and ambition of the Dorset Stour Catchment Partnerships for the next five years to 2027. The vision for the partnerships is that:

“Dorset’s river catchments are sustainably healthy, resilient and safe for people and wildlife.”

2.31 The Strategy cites the following strategic priorities for Dorset’s catchments:

- **Upper catchments:** Focus on reducing nutrient and sediment runoff from agriculture to improve water quality, enhance hydrological connectivity, and reduce flood risk.
- **Middle catchments:** Prioritise restoring natural river processes and protecting river corridors, which also helps reduce pollution and improve habitats.

- **Lower catchments:** Engage local communities to understand their connection with rivers and estuaries, promote awareness of healthy river systems, and build support for ongoing efforts.
- **Across all catchments:** Make habitat restoration a central theme, especially to boost habitat connectivity and combat invasive species.
- **Partnership efforts:** Strengthen the evidence base through monitoring, data sharing, and exploration of new techniques like natural capital approaches.

2.32 [The Interim Strategy for Mitigating the Effects of Recreational Pressure on the Chesil Beach and the Fleet SAC, SPA and Ramsar](#) [See reference 40], adopted in 2020, seeks to mitigate the impact of new development from recreational activities by taking financial contributions from development and using this to provide mitigation measures, including:

- Little Tern wardening, fencing, monitoring, volunteer co-ordination
- Visitor Centre presence for dissuading inappropriate activities and source of information for users
- Chesil Beach car park spaces and charges review
- expansion of Dorset Dogs
- interpretation - leaflets, signage (land and water), smartphone app
- infrastructure projects
- seasonal by-laws to reinforce encouragement of positive behaviour
- provision of alternative strategic green space
- policy based major development (10 dwellings or equivalent) within 400m of the designated site to provide bespoke infrastructure mitigation measures
- review of water access points
- use of existing watercraft permit system
- provision of bins for litter and dog waste
- engagement with user groups and agree codes of conduct where appropriate.

2.33 [The Poole Harbour Recreation Supplementary Planning Document \(2020\)](#), [See reference 41] adopted in 2020, seeks to mitigate the impact of new development from recreational activities by taking financial contributions from development and using this to provide mitigation measures, including:

- Strategic Access Management and Monitoring (SAMMS): further surveys and monitoring, wardens/rangers, awareness raising projects, and developing an Access Management Plan; and
- Poole Harbour Infrastructure Projects (PHIP): Projects to manage visitor access and minimise disturbance, including for example the provision of alternative access around the Poole Harbour shoreline. Could potentially include Suitable Alternative Natural Greenspace (SANG).

2.34 [The Dorset Heathlands Planning Framework 2015-2020 \(2015\)](#) [See reference 42] supplementary planning document retains as its guiding principle that there is no net increase in urban pressures on internationally important heathland as a result of additional development, and intends to protect the integrity of the Dorset Heaths by:

- Improving the quality of habitat;
- Reducing the effects of fragmentation and isolation by linking and securing sympathetic land use; and
- Implementing heathland avoidance elements of the green infrastructure.

2.35 The [Dorset Heathlands Interim Air Quality Strategy \(2020\)](#) [See reference 43] is an addendum to the Dorset Heathlands Planning Framework, and seeks to address the adverse effect of airborne nitrogen upon the Dorset Heathlands designated sites by contributing to the achievement of the conservation objectives for air quality. In doing so it will facilitate the delivery of planned development. The strategy stipulates that it be developed and formalised as policy in the BCP Council Local Plan and Dorset Council Local Plan to ensure that new development does not have an adverse effect upon heathland. It states that the Local Plans could include policies to address:

- The siting of new development by focussing growth in the urban area where there is better access to facilities and services and thereby minimising the need for additional car trips past heathland sites;
- The siting and design of new agricultural buildings that create pollutants, e.g. stocking sheds, slurry pits, etc.;
- The change of use of agricultural land near heathland to lower nitrogen inputs;
- Ensuring that any major development proposals in the countryside near heathland include measures to reduce impacts elsewhere in the wider land ownership;

- Look to identify multiple use benefits in the siting of Heathland Infrastructure Projects (HIPs), Poole Harbour Infrastructure Projects (PHIPs) and nitrogen offsetting projects on sites adjacent to heathland; and
- Help implement the outcomes of the government's Nitrogen Futures project.

2.36 [The Dorset National Landscape Management Plan 2026 – 2031 \(2026\)](#) [See reference 44] has the following objectives (A1 Conserving and Enhancing Nature) relating to biodiversity:

- Expand and connect habitats across the landscape, restoring grasslands, woodlands, hedgerows, heathlands, wetlands and rivers to support species movement and ecosystem resilience, as set out in the Dorset Local Nature Recovery Strategy and Dorset National Landscape Nature Recovery Plan and as required for the Protected Landscape Target and Outcome Framework.
- Manage land and sea at a scale, reinstating natural processes and building ecological dynamism across landscapes managed for nature, to enhance resilience and support long term nature recovery.
- Implement nature recovery initiatives aligned with the Dorset Local Nature Recovery Strategy and Dorset National Landscape Nature Recovery Plan.
- Increase the area and quality of sites that meet qualifying criteria for '30 by 30', ensuring effective long-term management in line with the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework.
- Support management of non-native invasive species.
- Support citizen science and community monitoring to improve biodiversity data for adaptive management.

[The Cranborne Chase Partnership Plan 2019 – 2024 \(2019\)](#) [See reference 45] also contains objectives relating to biodiversity:

- All pests, pathogens, and invasive non-native species causing harm in the AONB (now called the National Landscape) are being effectively addressed; and
- Coherent and resilient ecological networks are established and maintained across the AONB.

2.37 [The River Avon Special Area of Conservation Nutrient Management Plan for Phosphorus \(2015\)](#) [See reference 46] intends to help reduce and manage phosphorus levels in the River Avon Special Area of Conservation (SAC) by ensuring that new development in the River Avon catchment does not add to the phosphorus load in the river. This nutrient management plan has two primary objectives:

- To achieve compliance with the requirements of the Habitats Directive (see paragraph 2.1.5), in particular:
- To establish the necessary conservation measures and implement appropriate steps to avoid deterioration within the River Avon SAC which might result from nutrient loading;
- To achieve the ambition reduction targets in the short term and the conservation objectives targets for phosphorus in the longer term to support the achievement of Favourable Conservation Status; and
- To facilitate development within the catchment in a manner which is compliant with the requirements of the Habitats Regulations, whilst securing that existing consented activities do not adversely affect the integrity of the River Avon SAC.
- To achieve compliance with the Water Framework Directive through delivery of the 'protected area' standards. This includes addressing nutrient enrichment issues such as phosphates which affect sensitive habitats, notably the Somerset Levels and Moors Ramsar. This aligns with the [Somerset Levels Phosphate Strategy](#) [See reference 47], which sets out measures to mitigate and reduce phosphorus inputs to support the ecological integrity of these internationally and nationally protected wetland sites.

2.38 [The Poole Harbour Catchment Initiative Catchment Plan \(update\) \(2014\)](#) [See reference 48] aims to protect and restore the groundwater, rivers and Poole Harbour by delivering the following vision relating to biodiversity:

“Improvements to biodiversity habitats both in the form of naturally functioning rivers, floodplains and wetlands and appropriately located woodland and low-input grassland”

2.39 [The South East Dorset Green Infrastructure Strategy \(2011\)](#) [See reference 49] provides a non-statutory framework for green infrastructure across South East Dorset. It sets out a vision for the area which seeks to co-ordinate the planning for, and investment in, parks, open spaces, wildlife corridors, street trees, and other green spaces.

2.40 [The Dorset Biodiversity Strategy \(Mid Term review\) \(2010\)](#) [See reference 50] sets the priorities for Dorset's major biodiversity issues up until 2015, and includes the following guiding principles:

- Conserve existing biodiversity;
- Conserve Protected Areas and other high quality habitats;

- Conserve range and ecological variability of habitats and species;
- Conserve and enhance local variation within sites and habitats;
- Make space for the natural development of rivers and coasts;
- Establish ecological networks through habitat protection, restoration and creation;
- Respond to changing conservation priorities.

Baseline information

2.41 Dorset is home to an incredibly diverse range of wildlife habitats and species, some of which are of exceptional ecological importance.

2.42 The Dorset Council Local Plan area includes large areas of important heathland, mixed deciduous woodland and calcareous grassland habitats, as well as coastal and marine habitats such as floodplain grazing marsh, coastal saltmarsh and reedbeds. These are listed as ‘priority habitats’ in the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006 and provide the focus of wildlife conservation in the Government’s 25 year Environment Plan (Table 2.1).

Table 2.1: Extent of priority habitats within the Dorset Council Local Plan area
[See reference 51]

Priority Habitat	Area (ha)
Lowland heathland	4,673
Lowland mixed deciduous woodland	4,283
Lowland calcareous grassland	3,286
Lowland fens	689
Lowland meadows	668
Maritime cliff and slope	670
Wood-pasture and parkland	590
Lowland dry acid grassland	565
Wet woodland	553
Saline Lagoons	511
Purple moor grass and rush pastures	499
Coastal and floodplain grazing marsh	460
Coastal saltmarsh	376

Priority Habitat	Area (ha)
Reedbeds	272
Coastal vegetated shingle	100
Coastal sand dunes	90

2.43 The ecological designations within the plan area include:

- Habitats sites: Habitats sites are strictly protected sites and include Special Areas of Conservation (SAC) and Special Protection Areas (SPA), which are designated under the habitats directive [\[See reference 52\]](#) and birds directive [\[See reference 53\]](#), respectively. Ramsar sites, which are wetlands of international importance designated under the Ramsar Convention [\[See reference 54\]](#), have similar status to SPAs and SACs.
- National sites: Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI), National Nature Reserves and Local Nature Reserves are all designated on a national level.
- Local sites: Sites of Nature Conservation Interest (SNCI).

2.44 The plan area occupies approximately 252,100ha, of which approximately 6.1% is occupied by international sites, approximately 8.5% by national sites, and approximately 5.3% by local sites (Table 2.2). However, there is some overlap between the wildlife designations, for example all international sites also have Sites of Special Scientific Interest status.

Table 2.2: A table showing the coverage of wildlife designations within the Dorset Council Local Plan area [\[See reference 55\]](#)

Designation	Designation	Area (ha)
Habitats sites	Special Area of Conservation	11,681
Habitats sites	Special Conservation Area	11,022
Habitats sites	Ramsar	9,121
Habitats sites	Total (Excluding overlap between the International designations)	15,488
National sites	Site of Special Scientific Interest	19,048
National sites	National Nature Reserve	5,557
National sites	Local Nature Reserve	174

Designation	Designation	Area (ha)
National sites	Total	24,779
Local sites	Site of Nature Conservation Interest	11,809
Local sites	Total	13,258

2.45 At the end of 2024, the Dorset Wildlife Trust acquired three new nature reserves totalling 370 hectares of land. These nature reserves were acquired by the support of various bodies and schemes, including Natural England's National Nature Reserves Fund and nutrient neutrality scheme. These nature reserves comprise of:

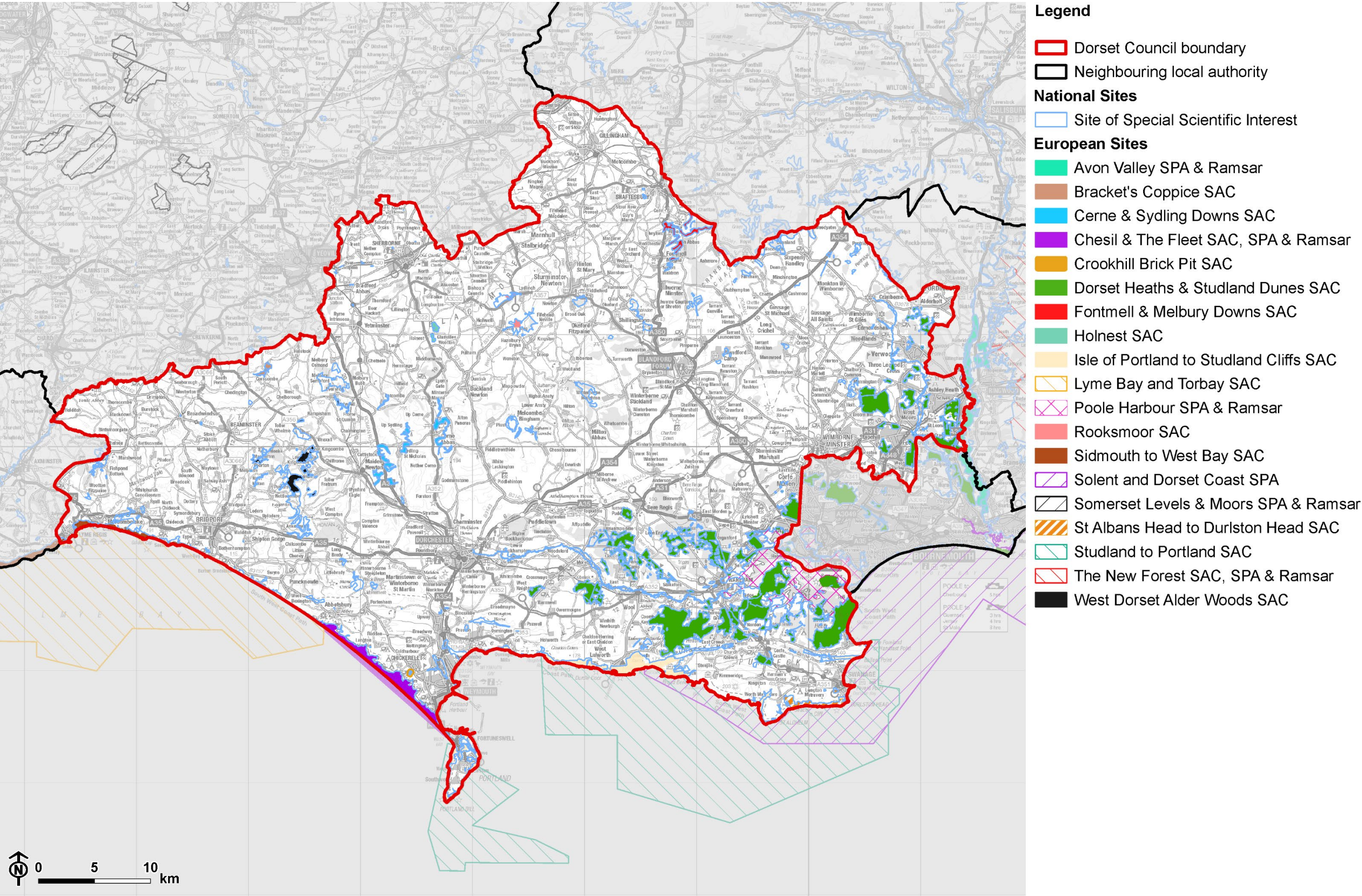
- **Lyscombe Nature Reserve** – A 335 hectare site located north-east of Dorchester. Lyscombe already holds a number of prestigious designations, including a 50-hectare Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI), a Site of Nature Conservation Interest (SNCI) and several Scheduled Monuments, including the unique Lyscombe Chapel. The management plan is to continue with traditional management techniques to ensure wildlife continues to thrive in the SSSI, to restore natural processes across the reserve and to open up more access for people to enjoy this stunning landscape.
- **West Holme** – A 22 hectare site near West Holme, which is planned to be less intensively managed land, and bring back wetland, wood pasture and woodland through natural regeneration. The land lies within a nature recovery network close to the River Frome.
- **New land at Kingcombe Meadows** – 13 hectares of land adjacent to Kingcombe National Nature Reserve, comprising of lowland meadows.

2.46 The international sites within the plan area occupy large areas of the coast. These include Sidmouth to West Bay SAC in the west, through Chesil and Fleet SAC, SPA and Ramsar, and Isle of Portland to Studland Cliffs SAC and St Albans Head to Durlleston Head SAC. The wider Isle of Portland to Studland Cliffs SAC forms a single, continuous stretch of cliffed coastline spanning roughly 40km of South Dorset. The Dorset heathlands stretch from Avon Valley in the east to Dorchester and Warmwell in the west, and south across the Isle of Purbeck, and are protected by multiple national and international conservation designations including SSSI, SPA, and SAC. The offshore marine areas off the coast of Dorset include the South Dorset Marine Conservation Zone, which is located approximately 17.5km south of St Alban's Head, to the south-east of Swanage. Additional marine habitats immediately offshore include the Studland to Portland SAC, which contains numerous areas of reef in many forms, supporting a large amount of geological variety and biological diversity, and the Solent and Dorset Coast SAC, which encompasses a major estuarine system on the south coast of England with four coastal plain estuaries.

2.47 Monitoring of the condition of the wildlife designations within the Dorset Council Local Plan area has indicated that the majority (55%) of land occupied by the Site of Special Scientific Interest designation in the plan area is in unfavourable condition **[See reference 56]**.

2.48 However, records indicate an improvement in the management of local wildlife designations, with approximately 67.5% of designations in the Dorset Council Local Plan area under positive conservation management in 2019, marking a 20% increase from 2009, when 47.2% of sites were managed positively **[See reference 57]**.

Figure 2.1: The location and extent of international and national wildlife designations in the Dorset Council Local Plan area [See reference 58]



Environmental issues relating to designated sites

2.49 The SEA Directive requires particular consideration be given to the environmental problems affecting sites which have been designated under the Birds and Habitats Directives. Below is a summary of the sustainability issues of relevance. However, the Habitats Regulations Assessment will consider the impacts on European sites in more detail.

2.50 Approximately 15,488ha of the Dorset Council Local Plan area, which represents 6.1% of the plan area, is designated as SPA, SAC or Ramsar.

2.51 The key environmental problems affecting Habitats Sites which are relevant to the Dorset Council Local Plan include:

- Water quality
 - Elevated concentrations of phosphorus affecting the River Avon SAC and River Axe SAC, and the Somerset Levels and Moors Ramsar;
 - Elevated concentrations of nitrogen affecting the Poole Harbour SPA and Ramsar;
 - Elevated concentrations of nitrogen and phosphorus affecting the Chesil and the Fleet SAC, SPA and Ramsar.
- Recreational pressure
 - Affecting the Poole Harbour SPA and Ramsar, Fontmell and Melbury Downs SAC and Cerne and Sydling Downs SAC, Dorset Heaths SAC, Dorset Heathlands SPA and Ramsar, as well as the Chesil and the Fleet SAC, SPA and Ramsar;
- Air quality
 - Issues affecting the Poole Harbour SPA and Ramsar, Dorset Heaths SAC and Dorset Heathlands SPA and Ramsar, Fontmell & Melbury Downs SAC and Cerne and Sydling Downs SAC, and Chesil and the Fleet SPA.

2.52 These impacts are considered in the following paragraphs.

River Avon SAC

2.53 The Avon Valley has a greater range of habitats and a more diverse range of flora and fauna than any other chalk river in Britain [\[See reference 59\]](#).

2.54 The River Avon is a large, lowland river system that includes sections running through chalk and clay. It supports important populations plant, fish and invertebrate species, and is a designated Special Area of Conservation (SAC) under the Habitats Directive. The lower reaches of the River Avon SAC lie within the Avon Valley Special Protection Area (SPA) which is classified due to the population of over wintering bird species of European importance which inhabit the site. In addition, the areas of the Avon Valley downstream of Fordingbridge include the Avon Valley Ramsar site, a wetland area of international importance.

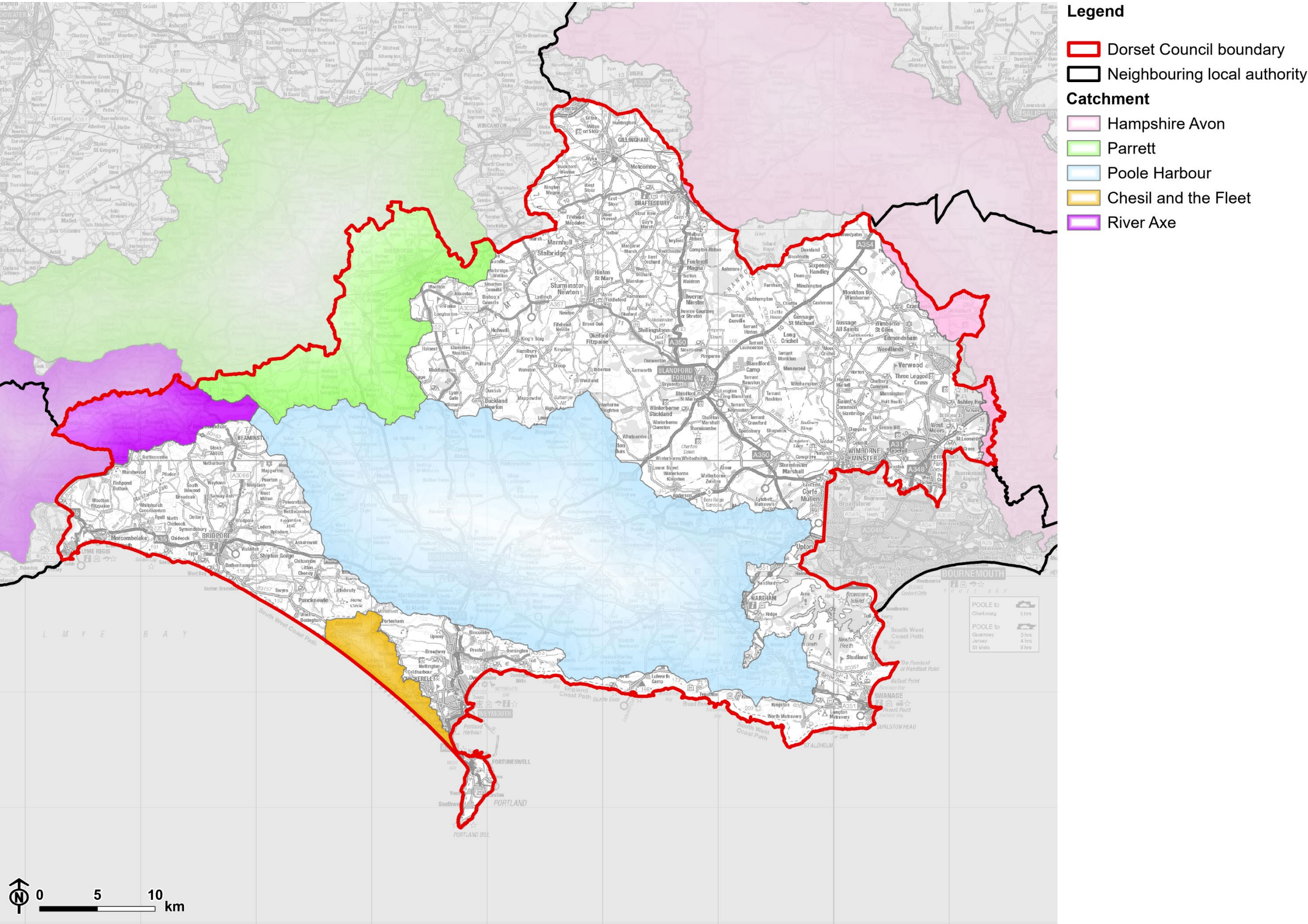
2.55 Studies have shown that elevated concentrations of phosphates in freshwater systems results in increased plant growth, algal blooms and an accumulation in organic matter all of which contribute to a decrease in oxygen availability and a degradation in water quality. This effect, known as eutrophication, can result in catastrophic ecological impacts.

2.56 Only 10% of [Dorset's rivers are in favourable ecological condition](#) [See [reference 60](#)]. The Hampshire Avon failed to achieve Good Ecological or Groundwater Chemical Status under the [Water Framework Directive in 2014 and 2015, and 2019](#) [See [reference 61](#)]. This may be at least partly attributed to elevated levels of phosphates, the main sources of which are fertiliser from farming activities, fish farms and cress beds, wastewater effluent from residential properties and industrial development, and a natural contribution from the Upper Greensand underlying geology.

2.57 Wessex Water strips the vast majority of phosphate from sewage at Sewage Treatment Works in accordance with Environment Agency permit conditions before it is discharged to the river. However, despite this, elevated concentrations of phosphate are making a significant contribution to overall phosphate concentrations in the River Avon, resulting in impacts upon the River Avon and Avon Valley Habitats sites. Wessex Water has pledged to spend approximately £900 million between 2025 and 2030 to reduce nutrient levels (including phosphorus) in their treated wastewater before it is released into [waterways](#). [See [reference 62](#)]

2.58 Sections of the eastern boundary of the Dorset Council Local Plan area are within the hydrological catchment of the Hampshire Avon (Figure 2.2). New development within the part of Hampshire Avon's hydrological catchment which lies within the Dorset Council Local Plan area may result in additional inputs of phosphate into the Hampshire Avon Habitats site, affecting the integrity of the River Avon and Avon Catchment Habitats sites.

Figure 2.2: A map showing the extent of the River Avon, River Axe, Chesil and the Fleet, and River Parrett (Somerset Levels) and Poole Harbour catchments [See reference 63]



Created by LUC - Figure 2.2: The location and extent of hydrological catchments 08/09/2026
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Poole Harbour SPA and Ramsar

2.59 Poole Harbour is a natural harbour and an outstanding natural feature on the south coast of England. Poole Harbour is of great nature conservation importance, as a wetland habitat and for birds and as a wetland habitat.

2.60 Poole Harbour is being affected by both elevated concentrations of nutrients (nitrogen) entering the harbour and by recreational pressure.

2.61 Scientific evidence suggests that high concentrations of nitrogen in the harbour are encouraging the growth of widespread algal mats through the process of eutrophication. These mats restrict the availability of invertebrates, which are an important food source for wading birds and affect other important features and processes within the harbour. The extent of the algal mats has increased since the 1960s, expanding from Holes Bay to become widespread across the harbour.

2.62 The majority (~85%) of nitrogen entering Poole Harbour from land sources is generated by agriculture within the Poole Harbour catchment which occupies an area of 820km² and comprise the rivers and streams which drain into Poole Harbour. However, a proportion (~15%) of the nitrogen entering Poole Harbour is from human sewage discharged within the Poole Harbour catchment, since the Sewage Treatment Works remove only part of the nitrogen from human waste.

2.63 In response to this problem, the local authorities which occupy the Poole Harbour Catchment developed a supplementary planning document titled 'Nitrogen Reduction in Poole Harbour (2017)'. However, following the publication of Natural England's advice concerning the need for nutrient neutrality within the Poole Harbour catchment in 2022, and the subsequent stricter wastewater standards enacted by the Levelling Up Act 2023, the supplementary planning document was revoked in September 2024. While there is no longer a need for development to demonstrate phosphorous neutrality as nutrient pollution standards will bring levels of this nutrient below a threshold level, nitrogen mitigation remains mandatory for planning applications approved after 31st July 2024. Dorset Council secured £4.63m from the government's £57m Local Nutrient Mitigation Fund to support mitigation in the Poole Harbour Catchment, which can include on-site measures, third-party schemes, or council-led projects.

2.64 Some recreational activities (including dog walking, cycling and water sports) around Poole Harbour are creating disturbance to wading birds and adversely affecting the estuarine habitat.

2.65 Survey studies show that local people visiting the harbour for recreational purposes tend to derive from a wide catchment of areas around Poole. It is thought that the draw is due to the uniqueness of the harbour which cannot be replaced, nor is there any comparable area in the rest of Poole for certain recreational activities such as watersports.

2.66 There is however, clearly a link between proximity to the harbour and frequency of visits. In the plan area, proximity to the harbour is shown to be more significant as the visitor survey studies show that most of the local people who visit the harbour tend to live in the towns and villages which are close to the A35 and A351, such as Swanage, Corfe Castle, Stoborough, Wareham, Lytchett Matravers and Upton.

2.67 Further residential development in those areas surrounding the harbour would result in an increase in population around the harbour, and would be likely to result in an adverse effect on the Poole Harbour Habitats site.

2.68 The Poole Harbour Recreation Supplementary Planning Document (2020) sets out the Poole Harbour Recreation Zone within which the adverse effects of new residential development must be avoided or mitigated (Figure 2.3). The Poole Harbour Recreation Zone occupies an area in the southeast of the plan area, within the former district of Purbeck. The other recreation pressure zones (Dorset Heaths 5km zone, Chesil and the Fleet 7.3km zone, and New Forest 13.8km zone) are also shown on Figure 2.3.

The Dorset Heaths SAC and Dorset Heathlands SPA and Ramsar

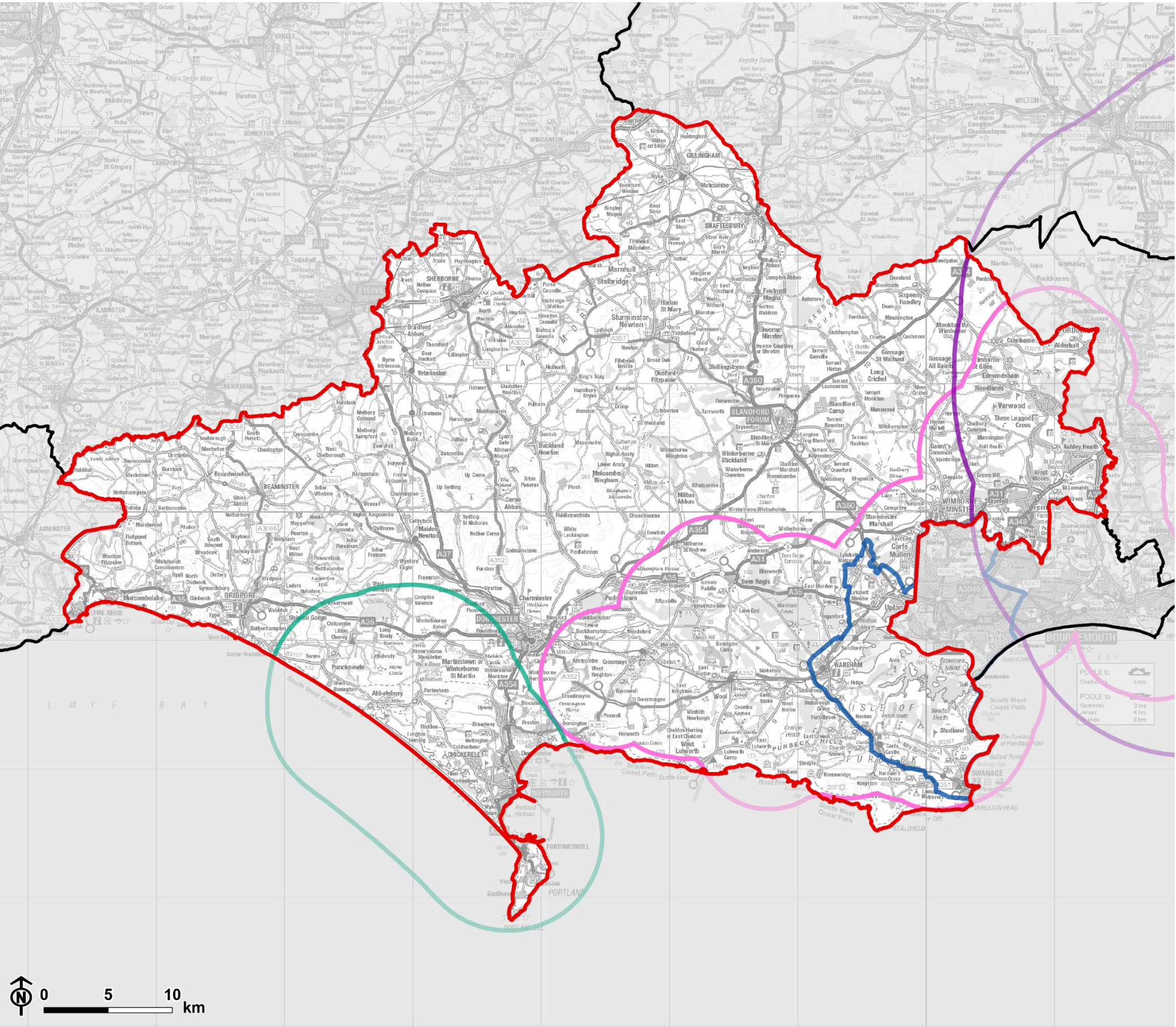
2.69 The Dorset Heaths SAC and Dorset Heathlands SPA and Ramsar are sensitive to additional recreational pressure and so any development involving a net increase in local residents or staying visitors could be detrimental if not mitigated. The potential impacts include increased cat predation of wildlife, higher instances of wildfire, disturbances to ground nesting birds, increased nutrients from dog fouling and damage from increased footfall (trampling) on the heaths.

2.70 These impacts are most marked for developments within 400m of heathland sites, where it is considered that a negative effect upon the Dorset designated site would result. Residential development in these areas is therefore not permitted.

2.71 In the area between 400m and up to 5km from a heathland site ("5km buffer zone"), the effect of residential development is less marked but still likely to be significant. However, mitigation in these areas is more likely to be successful and therefore residential developments within this area may go ahead.

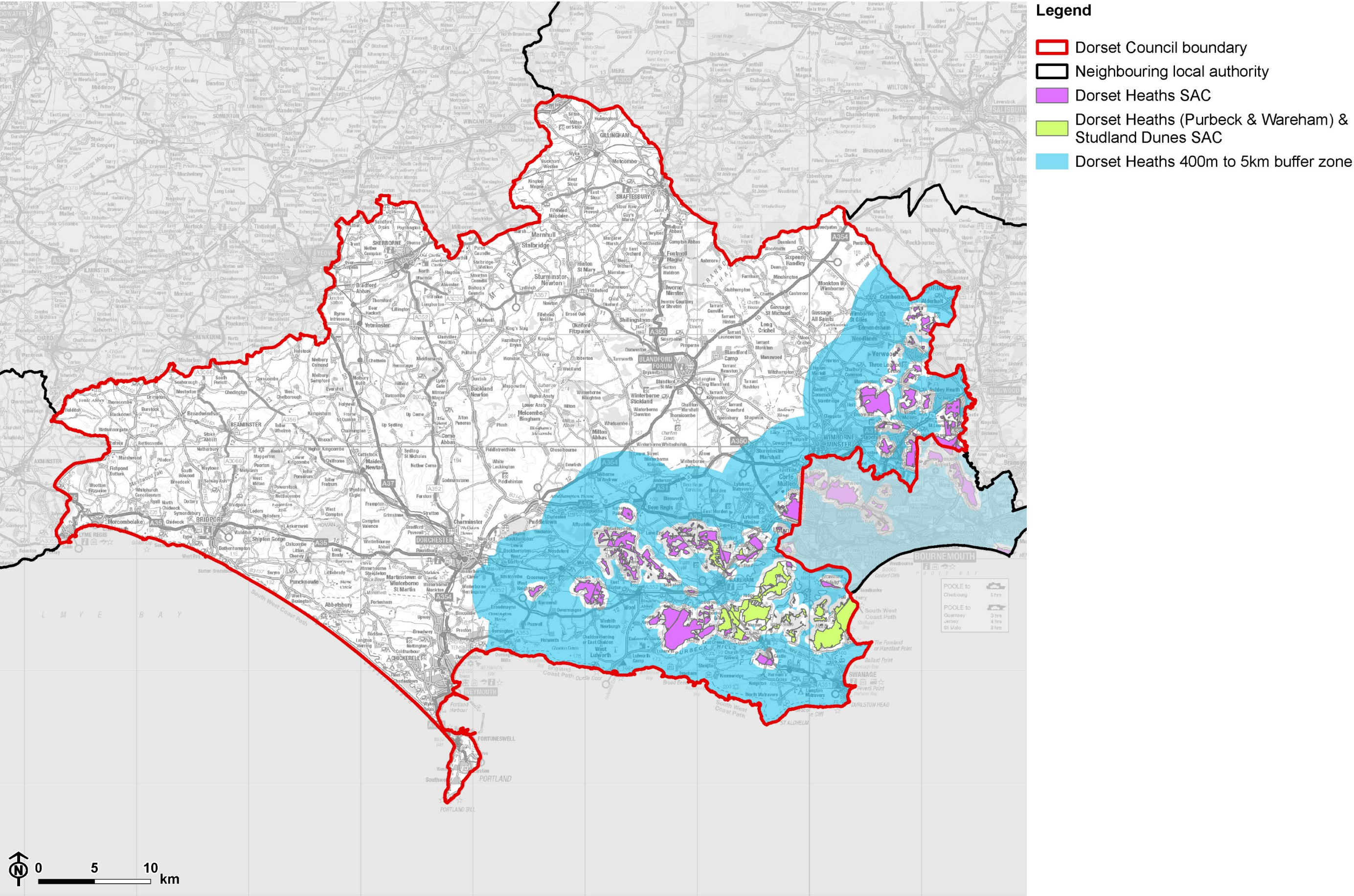
2.72 Air quality is also a particular consideration in relation to heathland habitats, with vehicle emissions from development contributing to nitrogen deposition and other pollutants affecting heathland habitats. To address these impacts, air quality mitigation is prioritised on heathlands within 200m of roads. There are approximately 650ha of heathland within 200m of A/B roads, of which around 475ha are considered suitable for the delivery of mitigation projects. This excludes established woodland, heathland separated from roads by a significant buffer, and areas that only marginally fall within the 200m zone [\[See reference 64\]](#).

Figure 2.3: The location and extent of recreation pressure zones [See reference 65]



- Legend**
- Dorset Council boundary
 - Neighbouring local authority
 - Recreation pressure zone**
 - Chesil and The Fleet
 - Dorset Heaths
 - New Forest
 - Poole Harbour

Figure 2.4: The location and extent of the Dorset Heaths buffer zones [See reference 66]



Created by LUC - Figure 2.3: The location and extent of the Dorset Heaths buffer zones 26/08/2026
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Fontmell & Melbury Downs SAC and Cerne and Sydling Downs SAC

2.73 The Fontmell and Melbury Downs SAC and Cerne and Sydling Downs SAC are characterised predominantly by semi-natural dry grassland with some scrub and heathland on the chalk valley slopes of north Dorset (Figure 2.5).

2.74 These chalk grassland habitats are sensitive to recreational pressure as a result of trampling and erosion by walking or cycling. Those parts that are steep and with thin soils, especially near access points where pressures are more concentrated, are particularly vulnerable. The addition of nutrients from dog faeces is also an threat, as this results in an input of nutrients into the soil and chalk grassland habitats are necessarily naturally low in nutrients.

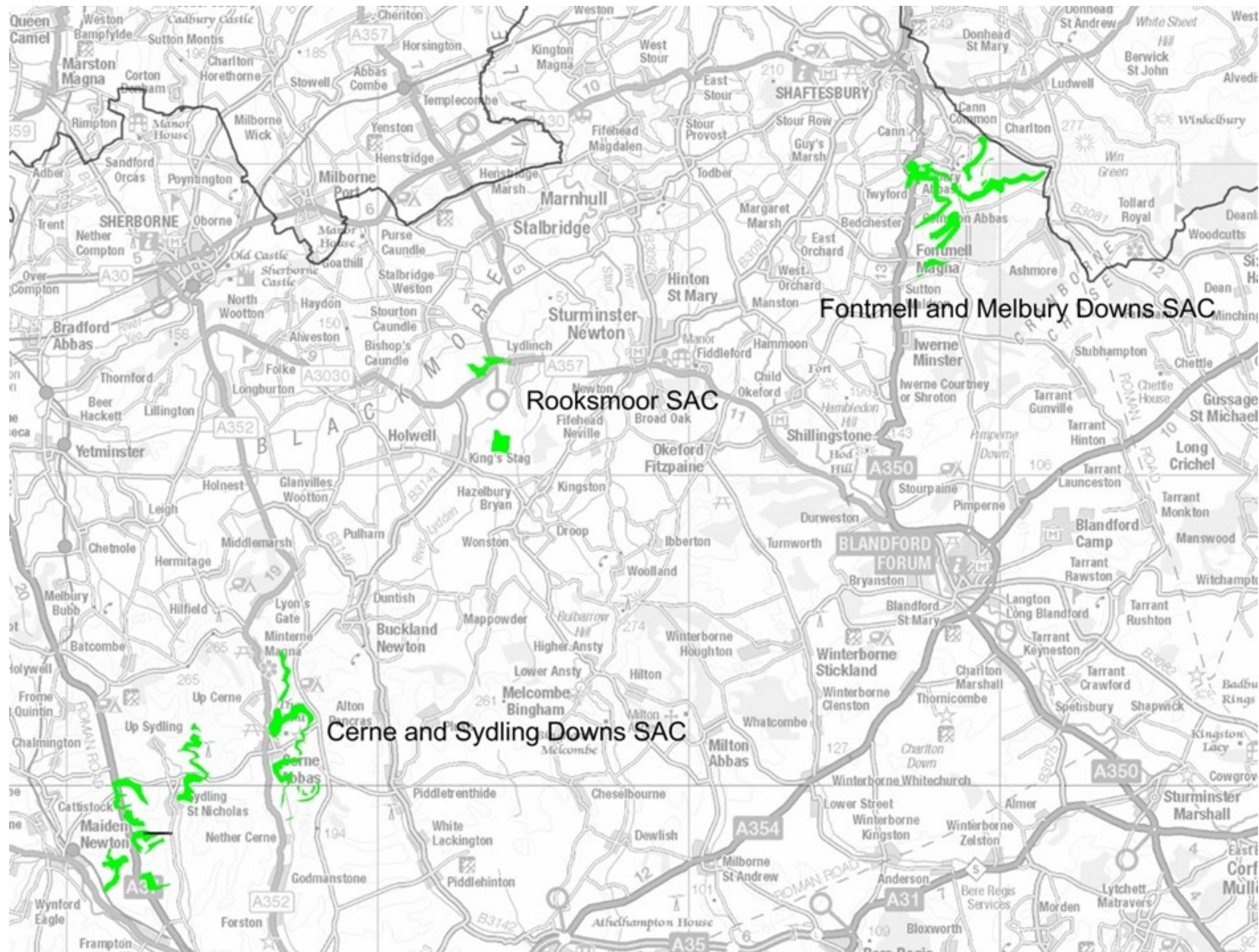
2.75 New development in the areas surrounding these Habitats sites may increase the local population and the number of visits to these sites, increasing the recreational pressure. Surveys have indicated that the core recreational catchment, defined by the zone within which 75% of visitors derive, is typically 4-6km from a Habitats site and rarely larger.

2.76 These Habitats sites are also sensitive to the deposition of atmospheric nitrogen from vehicle exhaust emissions as this results in the enrichment of soils within a habitat which naturally requires low nutrient levels.

2.77 Within a 'typical' housing development, by far the largest contribution to the emission of nitrogen (approximately 92%) is from the associated road traffic. Therefore, the impact of atmospheric deposition of nitrogen from new development is a particular issue close to roads. According to the Department of Transport's Transport Analysis Guidance, "Beyond 200m, the contribution of vehicle emissions from the roadside to local pollution levels is not significant". This is due to the mix of the exhaust gases, the small dimension of the exhausts and the velocity of the exhaust gases. Also, as traffic exhausts are situated only a few inches above the ground and are horizontal to it, the vast majority of emitted pollutants are never dispersed far and are very quickly deposited.

2.78 The deposition of atmospheric nitrogen is also an issue at the Rooksmoor SAC, which is characterised by species-rich meadows, copses, and Common Land on neutral to acidic soils. These majority of the site is necessarily naturally low in nutrients, and therefore the enrichment of soils through the deposition of atmospheric nitrogen represents a threat to the integrity of this Habitats site. Once again, this is a particular issue in those areas within 200m of the road, since vehicle emissions represent the greatest source of atmospheric nitrogen.

Figure 2.5: The location and extent of the Fontmell & Melbury Downs SAC, Cerne and Sydling Downs SAC, and Rooksmoor SAC



Somerset Levels and Moors Ramsar

2.79 The Somerset Levels and Moors Ramsar is located approximately 12km to the north of the Dorset Plan Area (Figure 2.1).

2.80 The Somerset Levels and Moors contain the largest area of lowland wet grassland in England, contributing 21% of the resource. The Somerset Levels and Moors are characterised by extensive flatness and frequent floods. The open expanse of grasslands broken up by isolated hills and ridges is some of the lowest land in the UK, with large areas lying below the level of the highest tides. Water dominates the landscape and a complex network of watercourses is evidence of a long history of drainage to reclaim productive farmland from marshland.

2.81 The Somerset Levels and Moors Habitats site occupies an area of approximately 6,400ha, representing approximately 12% of the total floodplain area. Much of the area outside the Habitats site is a farmed grassland monoculture and is likely to be too dry at critical times of the year to support wetland wildlife.

2.82 Huge flocks of migratory waterfowl arrive at the Somerset Levels and Moors in winter and its importance for bird species is year round as it is one of the UK's most important breeding areas for Lapwing, Curlew, Redshank and Snipe. Meadows with more than 60 species of plant in a single field and ditches supporting a unique assemblage of rare invertebrates add to its diversity.

2.83 The uppermost areas of the Somerset Levels hydrological catchment occupy a section of the northern extent of the Dorset Council Local Plan area. The rivers within the Somerset Levels drain into the Bristol Channel, which has the second highest tidal range in the world

2.84 Monitoring of the condition of the Habitats site undertaken by Natural England has shown that elevated concentrations of phosphates within the water bodies at the Habitats site are resulting in algal dominance and a decrease in plant diversity, resulting partly from a decline in vascular plants. This has resulted in some areas within the Habitats site being classified as 'unfavourable declining'.

Chesil and the Fleet SAC, SPA and Ramsar

2.85 The Chesil and the Fleet Habitats site is characterised by a 29km long shingle bar and a coastal lagoon called the Fleet (Figure 2.1). The SPA element of the Habitats site, designated under the Birds Directive, occupies the Fleet and immediate

surroundings. The SAC and Ramsar designation occupies the Fleet and surroundings and the shingle bar up to West Bay in the west.

2.86 The Chesil and the Fleet SAC element of the Habitats site is primarily designated for the following habitats:

- Coastal lagoon;
- Annual vegetation of drift lines;
- Perennial vegetation of stony banks; and
- Mediterranean and thermos-Atlantic halophilous scrubs (*Sarcocornetea fruticosa*).

2.87 The coastal lagoon, known as the Fleet, is the largest lagoon in England and supports the greatest diversity of habitats and species of any lagoon in the UK. The marine invertebrate communities and flora of the Fleet are exceptionally diverse with a number of nationally rare, scarce and protected species.

2.88 The Mediterranean and thermos-Atlantic halophilous scrubs habitat is largely associated with this lagoon habitat, since it is found predominantly on the seaward margin of the Fleet.

2.89 Chesil Beach represents an extensive area of 'perennial vegetation of stony banks', with most of it is relatively undisturbed by human activities. Chesil Beach supports the most extensive occurrences of the rare sea-kale (*Crambe maritima*) and sea pea (*Lathyrus japonicas*) in the UK, together with other grassland and lichen-rich shingle plant communities typical of more stable conditions.

2.90 In addition, Chesil beach is also one of two representatives of Annual vegetation of drift lines on the south coast of England. The inner shore of the beach supports extensive drift-line vegetation dominated by sea beet (*Beta vulgaris maritima*) and orache (*Atriplex*).

2.91 The Chesil and the Fleet SPA provides a nesting site for the Little Tern (*Sterna albifrons*), Common tern (*Sterna hirundo*) and Ringed Plover (*Charadrius hiaticula*) between February and August.

2.92 Natural England, in their consultation response, have raised concerns about the threat to the Chesil and the Fleet Habitats site posed by recreational pressure.

2.93 The recreational pressure at the Chesil and the Fleet Habitats site is typically as a result of walking, bird watching, fishing and boating. This may have a direct impact upon the SAC and Ramsar habitats.

2.94 In terms of the Chesil and the Fleet SPA, recreational pressure is likely to cause disturbance to bird species during breeding season may result in the birds expending energy unnecessarily, not feeding properly, and or tending to eggs or nestlings if the disturbance is close to the nesting site. This is likely to affect the condition of the birds and reduce the survival rate of the eggs and nestlings, ultimately compromising the survival of the birds. Disturbance to over wintering species is also a concern.

2.95 Whilst disturbance is generally less during the winter months, bird populations are particularly vulnerable during this time of year due to food shortages. Disturbance can result in the abandonment of suitable feeding areas can have severe consequences for those birds involved.

2.96 In July 2020, Dorset Council Cabinet agreed that developer contribution funding from the Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) would help to deliver an interim strategy from mitigating recreational pressure on the Chesil Beach and the Fleet SAC, SPA and Ramsar. The strategy provides an approach to addressing the recreational impacts upon Chesil Beach and the Fleet, which will ensure that new development contributes to the mitigation in a fair and proportionate manner. Mitigation delivery measures will include the review of water access points, infrastructure projects such as the establishment of a strategic Suitable Alternative Natural Greenspace (SANG) for Weymouth residents in close proximity to houses, and car park spaces and charges review. The cost of mitigation is estimated at £191,673 per year per year, which will largely be met through [CIL](#) receipts.

2.97 The Chesil and the Fleet SAC and SPA is also in an unfavourable condition due to excessive phosphorous and nitrogen levels, largely driven by historical and agricultural runoff. The Weymouth wastewater treatment plant or Water Recycling Centre (WRC) (sometimes referred to as the Wyke Regis WRC) handles the majority of foul drainage and sewage from the Weymouth and Portland catchment area, bordering the southeastern end of the Fleet. Wastewater from the Weymouth WRC is discharged offshore from the Chesil and the Fleet and therefore does not contribute to nutrient pollution in the SAC and SPA [\[See reference 67\]](#). However, within this area additional development may still contribute to increased phosphorous and nitrogen levels within the Chesil and the Fleet. The remainder of the catchment is served by the Abbotsbury and Langton Herring WRCs. These plants do discharge into the Chesil and the Fleet therefore may contribute to additional nutrient loading in the SAC and SPA.

Environmental and sustainability issues and likely evolution of the issues without the Local Plan

2.98 Analysis of the baseline information has enabled the following key environmental and sustainability issues relating to biodiversity, flora and fauna facing Dorset to be identified. Reference is made to the relevant SEA objective that has been identified to help address this:

- The potential loss of biodiversity and irreplaceable habitats (such as ancient woodland and veteran trees) and degradation of ecosystems through the effects of development (see SEA objective 1);
- The potential loss of wildlife corridors which provide important links between habitats. This results in a loss of connectivity between habitats, preventing species from freely migrating and causing populations to become isolated. This is likely to be a greater issue in future as the effects of climate change are realised, as wildlife sites connected by corridors allow species to freely migrate to a more suitable climates (see SEA objective 1);
- Maintaining or restoring the favourable conservation status of Habitats sites, designated under the Bird and Habitats Directives, and Ramsar sites (see SEA objective 1);
- Minimising the impacts upon the Dorset Heaths, Fontmell and Melbury Downs and Cerne and Sydling Downs as a result of additional recreational pressure from development, Poole Harbour due to the input of nitrates and recreational pressure from development, the River Avon, River Axe and Somerset Levels and Moors, and Chesil and the Fleet SAC and SPA from the input of phosphates (see SEA objective 3).
- Atmospheric nitrogen deposition from vehicle emissions, particularly within 200m of road, contributes to the enrichment of soils, which threatens the low-nutrient habitats of several Habitats Sites, particularly the Fontmell & Melbury Downs, Cerne & Sydling Downs, and Rooksmoor sites (see SEA objective 4); and
- The recreational pressure at the Chesil and the Fleet Habitats site is typically as a result of walking, bird watching, fishing and boating (see SEA objective 1).
- Elevated concentrations of phosphorus and/or nitrogen affecting water quality in the River Avon SAC and River Axe SAC, the Somerset Levels and Moors Ramsar, the Poole Harbour SPA and Ramsar and the Chesil and Fleet SAC, SPA and Ramsar.

- Maintaining or restoring the favourable conservation status of Sites of Special Scientific Interest, many of which are in unfavourable condition within the Dorset Council Local Plan area (see SEA objective 1);
- The protection and enhancement of local wildlife designations, such as Sites of Nature Conservation Interest (SNCI) (see SEA objective 1); and
- Maintaining and restoring the favourable conservation status of priority (S41) habitats and species, which are species and habitats of principal importance for the conservation of biodiversity in England, published as a requirement of the NERC Act Section 41 (S41) (see SEA objective 1).

2.99 The Dorset Council area contains areas of high biodiversity value including a number internationally important sites for habitats. The new Local Plan provides an opportunity to support the protection and enhancement of these biodiversity assets. Without the new Local Plan, there is greater risk that development could come forward in a fragmented way, resulting in less coordinated protection, mitigation, and enhancement of biodiversity assets across the area. Also, development could be located in areas that will exacerbate water quality issues.

SEA objectives

2.100 The draft SEA objective and accompanying assessment questions designed to capture the objectives of relevant international and national plans, programmes and policies and the relevant environmental and sustainability issues identified in this chapter are set out below. We propose to use these to assess the Dorset Council Local Plan and its reasonable alternatives.

Biodiversity, flora and fauna SEA objectives and appraisal assessment questions

SEA objective 1: Provide net gains for biodiversity

Assessment questions

- Will the plan/ option conserve, restore or enhance priority habitats and irreplaceable habitats and promote the protection and recovery of priority species?
- Will the plan/ option maintain or restore the favourable conservation status of Habitats and national sites, and avoid significant adverse effects upon local wildlife designations?

- Will the plan/ option establish coherent ecological networks where possible, with wildlife corridors which connect designated sites of importance for wildlife to prevent habitat fragmentation?
- Will the plan/ option pursue opportunities for securing net gains for biodiversity?

Relevant SEA topics

- Biodiversity,
- Flora and fauna

SEA objective 3: Maintain or improve water quality**Assessment questions**

- Will the plan/ option protect and improve the ecological and chemical status of freshwater, transitional waters and coastal waters, particularly those with 'poor' or 'bad' status?
- Will the plan/ option ensure that development does not contribute to groundwater quality issues particularly within Groundwater Source Protection Zones?
- Will the plan/ option ensure that development does not contribute to the groundwater inundation of the foul drainage network?

Relevant SEA topics

- Water

SEA objective 4: Maintain or improve air quality**Assessment questions**

- Will the plan/ option maintain or improve air quality?
- Will the plan/ option ensure that development does not contribute to air quality issues particularly within Air Quality Management Areas and where exceedances in the concentration of airborne contaminants have been recorded?

Relevant SEA topics

- Air
- Human Health

Chapter 3

Soil

3.1 This chapter sets out the baseline and policy context for Dorset's soil quality and quantity. The SEA will consider how the Local Plan can help to ensure good soil quality and avoid its loss, which is essential to environmental and human health, and is influenced by development patterns, climate resilience, biodiversity and the way land is managed.

3.2 Soil is the uppermost layer of the earth's crust, containing the organic and mineral matter which enable plants to grow.

3.3 Soil is an invaluable component of the natural environment, for example playing a key role in nutrient cycling by storing carbon, filtering water of contaminants as it leaches through the soil profile, and aiding drainage and flood management.

3.4 Soil is also an important natural resource both for the community and the economy, providing food, clean drinking water, and building materials.

3.5 Given the importance of soil, the global trend of soil degradation has been recognised as a serious and widespread problem. Soil degradation may occur:

- Physically: for example through accelerated soil erosion or the decline of structural condition which aids drainage;
- Chemically: for example through the loss of nutrients or elevated concentrations of contaminants; and/or
- Biologically: for example through the depletion of soil organic matter and the imbalance of populations of organisms which enable the healthy functioning of the soil.

3.6 The cause of soil degradation is often due to improper use or land management practices, such as deforestation and changes of land use, agricultural practices such as overgrazing, overexploitation and fertiliser use, and industrial activities.

3.7 Soil contamination is a form of soil degradation caused by elevated concentrations of chemicals in the soil, often as a legacy of previous land use, industrialisation, and inappropriate waste disposal.

3.8 Soil provides the medium for growing crops, and supplies the essential nutrients required to support healthy crop yields. Conserving soil quality is therefore key in

maintaining agricultural productivity, ensuring food security and achieving a sustainable agricultural system.

3.9 Soil is largely a product of the underlying geology, since it is formed by the weathering of bedrock. This Chapter will also consider geodiversity, defined as range of rocks, minerals, fossils, soils and landforms **[See reference 68]**, and conservation of the geological resource within the plan area.

Key messages from other plans, programmes and objectives

International

3.10 The United Nations developed a series of global development goals which aim to deliver sustainable development in the document titled [Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development \(2015\)](#). **[See reference 69]** One such goal is:

- End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture.

3.11 [The United Nations Declaration on Sustainable Development \(Johannesburg Declaration\) \(2002\)](#) **[See reference 70]** sets a broad framework for international sustainable development, including building a humane, equitable and caring global society aware of the need for human dignity for all, renewable energy and energy efficiency, sustainable consumption and production and resource efficiency.

National

3.12 [The UK National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan \(2025\)](#) **[See reference 71]** sets out how the four countries of the UK will work together to address biodiversity. The document reflects shared ambition to protect and restore nature and confirms the UK's pledge to meet all 23 targets of the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework within its own borders. The document outlines four long-term global goals:

- Protect and restore;
- Prosper with nature;
- Share benefits fairly; and

- Invest and collaborate.

3.13 The [National Planning Policy Framework \(2026\)](#) (NPPF) **[See reference 72]** encourages the reuse of previously developed land, with Policy L1: Planning for an effective use of land stating that the development plan should ‘identify ways of accommodating as much as possible of the identified need for development in the area on previously developed land’. Additionally, plan-making Policy P1: Planning for clean and safe places stipulates that development plans should “consider any wider opportunities to reduce air, water, soil, noise or other forms of pollution, and contribute to compliance with national and local environmental targets and objectives, through the spatial strategy and policies for specific parts of the plan area (such as by identifying opportunities for strategic nature-based solutions”.

3.14 [The Environment Improvement Plan 2023](#) **[See reference 73]** for England is the first revision of the 25YEP: It builds on the 25YEP vision with a new plan setting out how we will work with landowners, communities and businesses to deliver each of our goals for improving the environment, matched with interim targets to measure progress. Taking these actions will help us restore nature, reduce environmental pollution, and increase the prosperity of our country. To achieve its vision, the 25YEP set out 10 goals. We have used those 10 goals set out in the 25YEP as the basis for this document: setting out the progress made against all 10, the specific targets and commitments made in relation to each goal, and our plan to continue to deliver these targets and the overarching goals. The environmental goals are:

- Goal 1: Thriving plants and wildlife
- Goal 2: Clean air
- Goal 3: Clean and plentiful water
- Goal 4: Managing exposure to chemicals and pesticides
- Goal 5: Maximise our resources, minimise our waste
- Goal 6: Using resources from nature sustainably
- Goal 7: Mitigating and adapting to climate change
- Goal 8: Reduced risk of harm from environmental hazards
- Goal 9: Enhancing biosecurity
- Goal 10: Enhanced beauty, heritage, and engagement with the natural environment

3.15 [The 25 Year Environment Plan: progress reports \(2023\)](#) **[See reference 74]** sets out the progress made in improving the environment through the 25 Year Plan

and the indicator framework, which contains 66 indicators arranged into 10 broad themes.

3.16 The [Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, Levelling Up and Regeneration Act \(2023\)](#) [See reference 75] sets out the direction for planning and makes provisions to support the levelling-up agenda. It seeks to streamline the planning process whilst attaching greater weight to development plans. It also aims to improve infrastructure delivery with a new levy system, improve alignment between plans to address cross-boundary issues, and will introduce added protection for heritage assets. The Act also states that existing EU-generated systems of SEA, HRA and EIA will eventually be replaced by a simpler process known as ‘Environmental Outcomes Reports’.

3.17 The document also requires that strategic policies should seek to make the most effective use of land in meeting local requirements making as much use as possible of previously developed or ‘brownfield’ land. Furthermore, policies should “support appropriate opportunities to remediate despoiled, degraded, derelict, contaminated or unstable land”.

3.18 [The Environment Act 2021](#) [See reference 76] sets statutory targets for the recovery of the natural world in four priority areas: air quality, biodiversity, water, and resource efficiency and waste reduction. It also establishes the Office for Environmental Protection which will act as an impartial and objective body for the protection and improvement of the environment. The Act sets out legislation which covers:

- Resource efficiency, producer responsibility, and the management, enforcement and regulation of waste;
- Local air quality management frameworks and the recall of motor vehicles etc; and
- Plans and proposals for water resources, drainage and sewerage management, storm overflows, water quality and land drainage.

3.19 [Our 25 Year Plan to Improve the Environment \(2018\)](#) [See reference 77], also known as the 25 Year Environment Plan, sets out the UK government action to help the natural world regain and retain good health. The plan sets a series of goals for improving the environment within a generation and leaving it in a better state than we found it, and includes the following objectives and actions relating to soil and pollution:

- We will ensure that resources from nature are used more sustainably and efficiently. We will do this by:

- improving our approach to soil management: by 2030 we want all of England's soils to be managed sustainably, and we will use natural capital thinking to develop appropriate soil metrics and management approaches
- We will make sure that chemicals are safely used and managed, and that the levels of harmful chemicals entering the environment (including through agriculture) are significantly reduced. We will do this by:
 - seeking in particular to eliminate the use of Polychlorinated Biphenyls by 2025, in line with our commitments under the Stockholm Convention
 - substantially increasing the amount of Persistent Organic Pollutants material being destroyed or irreversibly transformed by 2030, to make sure there are negligible emissions to the environment
 - fulfilling our commitments under the Stockholm Convention as outlined in the UK's most recent National Implementation Plan

3.20 The Government's strategic direction for biodiversity is presented in [Biodiversity 2020: A strategy for England's wildlife and ecosystem services \(2011\)](#) [See reference 78], which includes the following aims with respect to agriculture (which is reliant on good soil quality):

- Priority action 3.1: Improve the delivery of environmental outcomes from agricultural land management practices, whilst increasing food production; and
- Priority action 3.2: Reform the Common Agricultural Policy to achieve greater environmental benefits.

3.21 The strategy for the future of soils in England is presented in the [Safeguarding our Soils: A strategy for England \(2009\)](#) [See reference 79], which sets out the following vision:

"By 2030, all of England's soils will be managed sustainably and degradation threats tackled successfully. This will improve the quality of England's soils and safeguard their ability to provide essential services for future generations".

3.22 [The Environmental Protection Act 1990 makes](#) [See reference 80] provision for the improved control of pollution to the air, water and land by regulating the management of waste and the control of emissions. Seeks to ensure that decisions pertaining to the environment are made in an integrated manner, in collaboration with appropriate authorities, non-governmental organisations and other persons.

Local

3.23 [The Dorset National Landscape Management Plan 2026 - 2031 \(2026\)](#) [See reference 81] has the following objectives relating to geodiversity:

- Protect and promote geodiversity as a core component of nature and the landscape)
- Embed geodiversity considerations into local planning policies and landscape-scale initiatives.
- Prioritise conservation and restoration of key geological sites, including quarries and features, and action that works with the dynamic nature of the coastline, and that are aligned with the Jurassic Coast Partnership Plan.
- Foster partnerships to raise awareness and engage communities in geodiversity conservation through citizen science and education.

3.24 Dorset Council's [Natural Environment, Climate and Ecology Strategy 2023 to 25 \(refresh\) \(2025\)](#) [See reference 82] aims to create a carbon neutral, nature positive, and resilient Dorset through a clean, green, and fair transition that supports prosperous, stronger, and healthier communities. It focuses on three main challenges: reducing greenhouse gas emissions to address climate change, protecting and enhancing ecosystems to reverse biodiversity loss, and adapting to unavoidable environmental impacts to build resilience. The strategy has four broad outcomes it aims to achieve:

- Net Zero Council 2040 and Net Zero Dorset 2050: Net zero emissions from power, heat, transport, construction, food, consumables and waste;
- Nature Positive Dorset 2030: At least 30% of our land, rivers and seas and nature-positive by 2030;
- Prosperity through green growth: Green jobs, skills and investment for low carbon and nature sectors; and
- Stronger, healthier communities: Healthier, cheaper to run homes and safer more resilient communities.

3.25 [Dorset Council's Contaminated Land Strategy 2024-2029 \(2024\)](#) [See reference 83] aims to prevent contamination of land from causing unacceptable risks to human health or the wider environment. The following objectives for managing contaminated land in Dorset are:

- To follow effective procedures in the identification and prioritisation of potentially contaminated land;

- To protect human health and the environment by identifying and securing remediation of sites meeting the definition of 'contaminated land';
- To pursue the management of potentially contaminated land through the planning system as required by relevant statutory guidance;
- To ensure effective management of all information about contaminated land, including the storage, accessibility/provision of, and responses to such information.
- To comply with and implement all relevant statute and guidance.

3.26 [The Dorset Local Nature Partnership's Vision and Strategy \(2023\)](#) [See reference 84] includes a set of strategic pillars relating to biodiversity (listed in Chapter 2 above), with one specifically referring to soil:

- Natural resilience - improving environmental and community resilience: In the light of a challenging future, and the impact on health, we will work collaboratively to improve both resilience against and adaption to climate change to enable a sustainable future. We will support local schemes to improve diets and reduce food waste, sensitive farming practices and facilitate greater engagement with the soil that sustains us all.

3.27 [The Dorset Local Geodiversity Action Plan \(2005\)](#) [See reference 85] aims to:

- draw together existing information and ongoing projects concerned with the geology, geomorphology, soils and landscapes of Dorset and the East Devon Coastal Corridor, and to initiate further actions that will lead to the conservation and enhancement of the geological resource; and
- increase appreciation and understanding of the geological heritage of the area.

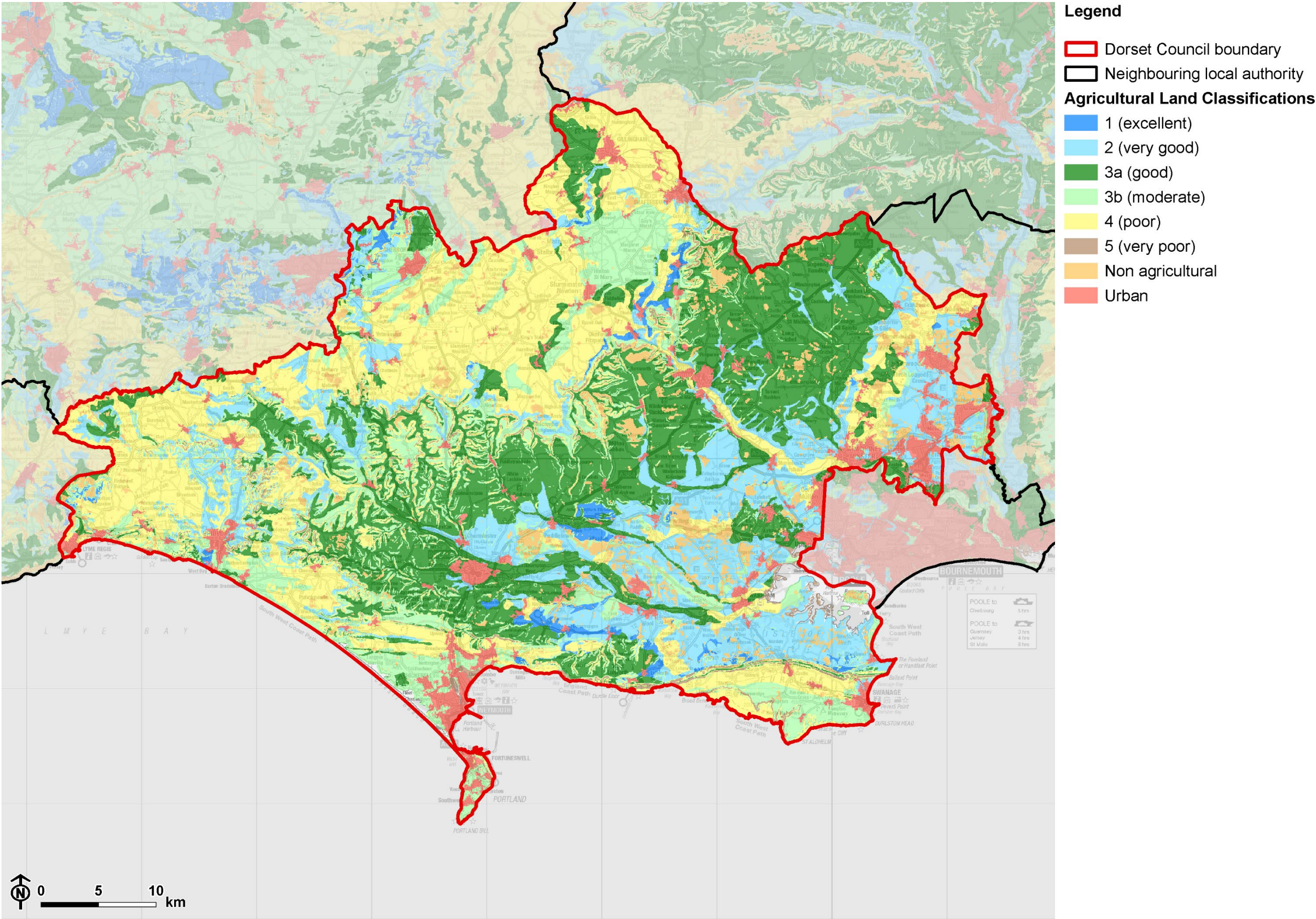
Baseline information

3.28 The Agricultural Land Classification system classifies land into five grades. The best and most versatile agricultural land, according to National Planning Policy Guidance, is defined as grades 1 (Excellent) and 2 (Very Good). This land which is 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. Grade 3 is divided into 3a (Good) and 3b (Moderate), grade 4 is 'poor', and grade 5 is 'very poor' agricultural land.

3.29 The highest-grade agricultural land (Grade 1) within the plan area is relatively concentrated, mainly being located within three areas: north of Bridport, west of Sherborne and north of Blandford Forum. Grade 2 agricultural land is more extensive

across the south-east, including around Swanage, Studland and Stoborough. Grade 3a agricultural land covers the centre of the plan area, from East Woodyates to Puncknowle, while grade 3b agricultural land covers large swathes of the west of the plan area, including Huntingford, Stock Gaylard, and Charmouth (Figure 3.1).

Figure 3.1: The location and extent of agricultural land grades within the Dorset Council Local Plan Area [See reference 86]



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3.30 Local Authorities have duties and responsibilities under Part IIA of the Environmental Protection Act 1990 to investigate land which is defined as contaminated under the terms of the Act.

3.31 Prior to the establishment of Dorset Council in April 2019, the individual councils held separate public registers of contaminated sites. These individual registers have been consolidated into a single register under Dorset Council. There are currently two entries identified as contaminated land under the definition provided in the Environmental Protection Act (1990) on the [Dorset Council Contaminated Land Register](#) [See reference 87]:

- Cogdean Elms Industrial Estate, Higher Merley Lane, Corfe Mullen, Wimborne: Companies that use chemicals have been present on the industrial estate since 1954. Uncontrolled practices resulted in small amounts of chemicals spilled into the ground or disposed to soakaway. Once the contamination is in the ground it enters groundwater and then enters the Ashington Stream. The site has been determined as contaminated and a “special site” as the contamination affects groundwater and surface water. As a special site, the Environment Agency took on responsibility for inspection, enforcement, and ensuring the site is remediated.
- Former Sherborne Landfill Site at West Mill Lane, Sherborne, Dorset: The site occupies an area of approximately 5.5 ha. The site was a stream valley owned by Sherborne Castle Estates. It was leased by Sherborne Urban District Council, who culverted the stream and used the site to tip domestic refuse from 1970 onwards. The lease passed to Dorset County Council in 1974. Tipping at the site ceased in 1993. The site was formally designated by West Dorset District Council as contaminated land on 29th July 2003, and Dorset County Council obtained government funding to repair the collapsing culvert and remediate the site to current standards.

3.32 Additionally, there are 3,099 other sites across Dorset that have been assessed and categorised based on potential environmental risk, though they do not meet the legal definition of contaminated land under Part 2A of the Environmental Protection Act 1990. These sites were identified through a risk-rating process and vary in significance, with some requiring further investigation and others suitable for ongoing monitoring or record-keeping. There are [14 Category 1 sites, which are deemed the highest risk.](#) [See reference 88]

Environmental and sustainability issues and likely evolution of the issues without the Local Plan

3.33 Analysis of the baseline information has enabled a number of key environmental and sustainability issues relating to soil quality facing Dorset to be identified. They are as follows (below each issue, reference is made to the relevant SEA objective that has been identified to help address the issue):

- The potential loss of the most productive soils to development, with the highest grade of agricultural land (Grade 1) mainly situated north of Bridport, west of Sherborne, and north of Blandford Forum, while Grade 2 agricultural land is more widely distributed across the south-east of the plan area. The loss of productive soils would compromise the ability to produce crops locally, affecting food security and sustainable agriculture (see SEA objective 2);
- New development causing contamination and contributing to unacceptable concentrations of pollutants in soil (see SEA objective 2);
- The remediation of soils on contaminated sites, to prevent impacts to human health, controlled waters, property and ecological systems (see SEA objective 2); and
- The protection of geodiversity and conservation of geological interests from the impacts of new development (see SEA objective 2).

3.34 Without the new Local Plan, development could be located in areas that result in the loss of significant amounts of high grade agricultural land, with the knock-on effects of a reduction in the volume and quality of food production. It could also result in an increase in soil pollutants which would similarly have a negative impact on the quality of food crops.

SEA objectives

3.35 The draft SEA objectives and accompanying appraisal assessment questions designed to capture the objectives of relevant international and national plans, programmes and policies and the relevant environmental and sustainability issues identified in this chapter are set out below. We propose to use these to appraise and assess the Dorset Council Local Plan and its reasonable alternatives.

Soil SEA objectives and assessment questions

SEA objective 2: Protect soil quality and conserve geological conservation interests

Assessment questions

- Will the plan/option protect the most productive agricultural land (grades 1 and 2) to provide food security and achieve sustainable agriculture?
- Will the plan/option remediate or mitigate the potential impacts of degraded, derelict, contaminated and unstable land where possible, to protect human health, property and the environment?
- Will the plan/option minimise harm to geological conservation interests, and where possible achieve the enhancement of the geological resource?

Relevant SEA topics

- Soil
- Human Health

Chapter 4

Water

4.1 This chapter sets out the baseline and policy context for Dorset's water resource and water quality. The SEA will consider how the Local Plan can help to ensure sufficient water resources and good water quality, which are essential to environmental and human health, and are influenced by levels of growth and development patterns, climate resilience, biodiversity and the way land is managed.

4.2 Water covers 70% of the earth's surface and is one of the world's most important resources. Water cycles around the planet, evaporating from the earth's surface and the oceans into the atmosphere and condensing to form clouds, before precipitating back onto the land to replenish groundwater and the oceans.

4.3 Water is essential for life and without it there would be no life on earth. It supports all ecosystems, providing aquatic and marine habitats and supplying the nutrients and minerals that plants and animals need to survive. Water is also critical for human health and wellbeing, making up two thirds of the human body and playing a role in every bodily function.

4.4 The social and economic value of water is immeasurable. Access to clean drinking water is a fundamental human right, and water is essential for agriculture, many industrial processes and a host of recreational and tourism based activities.

4.5 Given the widespread importance of water, the consequences of the decline in water quality are severe. Human activity is largely attributed as the cause of the decline in water quality, for example through pollution due to discharge of chemicals and other materials such as micro-plastics into watercourses, global temperature rise and overexploitation of water resources.

4.6 This section considers a broad range of issues relating to the topic of water and the aquatic environment including:

- coastal waters, defined as water up to one mile from the coast;
- transitional waters, which are surface waters in the vicinity of river mouths which are partly saline as a result of their proximity to coastal waters but which are substantially influenced by freshwater flows; and
- freshwater and related features such as wetlands and floodplains. This includes groundwater.

Key messages from other plans, programmes and objectives

International

4.7 [The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development \(2015\)](#) [See reference 89].

adopted by all United Nations Member States, provides a shared blueprint for peace and prosperity for people and the planet and includes 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), designed to achieve a better and more sustainable future for all.

Relevant to this topic are:

- SDG 6: Clean Water and Sanitation
- SDG 14: Life Below Water.
- SDG 15: Life on Land.

National

4.8 [The UK National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan \(2025\)](#) [See reference 90]

sets out how the four countries of the UK will work together to address biodiversity.

The document reflects shared ambition to protect and restore nature and confirms the UK's pledge to meet all 23 targets of the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework within its own borders. The document outlines four long-term global goals:

- Protect and restore;
- Prosper with nature;
- Share benefits fairly; and
- Invest and collaborate.

4.9 The [National Planning Policy Framework \(2026\)](#) [See reference 91] (NPPF) states in Policy N1: Identifying environmental opportunities and safeguards that “development plans should safeguard and enhance the natural environment, and reflect the wider benefits from natural capital and ecosystem services, by using Local Nature Recovery Strategies, Protected Landscape Management Plans, River Basin Management Plans, National Forest Strategies, Community Forest Plans and other relevant evidence”. Additionally, plan-making Policy P1: Planning for clean and safe places stipulates that development plans should “consider any wider opportunities to reduce air, water, soil, noise or other forms of pollution, and contribute to compliance

with national and local environmental targets and objectives, through the spatial strategy and policies for specific parts of the plan area (such as by identifying opportunities for strategic nature-based solutions". Plans should take a proactive approach to mitigating and adapting to climate change, taking into account implications for water supply. Policy W1: Planning for energy and water states that the development plan should take into account factors including water supply, drainage and wastewater capacity when considering the location and phasing of growth. Additionally, according to plan-making Policy P1: Planning for clean and safe places, development plans should consider opportunities to contribute to compliance with national and local environmental targets and objectives, through the spatial strategy and policies for specific parts of the plan area (such as by identifying opportunities for strategic nature-based solutions).

4.10 The National Framework for Water Resources 2025: Water for Growth, Nature and a Resilient Future (2025) [\[See reference 92\]](#) provides a strategic blueprint for managing England's long-term water needs. It emphasises the twin imperatives of securing resilient water supplies to support housing, energy, food production, economic growth, and a thriving natural environment, while safeguarding ecosystems through sustainable abstraction and nature-based solutions. The Framework projects significant pressures on water resources driven by climate change, population growth, and emerging industrial demands, forecasting a shortfall of up to 5 billion litres per day by 2055. It calls for integrated, multi-sector planning across national, regional, and local levels, combining demand management (such as leakage reduction and efficiency improvements) with development of new infrastructure and environmental enhancements.

4.11 [The Plan for Water: Our Integrated Plan for Delivering Clean and Plentiful Water \(2023\)](#) [\[See reference 93\]](#) sets out actions to transform the management of the water system, deliver cleaner water for nature and people, and secure a plentiful water supply. The plan also sets out measures to address sources of pollution, and boost water supplies through more investment, tighter regulation, and more effective enforcement.

4.12 [The Environment Act 2021](#) [\[See reference 94\]](#) sets statutory targets for the recovery of the natural world in four priority areas: air quality, biodiversity, water, and resource efficiency and waste reduction. It also establishes the Office for Environmental Protection which will act as an impartial and objective body for the protection and improvement of the environment. The Act sets out legislation which covers:

- Resource efficiency, producer responsibility, and the management, enforcement and regulation of waste;

- Local air quality management frameworks and the recall of motor vehicles etc; and
- Plans and proposals for water resources, drainage and sewerage management, storm overflows, water quality and land drainage.

4.13 [Managing Water Abstraction \(2021\)](#) [See reference 95] comprises the overarching document for managing water resources in England and Wales and links together the abstraction licensing strategies.

4.14 [The National Chalk Streams Strategy \(2021\)](#) [See reference 96] is built around the “trinity of ecological health”: water quantity, water quality and habitat quality and included 30+ recommendations to Defra, the Environment Agency, Natural England, the water companies, NGOs and stakeholders.

4.15 The Environment Agency’s [Meeting our future water needs: a national framework for water resources \(2020\)](#) [See reference 97] sets the strategic direction for long term regional water resources planning. The framework is built on a shared vision to:

- leave the environment in a better state than we found it
- improve the nation’s resilience to drought and minimise interruptions to all water users

4.16 [Green Future: Our 25 Year Plan to Improve the Environment \(2018\)](#) [See reference 98] sets out the UK government action to help the natural world regain and retain good health. The plan sets a series of goals for improving the environment within a generation and leaving it in a better state than we found it, and includes the following objectives and actions relating to water:

“We will achieve clean and plentiful water by improving at least three quarters of our waters to be close to their natural state as soon as is practicable by:

- reducing the damaging abstraction of water from rivers and groundwater, ensuring that by 2021 the proportion of water bodies with enough water to support environmental standards increases from 82% to 90% for surface water bodies and from 72% to 77% for groundwater bodies;
- reaching or exceeding objectives for rivers, lakes, coastal and ground waters that are specially protected, whether for biodiversity or drinking water as per our River Basin Management Plans;

- supporting OFWAT's ambitions on leakage, minimising the amount of water lost through leakage year on year, with water companies expected to reduce leakage by at least an average of 15% by 2025; and
- minimising by 2030 the harmful bacteria in our designated bathing waters and continuing to improve the cleanliness of our waters; we will make sure that potential bathers are warned of any short-term pollution risks.

4.17 The 25 Year Plan states that the Government will make sure that chemicals are safely used and managed, and that the levels of harmful chemicals entering the environment (including through agriculture) are significantly reduced by reducing land-based emissions of mercury to water by 50% by 2030.

4.18 [The Environment Agency's Approach for Groundwater Protection \(2018\)](#) [See reference 99] contains position statements which provide information about the Environment Agency's approach to managing and protecting groundwater. They detail how the Environment Agency delivers government policy for groundwater and adopts a risk-based approach where legislation allows. Many of the approaches set out in the position statements are not statutory but may be included in, or referenced by, statutory guidance and legislation.

4.19 [The Water Environment \(Water Framework Directive\) \(England and Wales\) Regulations \(2017\)](#) [See reference 100] seeks to protect inland surface waters, transitional waters, coastal waters and groundwater, and outlines the associated river basin management process. These Regulations establish the need to prevent deterioration of waterbodies and to protect, enhance and restore waterbodies with the aim of achieving good ecological and chemical status.

4.20 [The Environment Agency's Drought response: our framework for England \(2017\)](#) [See reference 101] discusses how drought affects England and how the Environment Agency works with government, water companies and others to manage the effects on people, business and the environment. It aims to ensure consistency in the way we co-ordinate drought management across England. It sets out:

- how drought affects different parts of England;
- who is involved in managing drought and how we work together;
- how we and others take action to manage drought;
- how we monitor and measure the impacts of drought to advise senior management and government on the prospects and possible action; and
- how we report on drought and communicate with others.

4.21 [The Nitrate Pollution Prevention Regulations \(2016\)](#) [See reference 102]

provides for the designation of land as nitrate vulnerable zones and imposes annual limits on the amount of nitrogen from organic manure that may be applied or spread in a holding in a nitrate vulnerable zone. The Regulations also specify the amount of nitrogen to be spread on a crop and how, where and when to spread nitrogen fertiliser, and how it should be stored. It also establishes closed periods during which the spreading of nitrogen fertiliser is prohibited.

4.22 [The Water Supply \(Water Quality\) Regulations \(2016\)](#) [See reference 103]

focus on the quality of water for drinking, washing, cooking and food preparation, and for food production. Their purpose is to protect human health from the adverse effects of any contamination of water intended for human consumption by ensuring it is wholesome and clean.

4.23 [The Environmental Permitting Regulations \(2016\)](#) [See reference 104]

streamlines the legislative system for industrial and waste installations into a single permitting structure for those activities which have the potential to cause harm to human health or the environment. They set out how to prevent or, where that is not practicable, to reduce emissions into air, water and land and to prevent the generation of waste, in order to achieve a high level of protection of the environment and human health.

4.24 [The National Policy Statement for Waste Water \(2012\)](#) [See reference 105]

sets out Government policy for the provision of major waste water infrastructure. The policy set out in this NPS is, for the most part, intended to make existing policy and practice in consenting nationally significant waste water infrastructure clearer and more transparent.

4.25 [The Flood and Water Management Act 2010](#) [See reference 106] and [The Flood and Water Regulations \(2019\)](#) [See reference 107] sets out measures to ensure that risk from all sources of flooding is managed more effectively. This includes incorporating greater resilience measures into the design of new buildings; utilising the environment in order to reduce flooding; identifying areas suitable for inundation and water storage to reduce the risk of flooding elsewhere; rolling back development in coastal areas to avoid damage from flooding or coastal erosion; and creating sustainable drainage systems (SuDS).

4.26 The Government's strategic direction for biodiversity presented in [Biodiversity 2020: A strategy for England's wildlife and ecosystem services \(2011\)](#) [See reference 108] includes the following priority actions with respect to water management:

- Priority action 3.6: Align measures to protect the water environment with action for biodiversity, including through the river basin planning approach under the EU Water Framework Directive.
- Priority action 3.7: Continue to promote approaches to flood and erosion management which conserve the natural environment and improve biodiversity.
- Priority action 3.8: Reform the water abstraction regime. The new regime will provide clearer signals to abstractors to make the necessary investments to meet water needs and protect ecosystem functioning. We will also take steps to tackle the legacy of unsustainable abstraction more efficiently.

4.27 [The Groundwater \(England and Wales\) Regulations \(2009\)](#) [See reference 109] implements in England and Wales Community legislation on pollution of groundwater. They provide rules for the granting by the Environment Agency of a permit under these Regulations, consent under section 91(8) of the Water Resources Act 1991 and (with exceptions) an environmental permit under the Environmental Permitting (England and Wales) Regulations. In addition, the Regulations create an offence of discharge of a hazardous substance or non-hazardous pollutant without a permit, provide for powers of enforcement of the Environment Agency and prescribe penalties for offences committed under these Regulations.

4.28 [The Environmental Protection Act 1990](#) [See reference 110] makes provision for the improved control of pollution to the air, water and land by regulating the management of waste and the control of emissions. Seeks to ensure that decisions pertaining to the environment are made in an integrated manner, in collaboration with appropriate authorities, non-governmental organisations and other persons.

Local

4.29 [The Poole Harbour and Dorset Stour Catchment Strategy 2022 – 2027 \(2022\)](#) [See reference 111] sets out the high level priorities and ambition of the Dorset Stour Catchment Partnerships for the next five years to 2027. The vision for the partnerships is that:

“Dorset’s river catchments are sustainably healthy, resilient and safe for people and wildlife.”

4.30 The strategic priorities for Dorset’s catchments are summarised in detail in Chapter 2 but of relevance to water are:

- **Upper catchments:** Focus on reducing nutrient and sediment runoff from agriculture to improve water quality, enhance hydrological connectivity, and reduce flood risk.
- **Middle catchments:** Prioritise restoring natural river processes and protecting river corridors, which also helps reduce pollution and improve habitats.

4.31 [The South West river basin management plan: updated 2022 \(2022\)](#) [See reference 112] describes the challenges that threaten the water environment and how these challenges can be managed. The plan identifies key challenges affecting the region's water bodies, including pollution from agriculture and wastewater, physical modifications to watercourses, over-abstraction of water, and the impacts of climate change. It sets environmental objectives for rivers, lakes, estuaries, coastal waters, and groundwater, aiming to achieve or maintain good ecological and chemical status.

4.32 The [Poole Harbour Consent Order Technical Investigation and Recommendations \(2022\)](#) [See reference 113] updates the Poole Harbour Nutrient Management Plan to deliver the Water Framework Directive (WFD) and Protected Area objectives. The report acknowledges the 'moderate' overall WFD status of Poole Harbour, outlining updated evidence and future targets to reduce the nutrient load entering the Harbour, including land reversion and reduced stocking.

4.33 [The Water Action Plan \(2021\)](#) [See reference 114] outlines the need to significantly reduce water demand and waste in the authority area and manage water resources in a way that eliminates emissions and ensures long-term sustainability by 2050. The Plan recommends 16 specific actions, with initial targets set for 2023 to ensure that progress stays on track.

4.34 [The River Basin Management Plan Part 1: South West River Basin District \(2015\)](#) [See reference 115] aims to provide a framework for protecting and enhancing the benefits provided by the water environment, partly by informing decisions on land-use planning. The plan aims to meet the objectives of the **Water Framework Directive (2000/60/EC)**, including the following:

- to prevent deterioration of the status of surface waters and groundwater;
- to achieve objectives and standards for protected areas;
- to aim to achieve good status for all water bodies or, for heavily modified water bodies and artificial water bodies, good ecological potential and good surface water chemical status;
- to reverse any significant and sustained upward trends in pollutant concentrations in groundwater;

- the cessation of discharges, emissions and losses of priority hazardous substances into surface waters; and
- progressively reduce the pollution of groundwater and prevent or limit the entry of pollutants.

Baseline information

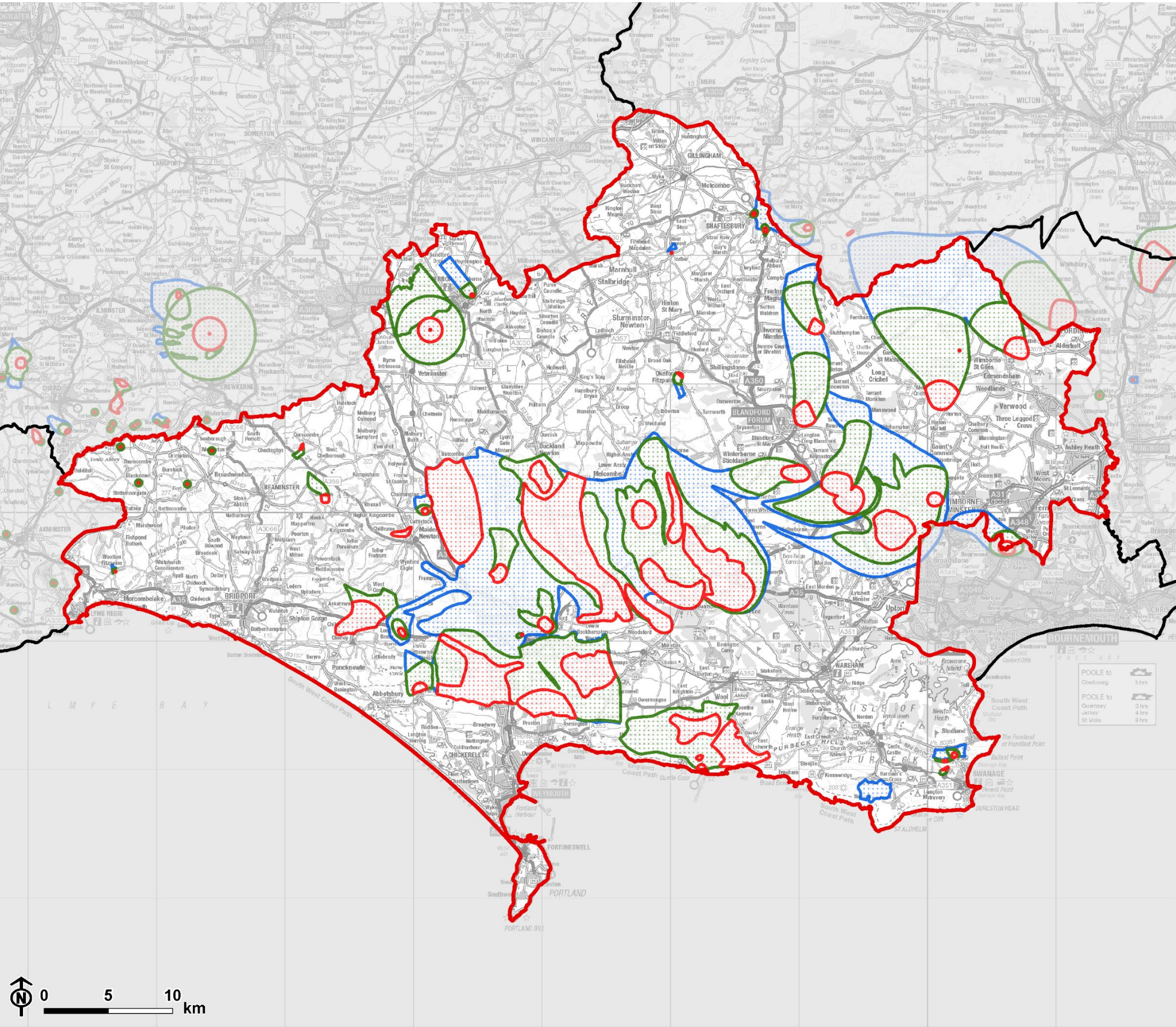
4.35 The most vulnerable groundwater sources to pollution within the plan area have been defined by the Environment Agency as Groundwater Source Protection Zones.

4.36 Groundwater Source Protection Zones show the risk of contamination from any activities that might cause pollution. The extent of Groundwater Source Protection Areas depend on ground conditions, groundwater abstraction techniques and other environmental factors.

4.37 Zone 1 denotes the most vulnerable areas, where there is just a 50 day travel time from any point below the water table to the source. Within a Zone 2 area, the travel time is 400 days from a point below the water table to the source. A Zone 3 area is defined as the area around a source within which all the groundwater recharge is discharged at the source.

4.38 The Groundwater Source Protection Areas are largely located across the central section of the Dorset Council Local Plan area. This reflects the geology of the area, as a vast swath of chalk runs from northeast to southwest across the central parts of the plan area (Figure 4.1).

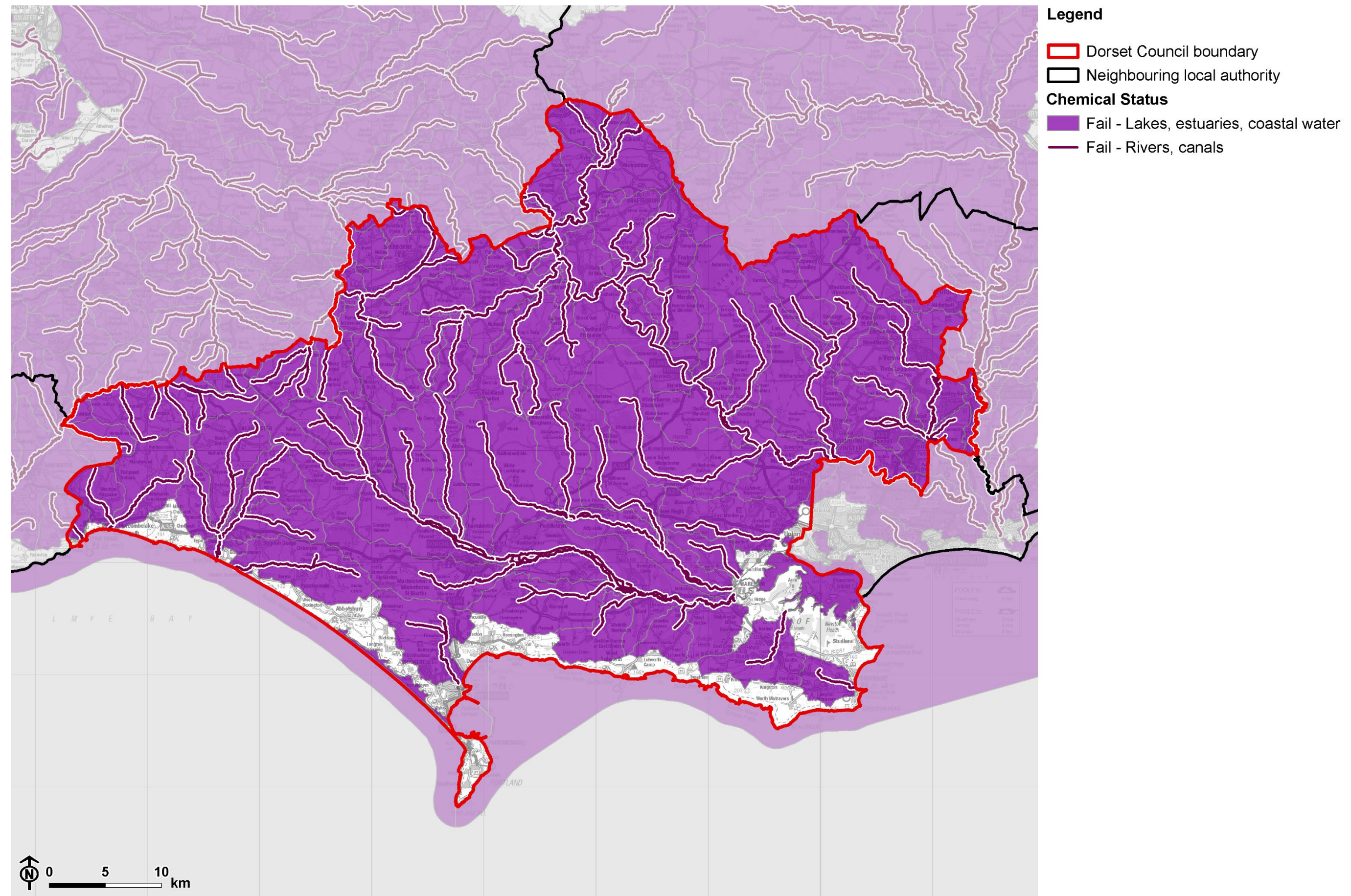
Figure 4.1: The location and extent of Groundwater Source Protection Zones within the Dorset Council Local Plan area [See reference 116]



4.39 The [River Basin Management Plan Part 1: South West river basin district \(2015\)](#) [See reference 117] provides information on the chemical, quantitative and ecological status of water bodies within Dorset. This has subsequently been updated by the [Environment Agency in 2022](#) [See reference 118], which demonstrates that all 68 waterbodies in the Dorset management Catchment failed to meet chemical status standards. The 2022 update introduces a revised methodology for evaluating chemical conditions in England's rivers. Prior to this, Dorset's catchments were classified as being in 'Good Chemical Condition'. However, the updated approach incorporates biota sampling alongside water quality analysis, targeting persistent and environmentally harmful substances – many of which are legacy industrial pollutants now banned. While these chemicals are not thought to be present in significant quantities within Dorset's catchments, the expanded testing criteria led to their reclassification. All water bodies in the Stour and Poole Harbour catchments are now rated as 'moderate' (a fail status) for chemical condition (see Figure 4.2), primarily due to exceedances of:

- **Mercury and its compounds** (likely from atmospheric deposition from sources in Europe); and
- **Polybrominated diphenyl ethers (PBDEs)** (formerly used in flame-retardant foams, entering catchments via atmospheric deposition and wastewater treatment).

Figure 4.2: The chemical status of water bodies in Dorset [See reference 119]

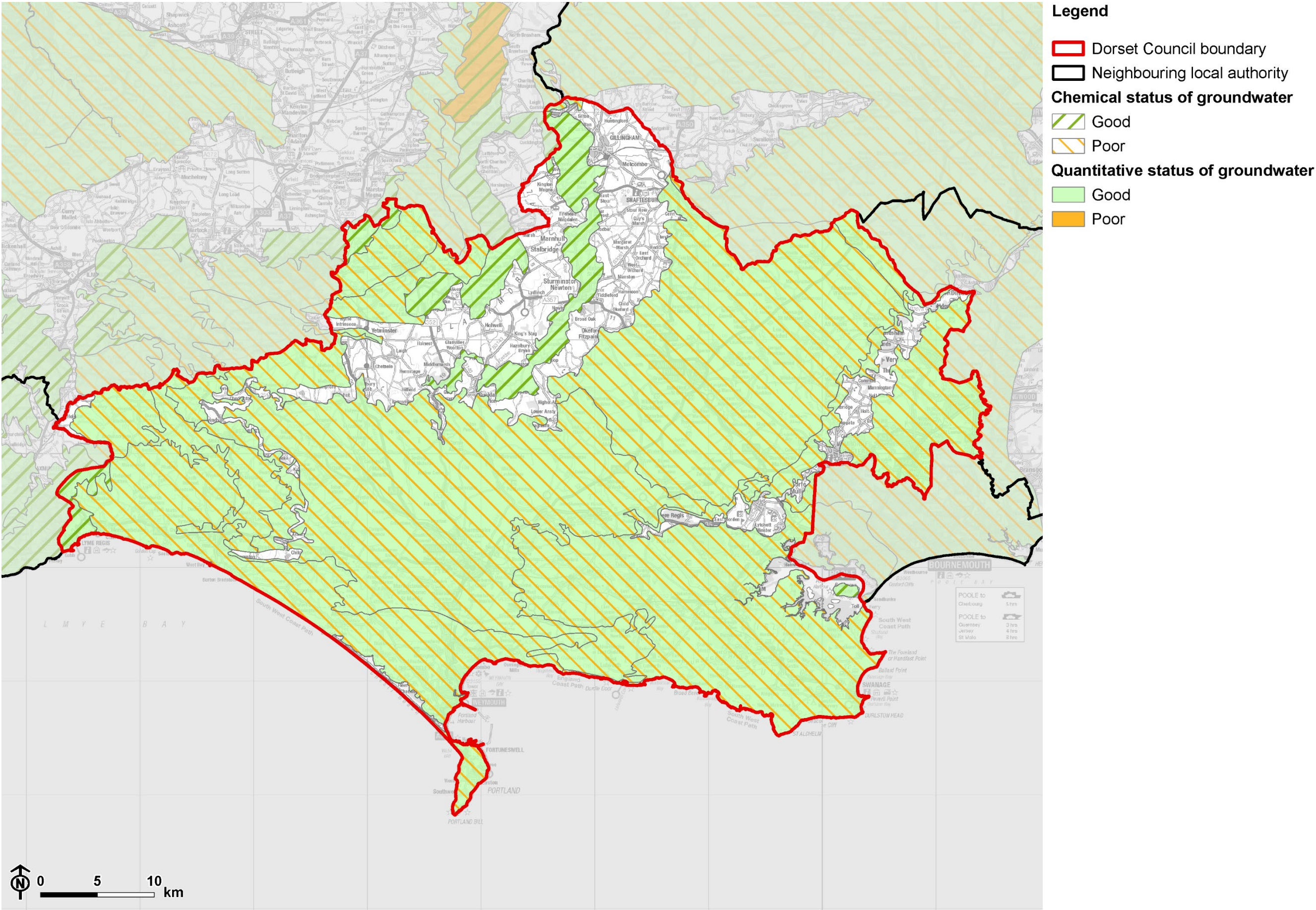


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4.40 The quantitative and chemical status of the groundwater in Dorset is presented in Figure 4.3. The chemical status of the groundwater within the plan area is mainly classified as ‘poor’, with some areas classified as ‘good’ in the west of the plan area. The quantitative status of the groundwater in the plan area, defined as the amount of groundwater available, is classified as ‘good’ except for some northern and central parts of the plan area.

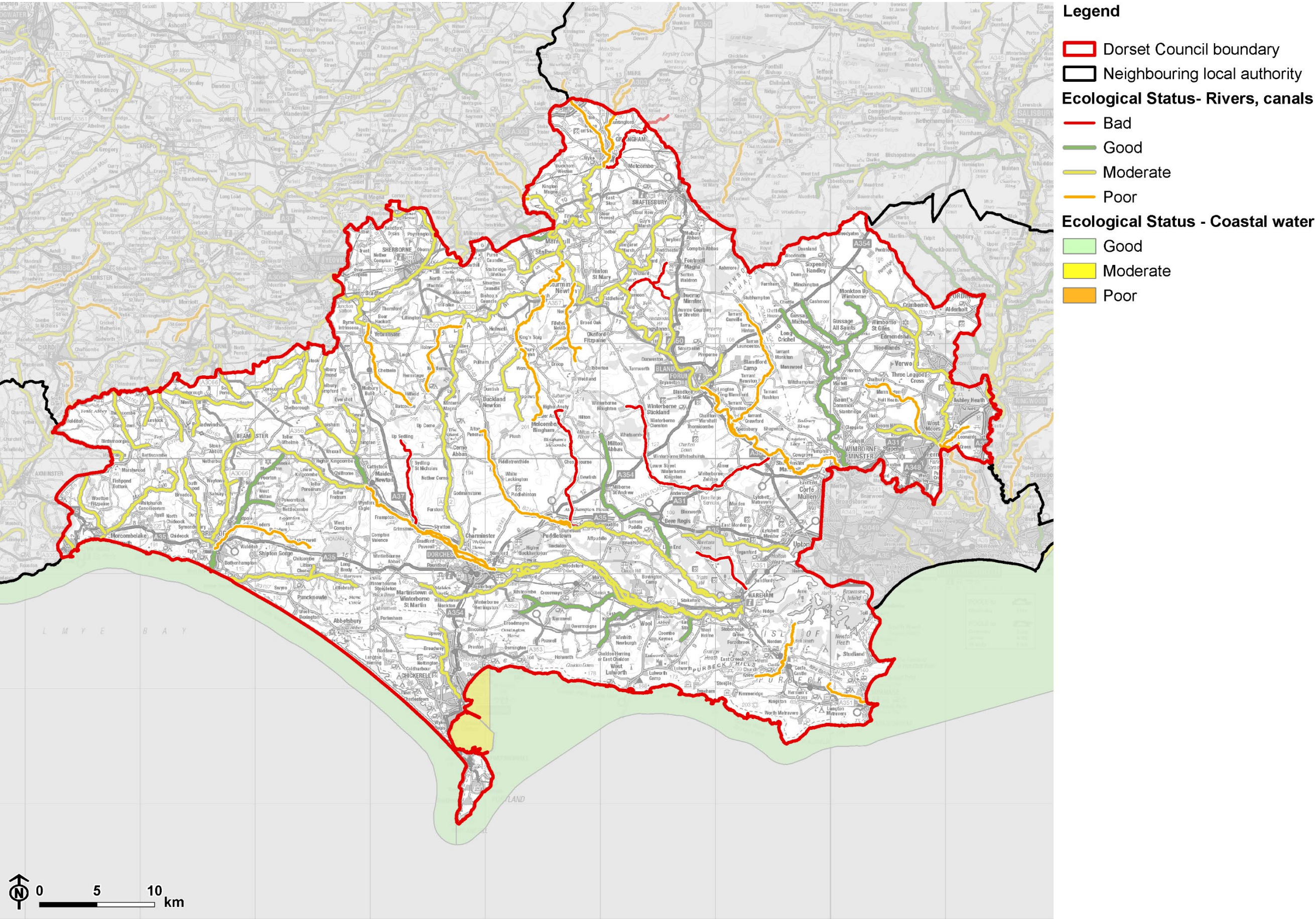
4.41 Nitrate and phosphorus from agriculture is too high across the catchments, leading to eutrophic waters, rising nitrate levels in groundwater used for public supply, and algal mats, particularly in Poole Harbour, where nitrate levels are a primary concern. Phosphorus levels are a driver for action in the Stour, as well as in the River Avon SAC and River Axe SAC, and the Somerset Levels and Moors Ramsar. Nitrogen and phosphorus is an issue across the Chesil and the Fleet SAC, SPA and Ramsar.

Figure 4.3: The chemical and quantitative status of groundwater in Dorset [See reference 120]



4.42 Of the 68 waterbodies assessed in Dorset, only 12 achieved 'good' ecological status, with [33 classified as 'moderate', 17 as 'poor', and 6 failing](#) **[See reference 121]** as shown in Figure 4.4. The primary pressure preventing many waterbodies from reaching good status is agricultural activity, particularly inadequate nutrient management. This is most evident in the Poole Harbour and Stour catchments, where [28 waterbodies are adversely affected by nutrient pollution from farming practices](#) **[See reference 122]**.

Figure 4.4: The ecological status of water bodies in Dorset [See reference 123]



Created by LUC - Figure 4.4: The ecological status of water bodies in Dorset 26/08/2026
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4.43 The Environment Agency and Wessex Water have highlighted the issue of groundwater inundation into the sewerage network within the Dorset Council Local Plan area.

4.44 The infiltration of groundwater into the foul drainage network can cause them to become inundated with water. If left unmanaged, this can cause the drains to fail leading to pollution and a deterioration in groundwater quality or can cause foul drainage sewers to flood in downstream properties.

4.45 Groundwater inundation within the Dorset Plan Area is a particular issue to the south of Blandford Forum, to the southwest and north of Dorchester, Yetminster and within the Piddle Valley.

Environmental and sustainability issues and likely evolution of the issues without the Local Plan

4.46 Analysis of the baseline information has enabled a number of key environmental and sustainability issues relating to water quality facing Dorset to be identified. They are as follows (below each issue, reference is made to the relevant SEA objective that has been identified to help address the issue):

- The ecological and chemical status of most of the water bodies in Dorset are classified as 'poor' or 'bad'. Further deterioration of the chemical, quantitative, and ecological status of the water environment could potentially occur as a result of development, for example through the input of nutrients, pollution and a change in land use (see SEA objective 3); and
- Large areas across the central section of the Dorset Council Local Plan area are classified as groundwater source protection zones. These areas are important for supplying drinking water and therefore the consequences of pollution in these areas are more significant. New development could result in pollution and land use change, compromising the drinking water quality in these areas (see SEA objective 3);
- The infiltration of groundwater into the sewer network, particularly following a rainfall event, may cause it to become inundated with flood water. This can lead to flows of sewerage from the foul drain leading to pollution and a deterioration in water quality generally. This is an issue in some areas of the Dorset Council Local Plan, including those areas to the south of Blandford Forum, to the southwest and north of Dorchester, Yetminster and within the Piddle Valley (see SEA objective 3).

- The quantitative status of the central parts of the plan area is classified as 'poor'. New development could affect the quantity of groundwater, for example through changes in the drainage characteristics of the area and abstraction from rivers and lakes (see SEA objective 3).

4.47 A significant number of water bodies are classed as being 'poor' due to high levels of nutrients and pollutants. Without the new Local Plan, development could further exacerbate these issues or could worsen the situation in other water bodies not currently experiencing the same water quality issues.

SEA objectives

4.48 The draft SEA objectives and accompanying assessment questions designed to capture the objectives of relevant international and national plans, programmes and policies and the relevant environmental and sustainability issues identified in this chapter are set out below. We propose to use these to assess the Dorset Council Local Plan and its reasonable alternatives.

Water SEA objectives and assessment questions

SEA objective 3: Maintain or improve water quality

Assessment questions

- Will the plan/ option protect and improve the ecological and chemical status of freshwater, transitional waters and coastal waters, particularly those with 'poor' or 'bad' status?
- Will the plan/ option ensure that development does not contribute to groundwater quality issues, particularly within Groundwater Source Protection Zones?
- Will the plan/ option ensure that development does not contribute to the groundwater inundation of the foul drainage network?

Relevant SEA topics

- Water

Chapter 5

Air

5.1 This chapter sets out the baseline and policy context for Dorset's air quality. The SEA will consider how the Local Plan can help to ensure good air quality, which is essential to environmental and human health, and is influenced by transport, development patterns, climate resilience and biodiversity.

5.2 Air quality is a measure of the degree of how polluted the air is. Air pollution comprises a mix of particles and gases. The major components of urban air pollution are particulate matter (PM) which are a complex mixture of solid and liquid particles of varying size and composition, and nitrogen dioxide (NO₂) a gas produced by combustion processes from vehicle emissions, power generation and industrial processes.

5.3 There are many sources of air pollution, both natural and man-made. These sources of air pollution include industrial processes, agriculture, vehicle exhaust emissions, energy generation and household heating systems involving gas and wood burners.

5.4 Poor air quality poses the greatest environmental risk to public health in the UK [\[See reference 124\]](#). Exposure to air pollution increases the risk of respiratory and cardiovascular diseases and may exacerbate existing conditions such as asthma. It is estimated that long term exposure to air pollution in the UK has the effect of 28,000 to 36,000 deaths a year [\[See reference 125\]](#). Evidence suggests that areas of poor air quality are also more prevalent in less affluent areas [\[See reference 126\]](#).

5.5 Air pollution also has widespread environmental impacts, affecting the health of plants and animals and compromising biodiversity. Since many air pollutants are also greenhouse gases, poor air quality contributes to climate change and the associated far reaching impacts which are explored in Chapter 6.

5.6 From a financial perspective, it was estimated that nationally, the total cost for the NHS and social care system was likely to be £1.6 billion between 2017 and 2025 for air pollutants ([fine particulate matter and nitrogen dioxide](#) [\[See reference 127\]](#)). In addition, air pollution may result in a decrease in agricultural productivity, leading to reduced crop yields and an adverse economic effect.

Key messages from other plans, programmes and objectives

International

5.7 [The Declaration on Climate, Relief, Recovery and Peace \(COP28 Declaration\) \(2023\)](#) [See reference 128] is an international agreement which seeks to address the complex challenges posed by climate change, particularly in the most vulnerable regions. Although non-binding and outside the formal UNFCCC negotiations, this declaration unites the concerns and proposed solutions of countries and institutions across humanitarian, development, climate, and peace sectors. It aims to urgently enhance climate resilience in vulnerable communities that are most affected by climate-related conflicts and crises.

5.8 [The Glasgow Pact \(UN Framework Convention on Climate Change, 2021\)](#) [See reference 129] The package of decisions consists of a range of agreed items, including strengthened efforts to build resilience to climate change, to curb greenhouse gas emissions and to provide the necessary finance for both. Nations reaffirmed their duty to fulfil the pledge of providing \$100 billion annually from developed to developing countries. And they collectively agreed to work to reduce the gap between existing emission reduction plans and what is required to reduce emissions. They also agreed to phase down unabated coal power and inefficient subsidies for fossil fuels.

5.9 [The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development \(2015\)](#) [See reference 130] adopted by all United Nations Member States, provides a shared blueprint for peace and prosperity for people and the planet and includes 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), designed to achieve a better and more sustainable future for all.

5.10 [The United Nations Paris Climate Change Agreement \(2015\)](#) [See reference 131] is an international agreement to keep global temperature rise this century well below 2 degrees Celsius above pre-industrial levels.

National

5.11 The [National Planning Policy Framework \(2026\)](#) [See reference 132] (NPPF) states in Policy N1: Identifying environmental opportunities and safeguards that “development plans should safeguard and enhance the natural environment, and reflect the wider benefits from natural capital and ecosystem services, by using Local Nature Recovery Strategies, Protected Landscape Management Plans, River Basin

Management Plans, National Forest Strategies, Community Forest Plans and other relevant evidence”. Additionally, plan-making Policy P1: Planning for clean and safe places stipulates that development plans should “consider any wider opportunities to reduce air, water, soil, noise or other forms of pollution, and contribute to compliance with national and local environmental targets and objectives, through the spatial strategy and policies for specific parts of the plan area (such as by identifying opportunities for strategic nature-based solutions”. Plans should take a proactive approach to mitigating and adapting to climate change, taking into account implications for water supply.

5.12 The [Air quality strategy for England \(2023\)](#) [See reference 133] sets out local authorities powers and responsibilities as well as the actions that Defra expects local authorities to take in support of the governments long-term air quality goals, including new PM2.5 targets.

5.13 [Decarbonising Transport: A Better, Greener Britain \(2021\) \(Decarbonising Transport Plan \(DTP\)\)](#) [See reference 134] sets out the Government’s commitments and the actions needed to decarbonise the entire transport system in the UK. It follows on from the Decarbonising Transport: Setting the Challenge report published in 2020. The DTP commits the UK to phasing out the sale of new diesel and petrol heavy goods vehicles by 2040, subject to consultation, in addition to phasing out the sale of polluting cars and vans by 2035. The DTP also sets out how the government will improve public transport and increase support for active travel, as well as creating a net zero rail network by 2050, ensuring net zero domestic aviation emissions by 2040, and a transition to green shipping.

5.14 [The Environment Act 2021](#) [See reference 135] sets statutory targets for the recovery of the natural world in four priority areas: air quality, biodiversity, water, and resource efficiency and waste reduction. It also establishes the Office for Environmental Protection which will act as an impartial and objective body for the protection and improvement of the environment. The Act sets out legislation which covers local air quality management frameworks and the recall of motor vehicles.

5.15 [Jet Zero Strategy Delivering net zero aviation by 2050 \(2020\)](#) [See reference 136] aims to reduce in-sector emissions from aviation by around 50% by 2050. The strategy is underpinned by three principles:

- International leadership: Leading coordinated global efforts to tackle international aviation emissions, including through ongoing work in the International Civil Aviation Organization.
- Delivered in partnership: Working with all parts of the sector and different partners to develop, test, implement and invest in the solutions needed.

- Maximising opportunities: Using the opportunity of the Jet Zero transition to boost the economy, create new jobs, develop new industries, and become a more energy secure nation.

5.16 The Government's [Clean Air Strategy 2019 \(2019\)](#) [See reference 137] sets out the Government's intention to tackle all sources of air pollution, making our air healthier to breathe, protecting nature and boosting the economy. The strategy aims achieve this by driving down the national emissions of pollutants, reducing background pollution, and minimising human exposure to harmful concentrations of pollution. The strategy sets the following targets for reducing emissions against a 2005 baseline:

- particulate matter by 30% by 2020 and 46% by 2030;
- ammonia by 8% by 2020 and 16% by 2030;
- nitrogen oxides by 55% by 2020 and by 73% by 2030; and
- sulphur dioxide by 59% by 2020, and by 88% by 2030.

5.17 [The Road to Zero \(2018\)](#) [See reference 138] sets out new measures towards cleaner road transport, aiming to put the UK at the forefront of the design and manufacturing of zero emission vehicles. It explains how cleaner air, a better environment, zero emission vehicles and a strong, clean economy will be achieved. One of the main aims of the document is for all new cars and vans to be effectively zero emission by 2040.

5.18 [A Green Future: Our 25 Year Plan to Improve the Environment \(2018\)](#) [See reference 139], also known as the 25 Year Environment Plan, sets out the UK government action to help the natural world regain and retain good health. The plan sets a series of goals for improving the environment within a generation and leaving it in a better state than we found it, and includes the following actions relating to achieving clean air:

- meeting legally binding targets to reduce emissions of five damaging air pollutants; this should halve the effects of air pollution on health by 2030
- ending the sale of new conventional petrol and diesel cars and vans by 2040
- maintaining the continuous improvement in industrial emissions by building on existing good practice and the successful regulatory framework

5.19 The 25 Year Plan states that the Government will make sure that chemicals are safely used and managed, and that the levels of harmful chemicals entering the environment (including through agriculture) are significantly reduced by reducing land-based emissions of mercury to air by 50% by 2030.

5.20 [UK Plan for Tackling Roadside Nitrogen Dioxide Concentrations \(2017\)](#) **[See reference 140]** sets out the Government's ambition and actions for delivering a better environment and cleaner air, including £1 billion investment in ultra-low emission vehicles, a £290 million National Productivity Investment Fund, a £11 million Air Quality Grant Fund and £255 million Implementation Fund to help Local Authorities to prepare Air Quality Action Plans and improve air quality, an £89 million Green Bus Fund, £1.2 billion Cycling and Walking Investment Strategy and £100 million to help improve air quality on the National road network.

5.21 [The Environmental Permitting Regulations \(2016\)](#) **[See reference 141]** streamline the legislative system for industrial and waste installations into a single permitting structure for those activities which have the potential to cause harm to human health or the environment. They set out how to prevent or, where that is not practicable, to reduce emissions into air, water and land and to prevent the generation of waste, in order to achieve a high level of protection of the environment and human health.

5.22 [The Air Quality Standards Regulations \(2016\)](#) **[See reference 142]** set out limits on concentrations of outdoor air pollutants that impact public health, most notably particulate matter (PM10 and PM2.5) and nitrogen dioxide (NO2). It also sets out the procedure and requirements for the designation of Air Quality Management Areas (AQMAs).

5.23 The Government's strategic direction for biodiversity, titled [Biodiversity 2020: A strategy for England's wildlife and ecosystem services \(2011\)](#) **[See reference 143]**, includes the following priority actions with respect to air quality and its effects on biodiversity:

- Reduce air pollution impacts on biodiversity through approaches at national, UK, EU and international levels targeted at the sectors which are the source of the relevant pollutants (nitrogen oxides, ozone, sulphur dioxide, ammonia).

5.24 [The Air Quality Strategy for England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland \(2007\)](#) **[See reference 144]** sets out a way forward for work and planning on air quality issues by setting out the air quality standards and objectives to be achieved. It introduces a new policy framework for tackling fine particles and identifies potential new national policy measures which modelling indicates could give further health benefits and move closer towards meeting the Strategy's objectives. The objectives of the strategy are to:

- Further improve air quality in the UK from today and long term; and
- Provide benefits to health quality of life and the environment.

5.25 [The Environmental Protection Act 1990](#) [See reference 145] makes provision for the improved control of pollution to the air, water and land by regulating the management of waste and the control of emissions. Seeks to ensure that decisions pertaining to the environment are made in an integrated manner, in collaboration with appropriate authorities, non-governmental organisations and other persons.

Baseline information

5.26 The only statutory target for air pollution which the UK are currently failing to meet is with respect to roadside nitrogen dioxide concentrations [See reference 146]. This is reflected in local air quality monitoring for Dorset, which indicates that nitrogen dioxide targets in some parts of the plan area are not being met.

5.27 Prior to the establishment of Dorset Council in April 2019, the individual councils published separate local air quality reports to fulfil their statutory duty to review and assess air quality under Part IV of the Environment Act 1985. In 2020, the former local authority areas were amalgamated into one report.

5.28 [The Dorset Council Air Quality Annual Status Report](#) [See reference 147] indicates that the main source of air pollution in the authority area is NO₂, generated as a result of road traffic. Consequently, two Air Quality Management Areas (AQMAs) were declared, relating to emissions from motorised vehicles:

- Chideock AQMA (shown in Figure 5.1); and
- Dorchester AQMA (revoked in March 2025).

5.29 The main pollutant of concern in the authority area is NO₂. Air quality monitoring over 2023 demonstrates a decrease in pollutant concentrations compared to 2022, and remaining below pre-pandemic 2019 levels. However, some exceedances of NO₂ were recorded within the Chideock AQMA, occurring at two sites within Chideock Hill, although are displaying a decrease compared within 2022 concentrations.

5.30 Dorchester AQMA was revoked in March 2025, due to sites remaining at least 10% below the minimum objective.

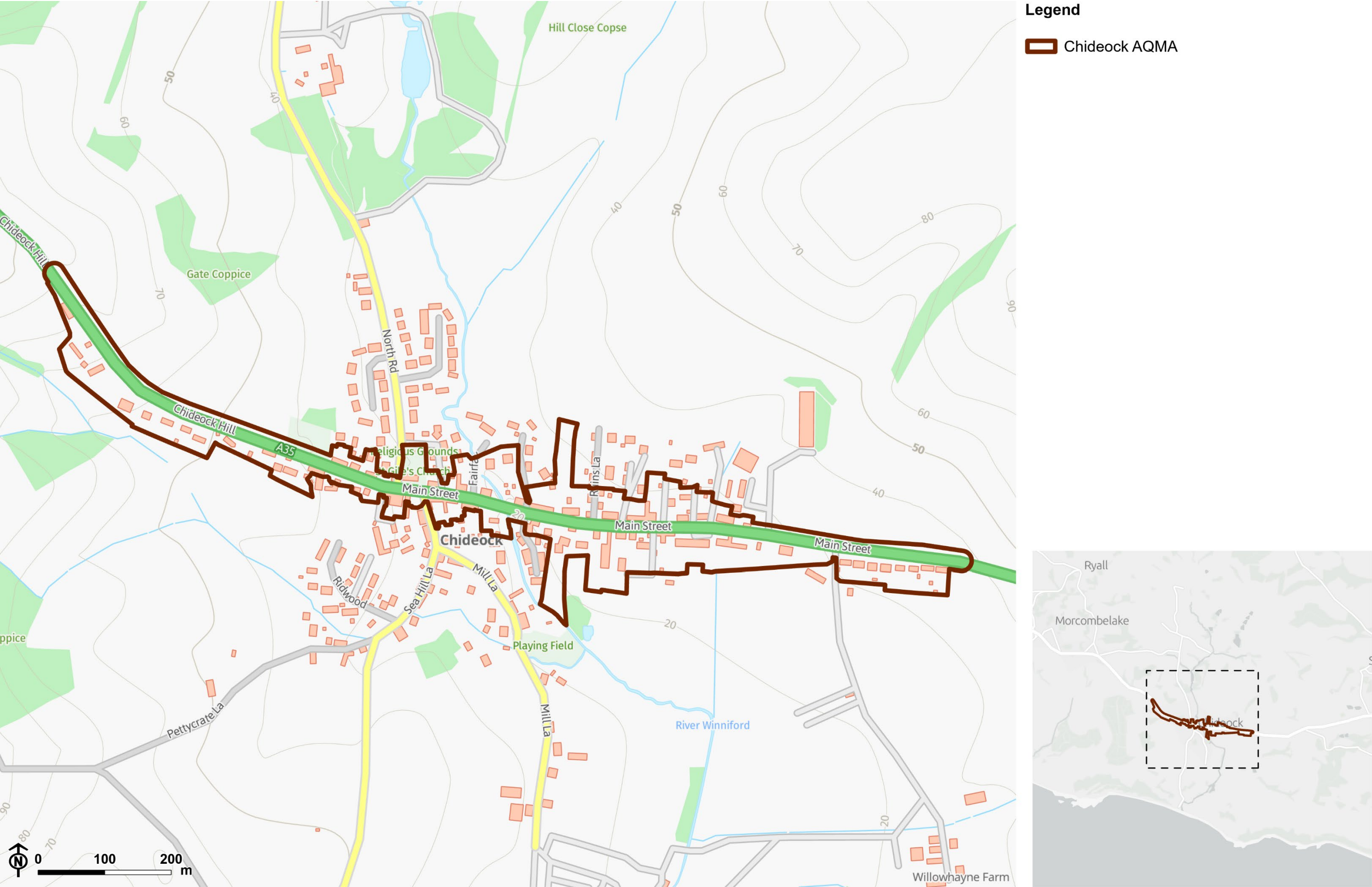
5.31 Additionally, air quality in both the former East Dorset and Purbeck districts remains very good, with no identified AQMA areas for concern, exceedances, or sites within 10% of the air quality objective. Further to this, across four sites in Dorset, there were no recorded exceedances of the PM₁₀ annual mean objective, and all sites remain below the future 2040 target of 10µg/m³.

Neighbouring AQMAs

5.32 The Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole (BCP) urban area lies at the heart of the South East Dorset functional area, and although sits largely outside the Dorset Council area, its proximity to Dorset Council's administrative boundary means that air pollution from the conurbation may still affect parts of Dorset.

5.33 BCP Council previously had three AQMAs due to NO₂ concerns. However, these have all been revoked following significant reductions in traffic-related emissions. This improvement in the adjacent urban area contributes positively to Dorset's overall air quality profile.

Figure 5.1: A map showing the extent of the Air Quality Management Area in Chideock [See reference 148]



Created by LUC - Figure 5.1: The extent of the Air Quality Management Area in Chideock 05/08/2026
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Environmental and sustainability issues and likely evolution of the issues without the Local Plan

5.34 Analysis of the baseline information has enabled a number of key environmental and sustainability issues relating to air quality facing Dorset to be identified. They are as follows (below each issue, reference is made to the relevant SEA objective that has been identified to help address the issue):

- Air pollution as a result of industrial processes, agriculture, vehicle exhaust emissions, energy generation and household heating systems involving gas and wood burners are causing widespread environmental and health problems (see SEA objective 4);
- Vehicle emissions resulting in elevated concentrations of nitrogen dioxide both nationally, as the UK are failing to meet their statutory target, and locally in Chideock (see SEA objective 4); and

5.35 Without the new Local Plan it is less likely that air pollution associated with vehicular travel will be suitably addressed. The new Local Plan provides the opportunity to address this issue by promoting sustainable travel and ensuring that the potential air quality impacts associated with new development are assessed and managed accordingly (see SEA objective 4).

SEA objectives

5.36 The draft SEA objectives and accompanying assessment questions designed to capture the objectives of relevant international and national plans, programmes and policies and the relevant environmental and sustainability issues identified in this chapter are set out below. We propose to use these to assess the Dorset Council Local Plan and its reasonable alternatives.

Air quality SEA objectives and assessment questions

SEA objective 4: Maintain or improve air quality

Assessment questions

- Will the plan/ option maintain or improve air quality?

- Will the plan/ option ensure that development does not contribute to air quality issues, particularly within Air Quality Management Areas and where exceedances in the concentration of airborne contaminants have been recorded?

Relevant SEA topics

- Air
- Human Health
- Climatic Factors

Chapter 6

Climatic Factors

6.1 This chapter sets out the baseline and policy context for climate change mitigation and adaptation in Dorset. The SEA will consider how the Local Plan can help to address climate change because it affects where and how development takes place, shapes energy and transport choices, and has major implications for health, biodiversity, water resources and flood risk.

6.2 Climate change is the long term variation in expected weather patterns as a result of the growing concentration of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere.

6.3 Human activities since the start of the industrial revolution are largely attributed to causing the spike in the concentration of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere and the corresponding change in global climate. The majority of global greenhouse emissions are from the combustion of fossil fuels such as oil, coal and natural gas for energy and heat production (25%). Other significant human activities include deforestation, changes in land use and agriculture which contributes to 24% of global emissions [\[See reference 149\]](#).

6.4 Greenhouse gases absorb energy and emit it as thermal energy, causing a warming effect known as the greenhouse effect. Water vapour makes the highest contribution to the greenhouse gas effect, followed by carbon dioxide, then methane.

6.5 Climate projections [\[See reference 150\]](#) suggest an increased chance of milder, wetter winters and hot, drier summers along with an increase in the frequency and intensity of extreme events in the UK.

6.6 The possible environment, social and economic impacts of climate change are complex, far reaching and potentially catastrophic. It has been reported that climate change may cause the widespread extinction of species, global famine and the collapse of the global economy. Immediate and ambitious action may be needed to reduce the concentration of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere and address the climate change issue, which has been acknowledged by the declaration of a climate emergency nationally by the UK Parliament and locally by Dorset Council.

6.7 Since there is approximately a 40 year lag in the atmosphere between the cause and effect, a degree of future climate change is inevitable, irrespective of what action is taken to reduce greenhouse gas emissions now. Carefully planning is needed to adapt and avoid increased vulnerability to the range of impacts arising from future climate change.

Key messages from other plans, programmes and objectives

International

6.8 [The Declaration on Climate, Relief, Recovery and Peace \(COP28 Declaration\) \(2023\)](#) **[See reference 151]** is an international agreement which seeks to address the complex challenges posed by climate change, particularly in the most vulnerable regions. Although non-binding and outside the formal UNFCCC negotiations, this declaration unites the concerns and proposed solutions of countries and institutions across humanitarian, development, climate, and peace sectors. It aims to urgently enhance climate resilience in vulnerable communities that are most affected by climate-related conflicts and crises.

6.9 [The Convention on Biological Diversity \(2022\)](#). **[See reference 152]** COP15 Kunming-Montreal adopted the “Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework” (GBF), including four goals and 23 targets for achievement by 2030.

6.10 [The Glasgow Pact \(UN Framework Convention on Climate Change, 2021\)](#) **[See reference 153]**. The package of decisions consists of a range of agreed items, including strengthened efforts to build resilience to climate change, to curb greenhouse gas emissions and to provide the necessary finance for both. Nations reaffirmed their duty to fulfil the pledge of providing \$100 billion annually from developed to developing countries. And they collectively agreed to work to reduce the gap between existing emission reduction plans and what is required to reduce emissions. They also agreed to phase down unabated coal power and inefficient subsidies for fossil fuels.

6.11 [United Nations Declaration on Forests and Land Use \(COP26 Declaration\) \(2021\)](#) **[See reference 154]** is an international commitment to halt and reverse forest loss and land degradation by 2030 while delivering sustainable development and promoting an inclusive rural transformation.

6.12 [The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development \(2015\)](#) **[See reference 155]**, adopted by all United Nations Member States, provides a shared blueprint for peace and prosperity for people and the planet and includes 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), designed to achieve a better and more sustainable future for all.

6.13 [The United Nations Paris Climate Change Agreement \(2015\)](#) **[See reference 156]** is an international agreement to keep global temperature rise this century well below 2 degrees Celsius above pre-industrial levels.

National

6.14 The [National Planning Policy Framework \(2026\)](#) [See reference 157] (NPPF) supports climate change mitigation and adaption, energy efficiency and waste minimisation measures for new development including through the promotion of renewable energy schemes Plan-making Policy CC1: Planning for climate change stipulates that development plans should take a “proactive approach to mitigating climate change and supporting the transition to net zero, in accordance with the objectives and provisions of the Climate Change Act 2008. They should also take a proactive approach to adapting to climate change, taking into account the implications of extreme weather and long-term climate trends including overheating, wildfires, drought, flood risk, coastal change, water supply, biodiversity and landscapes”.

6.15 Policy F1: Assessing flood risk for plan-making requires development plans to ‘take a risk-based approach when identifying suitable locations for development, taking into account all sources of flood risk and the current and future impacts of climate change’.

6.16 The UK Government’s [Warm Homes Plan 2026](#) [See reference 158] sets out how it intends to help people find ways to save money on energy bills and transform the UK’s ageing building stock into low-carbon homes. In particular it proposes to help households to upgrade their homes by providing grants to lower the cost of solar panels, insulation, batteries and heat pumps.

6.17 The [UK’s Modern Industrial Strategy 2025](#) [See reference 159] is a 10-year plan to increase business investment and grow the industries of the future in the UK. The Strategy will make it quicker and easier for business to invest and will provide the certainty and stability needed for long-term investment decisions. It specifically identifies and proposes support for eight sectors, including clean energy industries. This includes support for all types of wind energy, hydrogen, carbon capture usage and storage (CCUS) and heat pumps.

6.18 The [Clean Energy Industries Sector Plan \(2025\)](#) [See reference 160] is the UK government’s strategic initiative, under the Modern Industrial Strategy, to position the nation as a global leader in frontier clean energy technologies by 2035. The Plan sets out an ambition to double investment across key clean energy industries, such as wind (onshore, offshore, floating), nuclear fission, fusion, hydrogen, carbon capture, usage and storage (CCUS), greenhouse gas removals, and heat pumps, to over £30 billion per year, while continuing to support other vital technologies like solar, long-duration energy storage and bioenergy. It aims to catalyse private sector engagement by deploying targeted public investment, including more than £8.3 billion

through Great British Energy and Great British Energy-Nuclear up to 2029 and a Clean Energy Supply Chain Fund, and by reducing barriers to investment, thereby providing industry certainty and encouraging deployment and innovation.

6.19 The [Hydrogen Update to the Market \(2025\)](#) [See reference 161] provides a detailed overview of the UK's hydrogen sector progress in the first half of 2025 and outlines forthcoming opportunities as part of the government's Clean Energy Superpower and Growth Missions. It reports substantial milestones, including the shortlist of 27 projects advancing to Hydrogen Allocation Round 2 (HAR 2), with HAR 3 and HAR 4 scheduled from 2026 and 2028 respectively; HAR 1 winners have begun construction, unlocking over 700 skilled jobs across industrial regions. Significant investment commitments include over £500 million allocated toward developing the first regional hydrogen transport and storage network, aiming for operation by 2031, supported by a forthcoming Hydrogen to Power Business Model in 2026. The report highlights plans to abolish Climate Change Levy charges on electricity used in hydrogen electrolysis, regulatory and sector development initiatives, including skills and infrastructure planning.

6.20 The [Onshore Wind Strategy \(2025\)](#) [See reference 162] presents the country's first dedicated strategy to accelerate onshore wind deployment as a key component of its Clean Power 2030 mission. The strategy sets a target of deploying 27-29 GW of onshore wind capacity across Great Britain by 2030, significantly increasing from existing capacity of over 16 GW, and backed by over 40 actions to tackle barriers such as planning delays, aviation and defence conflicts, grid access, and community engagement. New measures include the creation of an Onshore Wind Council to oversee implementation, potential expansion of the Clean Industry Bonus to support UK-based supply chains, workforce and skills development initiatives, and a programme to repower ageing turbines while smoothing the consenting and survey process for new projects. The strategy also outlines mechanisms to ensure community benefit through up to £70 million annually (£5,000 per MW) in local investment, while projecting creation of up to 45,000 direct and indirect jobs by 2030. The overarching aim is to deliver affordable, home-grown renewable energy, reduce reliance on volatile gas markets, and bolster energy security through rapid onshore wind expansion.

6.21 The [Carbon Budget and Growth Delivery Plan \(2025\)](#) [See reference 163] sets out how the government will meet its statutory carbon budgets and secure the benefits of this transition for people and businesses. The plan sets out a package of quantified and unquantified proposals and policies and associated timescales and delivery risks. This includes actions around energy security and lower bills, such as incentivising new clean electricity generating projects in Great Britain.

6.22 [The Clean Power 2030 Action Plan \(2024\)](#) [See reference 164] aims to secure a fully clean electricity system by 2030, enhancing energy security, reducing fossil fuel reliance, and cutting emissions. It focuses on expanding renewables, improving grid infrastructure, accelerating planning, and fostering investment through Great British Energy. Flexible energy solutions like battery storage and hydrogen aim to support stability, while regulatory reforms aim to lower consumer bills. With £40 billion in annual investment, the plan aims to drive economic growth, job creation, and long-term sustainability, as well as position the UK as a leader in renewable energy and advancing the net-zero transition.

6.23 [The Policy Statement on Onshore Wind \(2024\)](#) [See reference 165] outlined a commitment to double onshore wind energy capacity by 2030. To achieve this, the policy statement removed previous planning restrictions specific to onshore wind projects in England, placing them on equal footing with other energy developments within the NPPF. This has since been followed by the Onshore Wind Taskforce Strategy (2025) referred to above, which provides the current strategic framework for accelerating onshore wind deployment to support the Government's 2030 clean power targets.

6.24 [The State of the UK Climate \(2024\)](#) [See reference 166] is the tenth in the annual series of reports that provide a summary of the UK weather and climate through the calendar year 2023, alongside the historical context for a number of essential climate variables. It provides an accessible, authoritative and up-to-date assessment of UK climate trends, variations and extremes based on the most up to date observational datasets of climate quality.

6.25 [The Carbon Budget Delivery Plan \(2023\)](#) [See reference 167] explains how the Government intends to meet its legally-binding climate goals, setting out a package of quantified and unquantified proposals and policies, and associated timescales and delivery risks this also includes:

- wider matters in connection with carbon budgets
- the contribution of these proposals and policies to sustainable development
- the impact the package has on sectors of the economy

6.26 [Powering Up Britain: Net Zero Growth Plan \(2023\)](#) [See reference 168] sets out the approach of the Government to secure growth of the national income while achieving net zero greenhouse gas emissions by 2050. The key policies and proposals of the Strategy sit below a number of overarching principles: acceleration of clean growth including through recommendations for private and public investment to meet carbon budgets; providing support to improve business and industry energy efficiency; improving energy efficiency in the housing stock including through low

carbon heating; accelerating the shift to low carbon transport; delivering clean, smart, flexible power; enhancing the benefits and value of our natural resources; leading in the public sector to meet emissions targets; and ensure Government leadership to drive clean growth.

6.27 [The Environment Improvement Plan 2023](#) [See reference 169] for England is the first revision of the 25YEP – it builds on the 25YEP vision with a new plan setting out how they will work with landowners, communities and businesses to deliver each of our goals for improving the environment, matched with interim targets to measure progress. Taking these actions will help us restore nature, reduce environmental pollution, and increase the prosperity of our country.

6.28 [Understanding climate adaptation and the third National Adaptation Programme \(NAP3\)](#) [See reference 170] (2023) sets out visions for the following sectors:

- People and the Built Environment – “to promote communities, homes, buildings, cultural heritage and places that are resilient to climate change impacts, including flooding, heatwaves, drought and coastal change, and are designed and managed to adapt to future climate risks.”
- Infrastructure – “ensure an infrastructure network that is resilient to today’s natural hazards and prepared for the future changing climate.”
- Natural Environment – “a healthy and resilient natural environment that can adapt to climate change, recover from environmental pressures and continue to provide ecosystem services, biodiversity benefits and nature-based solutions.”
- Business and Industry – “UK businesses are resilient to extreme weather and prepared for future risks and opportunities from climate change.”
- Local Government – “Local Government plays a leading role in embedding climate adaptation and resilience into decision-making, planning, investment and service delivery.”

6.29 [The UK Climate Change Risk Assessment 2022](#) [See reference 171] outlines the UK government and devolved administrations’ position on the key climate change risks and opportunities that the UK faces today. The risk assessment considers sixty-one UK-wide climate risks and opportunities cutting across multiple sectors of the economy and prioritises the following eight risk areas for action in the next two years:

- risks to the viability and diversity of terrestrial and freshwater habitats and species from multiple hazards
- risks to soil health from increased flooding and drought
- risks to natural carbon stores and sequestration from multiple hazards

- risks to crops, livestock and commercial trees from multiple climate hazards
- risks to supply of food, goods and vital services due to climate-related collapse of supply chains and distribution networks
- risks to people and the economy from climate-related failure of the power system
- risks to human health, wellbeing and productivity from increased exposure to heat in homes and other buildings
- multiple risks to the UK from climate change impacts overseas

6.30 Since this time, the process has moved forwards, with the publication of the [CCRA4 Independent Assessment \(2026\)](#) [See reference 172] which provides the latest evidence on climate risks and adaptation needs.

6.31 [The Environment Act 2021](#) [See reference 173] sets statutory targets for the recovery of the natural world in four priority areas: air quality, biodiversity, water, and resource efficiency and waste reduction. The Environment Act will deliver:

- Long-term targets to improve air quality biodiversity, water, and waste reduction and resource efficiency.
- A target on ambient PM2.5 concentrations.
- A target to halt the decline of nature by 2030.
- Environmental Improvement Plans, including interim targets.
- A cycle of environmental monitoring and reporting.
- Environmental Principles embedded in domestic policy making.
- Office for Environmental Protection to uphold environmental law.

6.32 [The Energy Performance of Buildings Regulations \(2021\)](#) [See reference 174] seek to improve the energy efficiency of buildings, reducing their carbon emissions and lessening the impact of climate change. The Regulations require the adoption of a standard methodology for calculating energy performance and minimum requirements for energy performance, reported through Energy Performance Certificates and Display Energy Certificates.

6.33 [The Waste Management Plan for England \(2021\)](#) [See reference 175] sets out the measures for England to work towards a zero waste economy.

6.34 [The National Infrastructure Strategy: Fairer, faster greener \(2020\)](#) [See reference 176] sets out plans to transform UK infrastructure in order to level up the

country, strengthen the Union and achieve net zero emissions by 2050. This will be enabled by clear support for private investment and through a comprehensive set of reforms to the way infrastructure is delivered.

6.35 [The Sixth Carbon Budget report \(2020\)](#) [See reference 177] is based on an extensive programme of analysis, consultation and consideration by the Committee and its staff, the report builds on the evidence published last year for their Net Zero advice. Their recommended pathway requires a 78% reduction in UK territorial emissions between 1990 and 2035. In effect, bringing forward the UK's previous 80% target by nearly 15 years.

6.36 [Decarbonising Transport: A Better, Greener Britain \(2021\)](#) [See reference 178] out the strategic priorities for the new Transport Decarbonisation Plan (TDP), published in July 2021, with information on assumptions updated in 2023. It sets out in detail what government, business and society will need to do to deliver the significant emissions reduction needed across all modes of transport, putting us on a pathway to achieving carbon budgets and net zero emissions across every single mode of transport by 2050. This document acknowledges that while there have been recently published strategies to reduce greenhouse gas emissions in individual transport modes, transport as a whole sector needs to go further and more quickly, therefore the TDP takes a coordinated, cross-modal approach to deliver the transport sector's contribution to both carbon budgets and net zero. The TDP also highlights the wider benefits of decarbonisation, including improved air quality, public health, economic growth and job creation.

6.37 [Flood and Coastal Erosion Risk Management: Policy Statement \(2020\)](#) [See reference 179] sets out the Government's long-term ambition to create a nation more resilient to future flood and coastal erosion risk, and in doing so, reduce the risk of harm to people, the environment and the economy. The Policy Statement sets out five policy areas which will drive this ambition. These are:

- Upgrading and expanding our national flood defences and infrastructure;
- Managing the flow of water more effectively;
- Harnessing the power of nature to reduce flood and coastal erosion risk and achieve multiple benefits;
- Better preparing our communities; and
- Enabling more resilient places through a catchment-based approach.

6.38 [The Waste \(Circular Economy\) \(Amendment\) Regulations \(2020\)](#) [See reference 180] seek to prevent waste generation and to monitor and assess the implementation of measures included in waste prevention programmes. They set out

requirements to justify not separating waste streams close to source for re-use, recycling or other recovery operations, prohibit incineration and landfilling of waste unless such treatment process represent the best environmental outcome in accordance with the waste hierarchy. The Regulations set out when waste management plans and in waste prevention programmes are required. The Regulations focus on the circular economy as a means for businesses to maximise the value of waste and waste treatment.

6.39 [The Climate Change Act 2008 sets](#) **[See reference 181]** targets for UK greenhouse gas emission reductions of at least 100% by 2050, against a 1990 baseline (this was previously 80% but was updated to a net zero target in June 2019).

6.40 [The Planning and Energy Act \(2008\)](#) **[See reference 182]** enables local planning authorities to set requirements for carbon reduction and renewable energy provision. It should be noted that while the Housing Standards Review proposed to repeal some of these provisions, at the time of writing there have been no amendments to the Planning and Energy Act.

6.41 [The Environmental Noise Regulations \(2006\)](#) **[See reference 183]** require regular noise mapping and action planning for road, rail and aviation noise and noise in large urban areas. They also require Noise Action Plans based on the maps for road and rail noise and noise in large urban areas. The Action Plans identify Important Areas (areas exposed to the highest levels of noise) and suggest ways the relevant authorities can reduce these. Major airports and those which affect large urban areas are also required to produce and publish their own Noise Action Plans separately. The Regulations do not apply to noise from domestic activities such as noise created by neighbours; at workplaces; inside means of transport; or military activities in military areas.

Local

6.42 [Dorset Council's Natural Environment, Climate and Ecology Strategy 2023 to 25 \(2025\)](#) **[See reference 184]** (refresh) aims to create a carbon neutral, nature positive, and resilient Dorset through a clean, green, and fair transition that supports prosperous, stronger, and healthier communities. It focuses on three main challenges: reducing greenhouse gas emissions to address climate change, protecting and enhancing ecosystems to reverse biodiversity loss, and adapting to unavoidable environmental impacts to build resilience. The strategy has four broad outcomes it aims to achieve:

- Net Zero Council 2040 and Net Zero Dorset 2050: Net zero emissions from power, heat, transport, construction, food, consumables and waste;
- Nature Positive Dorset 2030: At least 30% of our land, rivers and seas and nature-positive by 2030;
- prosperity through green growth: Green jobs, skills and investment for low carbon and nature sectors; and
- stronger, healthier communities: Healthier, cheaper to run homes and safer more resilient communities.

6.43 [The Dorset Local Nature Partnership's Vision and Strategy \(2023\)](#) [See [reference 185](#)] sets out the following strategic priorities for the partnership (listed in Chapter 2 above), with one specifically referring to biodiversity:

- Natural capital – increasing investment: Dorset has some exceptional natural assets which already underpin the economic and social wellbeing of the county, yet it is still declining in quality and quantity and needs greater investment. We will facilitate funding and lobby for more;

6.44 [The Dorset National Landscape Management Plan 2026 – 2031 \(2026\)](#) [See [reference 186](#)] has the following objectives relating to climate change:

- Support measures to increase energy efficiency;
- Develop understanding of a dynamic landscape and changing climate.
- Support renewable energy production where compatible with the objectives of National Landscape designation;
- Ensure environmental resilience and adaptation to change at a landscape scale.
- Discourage practices that do not support natural processes or allow evolution with environmental change.

Baseline information

6.45 Climate change presents a global risk, with a range of different environmental, social and economic impacts that are likely to be felt within Dorset across numerous receptors. A key challenge in protecting the environment will be to tackle the causes and consequences of climate change. The consequences include predictions of warmer, drier summers and wetter winters with more severe weather events all year, as well as higher sea levels and increased river flooding. A strong reaction is required from planning to ensure appropriate action can be taken to help species and

habitats adapt and to enable the agricultural sector to continue to deliver diverse, affordable and good quality produce.

6.46 There has been a general trend towards warmer average temperatures in recent years. 2024 was provisionally the fourth warmest year on record for the UK, with a mean temperature of 9.78°C, which is 0.64°C above the 1991-2020 average. Only 2022, 2023 and 2014 recorded higher average temperatures. [All the top ten warmest years for the UK in the series from 1884 have occurred since 2000, with five of them in the most recent decade.](#) [See reference 187]

6.47 [The Government's most recent climate projections](#) [See reference 188] suggest that there is an increased chance of milder, wetter winters and hot, drier summers in the southwest of England. It also predicts an increase in the frequency and intensity of extreme events in the UK.

6.48 The carbon footprint of an individual, event or a product is a measure of the amount of gases that cause climate change (known as greenhouse gases) which it releases into the atmosphere.

6.49 A carbon footprint may be calculated in terms of greenhouse gas emissions, which is a measure of the release of greenhouse gases, or carbon emissions, which is a measure of the equivalent amount of carbon dioxide.

6.50 Within the Dorset Council Local Plan area, territorial carbon dioxide emissions within the scope of influence of Dorset Council, have decreased by 38.3% between 2005 and 2024, declining from 2,640.5kT CO₂e to 1,591.2 kT CO₂e. [See reference 189]

6.51 The total carbon emissions may be split into industrial and commercial, domestic and transport sources.

6.52 The highest contribution of greenhouse gas emissions within the Dorset Plan Area is from transport sources which provides 49.9% of emissions. Domestic sources provide 32.1% and industry & commercial 18.0% of the total carbon emissions within the Dorset Plan Area.

6.53 The carbon emissions from industrial & commercial and domestic sources have reduced by 30.2% and 27.5% respectively between 2016 and 2024 (Table 6.1). This represents a significant decrease in greenhouse gas emissions from these sources.

6.54 Carbon emissions from transport sources have only reduced by 16.6% during the period between 2016 and 2024, representing a smaller decrease in carbon emissions during this period.

Table 6.1: A table showing the carbon emissions according to industrial and commercial, domestic and transport sources within the Dorset Council Local Plan area (2016-2024)

Sector	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024
Industry & Commercial	348.1	308.5	322.4	289.3	257.7	284.0	274.5	245.0	242.8
Domestic	618.5	580.0	570.0	543.6	534.2	536.5	475.2	444.0	448.2
Transport	825.9	822.4	805.4	777.5	615.0	728.7	693.7	692.5	688.6
Total*	1,792	1,710	1,697	1,610	1,406	1,549	1,443	1,382	1,380

(source: <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/uk-local-authority-and-regional-greenhouse-gas-emissions-statistics-2005-to-2024>)

It should be noted that the figures in Table 6.1 above do not account for large industrial sites, railways, motorways, land-use, livestock and soils.

6.55 Carbon emissions from industrial & commercial and domestic sources have decreased every year between 2012 and 2016, displaying a downward trend in carbon emissions from these sources.

6.56 Furthermore, carbon emissions from transport sources have declined significantly in the long-term, although there was an 18.5% increase in emissions between 2020 and 2021, reflecting post COVID-19 travel and freight demand. Carbon emissions from transport sources dipped again in 2022.

6.57 Renewable energy is recognised as an important contributor to reducing reliance on fossil fuels and adapting to climate change. Within the South West of England, there was a total of 201,361 sites that were capable of generating renewable energy across wind, solar, wave, hydro and biomass renewable sources in 2023. This represents 13.4% of all the sites within the UK that generate renewable energy. In 2023, the South West of England generated a total of 5,589.4GWh of renewable energy.

6.58 The use of renewable sources to generate electricity and heat reduces the consumption of fossil fuels, which leads to lower emissions of greenhouse gases.

6.59 In 2023, a total of 14,207 photovoltaic panels were installed in Dorset. This is an increase on 2014 when 5,001 photovoltaic panels were installed.

6.60 The total capacity of renewable energy in the plan area was 358MW in 2023 (Table 6.3).

6.61 The vast majority of renewable electricity is derived from solar photovoltaics in the Dorset Council Local Plan area (96%), with contributions also from landfill gas (2%) and anaerobic digestion (1.4%).

Table 6.2: Installed capacity of renewable energy (MW) within the Dorset Council Local Plan area in 2026 [See reference 190]

Capacity	Photovoltaics	Onshore Wind	Hydro	Anaerobic Digestion	Landfill Gas	Total
Installed capacity (MW)	339.4	9.2	10.0	3.9	3.0	365.5
% of total installed capacity	92.9%	2.5%	2.7%	1.1%	0.8%	100.0%

6.62 In 2022, three solar farms were given approval. Additionally, Alaska Wind Farm LLP acquired refurbished four wind turbines for installation, near Wareham. Now fully operational, the wind farm is set to generate 17GWh annually and will operate up to 2045.

6.63 As of 2025, the Dorset Green Hydrogen project is fully operational. The project represents the first commercially operational green hydrogen production facility in the South West of England, producing green hydrogen from renewable electricity inputs.

Environmental and sustainability issues and likely evolution of the issues without the Local Plan

6.64 Analysis of the baseline information has enabled a number of key environmental and sustainability issues relating to climatic factors facing Dorset to be identified. They are as follows (below each issue, reference is made to the relevant SEA objective that has been identified to help address the issue):

- Elevated concentrations of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere causing climate change (see SEA objective 5).
- Development may result in an increase in carbon emissions from industrial and commercial, domestic and transport sources, both in terms of total emissions and emissions per capita, contributing to future climate change (see SEA objective 5).
- Whilst total carbon emissions across the Dorset Council Local Plan area are decreasing consistently, transport emissions exhibited short-term fluctuations between 2013-2016, and 2020-2021 (see SEA objective 5).
- Immediate and ambitious action, both locally and nationally, is needed to meet the national target of 'net zero' carbon emissions by 2050 and address the climate change issue (see SEA objective 5).
- Development must be carefully planned to avoid increased vulnerability to the range of impacts arising from climate change, ensuring that the area is resilient to the effects of future climate change (see SEA objective 5).

6.65 The new Local Plan offers an opportunity to update Dorset's approach to managing the effects of the changing climate and associated weather events, particularly in the design of new buildings, whole developments and green infrastructure. Therefore, without the new Local Plan these issues are less likely to be effectively addressed (see SEA objective 5).

SEA objectives

6.66 The draft SEA objective and accompanying assessment questions designed to capture the objectives of relevant international and national plans, programmes and policies and the relevant environmental and sustainability issues identified in this chapter are set out below. We propose to use these to assess the Dorset Council Local Plan and its reasonable alternatives.

Climatic factors SEA objectives and assessment questions

SEA objective 5: To limit climate change and improve resilience to future climate change

Assessment questions

- Will the plan/ option mitigate climate change by contributing to cutting the emission of greenhouse gases?
- Will the plan/ option adapt to future climate change by ensuring that new development is resilient to future climatic conditions?
- Will the plan/ option increase the use of renewable energy?

Relevant SEA topics

- Climatic Factors
- Air

Chapter 7

Flooding and Coastal Change

7.1 This chapter sets out the baseline and policy context for Dorset's flooding and coastal change. The SEA will consider how the Local Plan can help to ensure resilience to flooding and coastal change, which is essential to support the human population, climate resilience and biodiversity of Dorset.

7.2 Flooding is a natural phenomenon which involves the temporary covering by water of land not normally covered by water.

7.3 Flooding can devastate natural habitats, force people to leave their homes and businesses, destroy livelihoods, and take lives.

7.4 In the UK, there are currently 6.3 million homes and businesses at risk of flooding **[See reference 191]**. In future, the risk of flooding in the UK is likely to increase due to climate change.

7.5 [Climate projections](#) **[See reference 192]** indicate an increased chance of wetter winters, with up to 35% more precipitation in winter by 2070, and an increase in the frequency and intensity of extreme events.

7.6 In addition, as the UK population grows, it is predicted that the number of properties built on the flood plain will almost double by 2065, exposing more homes and businesses to flooding.

7.7 Climate change is also likely to influence the complex natural processes which result in coastal change, such as erosion and coastal landslip. Climate change is likely to cause sea level to rise by between 0.4m and 1m and the annual maximum significant wave height to increase by up to 1m (or 20%) off the coast of southwest England by 2100.

7.8 It is predicted that approximately 3,500 properties in England are likely to be vulnerable to coastal erosion by 2055 **[See reference 193]**.

7.9 Development must be carefully planned to avoid increased vulnerability to flooding and coastal change.

Key messages from other plans, programmes and objectives

International

7.10 The [Declaration on Climate, Relief, Recovery and Peace \(COP28 Declaration\) \(2023\)](#) [See reference 194] is an international agreement which seeks to address the complex challenges posed by climate change, particularly in the most vulnerable regions. Although non-binding and outside the formal UNFCCC negotiations, this declaration unites the concerns and proposed solutions of countries and institutions across humanitarian, development, climate, and peace sectors. It aims to urgently enhance climate resilience in vulnerable communities that are most affected by climate-related conflicts and crises.

7.11 [The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development \(2015\)](#) [See reference 195] adopted by all United Nations Member States, provides a shared blueprint for peace and prosperity for people and the planet and includes 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), designed to achieve a better and more sustainable future for all. Relevant to this topic are:

- SDG 6: Clean Water and Sanitation
- SDG 14: Life Below Water.
- SDG 15: Life on Land.

7.12 [The United Nations Paris Climate Change Agreement \(2015\)](#) [See reference 196] is an international agreement to keep global temperature rise this century well below 2 degrees Celsius above pre-industrial levels.

National

7.13 The [National Planning Policy Framework \(2026\)](#) [See reference 197] (NPPF) states in Policy N1: Identifying environmental opportunities and safeguards that “development plans should safeguard and enhance the natural environment, and reflect the wider benefits from natural capital and ecosystem services, by using Local Nature Recovery Strategies, Protected Landscape Management Plans, River Basin Management Plans, National Forest Strategies, Community Forest Plans and other relevant evidence”. Additionally, plan-making Policy P1: Planning for clean and safe places stipulates that development plans should “consider any wider opportunities to reduce air, water, soil, noise or other forms of pollution, and contribute to compliance with national and local environmental targets and objectives, through the spatial

strategy and policies for specific parts of the plan area (such as by identifying opportunities for strategic nature-based solutions”. Plans should take a proactive approach to mitigating and adapting to climate change, taking into account implications for water supply.

7.14 Policy F1: Assessing flood risk for plan-making requires development plans to ‘take a risk-based approach when identifying suitable locations for development, taking into account all sources of flood risk and the current and future impacts of climate change’.

7.15 The Environment Agency’s [National Framework for Water Resources \(2025\)](#) [See reference 198] sets the strategic direction for long term regional water resources planning. The framework is built on a shared vision to:

- protect and improve the water environment;
- ensure resilient water supplies for communities, businesses, food production and energy generation;
- support sustainable economic growth;
- increase resilience to drought and climate change; and
- promote coordinated national, regional and local water resources planning.

7.16 The [Environment Act 2021](#) [See reference 199] sets statutory targets for the recovery of the natural world in four priority areas: air quality, biodiversity, water, and resource efficiency and waste reduction. It also establishes the Office for Environmental Protection which will act as an impartial and objective body for the protection and improvement of the environment. The Act sets out legislation which covers:

- Resource efficiency, producer responsibility, and the management, enforcement and regulation of waste.
- Local air quality management frameworks and the recall of motor vehicles etc; and
- Plans and proposals for water resources, drainage and sewerage management, storm overflows, water quality and land drainage.

7.17 [The Flood and Coastal Erosion Risk Management: Policy Statement \(2020\)](#) [See reference 200] sets out the Government’s long-term ambition to create a nation more resilient to future flood and coastal erosion risk, and in doing so, reduce the risk of harm to people, the environment and the economy. The Policy Statement sets out five policy areas which will drive this ambition. These are:

- Upgrading and expanding our national flood defences and infrastructure;
- Managing the flow of water more effectively;
- Harnessing the power of nature to reduce flood and coastal erosion risk and achieve multiple benefits;
- Better preparing our communities; and
- Enabling more resilient places through a catchment-based approach.

7.18 [Green Future: Our 25 Year Plan to Improve the Environment \(2018\)](#) [See reference 201] sets out the UK government action to help the natural world regain and retain good health. The plan sets a series of goals for improving the environment within a generation and leaving it in a better state than we found it, and includes the following objectives and actions relating to water:

“We will achieve clean and plentiful water by improving at least three quarters of our waters to be close to their natural state as soon as is practicable by:

- reducing the damaging abstraction of water from rivers and groundwater, ensuring that by 2021 the proportion of water bodies with enough water to support environmental standards increases from 82% to 90% for surface water bodies and from 72% to 77% for groundwater bodies;
- reaching or exceeding objectives for rivers, lakes, coastal and ground waters that are specially protected, whether for biodiversity or drinking water as per our River Basin Management Plans;
- supporting OFWAT’s ambitions on leakage, minimising the amount of water lost through leakage year on year, with water companies expected to reduce leakage by at least an average of 15% by 2025; and
- minimising by 2030 the harmful bacteria in our designated bathing waters and continuing to improve the cleanliness of our waters; we will make sure that potential bathers are warned of any short-term pollution risks.

7.19 The 25-year plan states that the Government will make sure that chemicals are safely used and managed, and that the levels of harmful chemicals entering the environment (including through agriculture) are significantly reduced by reducing land-based emissions of mercury to water by 50% by 2030.

7.20 [The Water Environment \(Water Framework Directive\) \(England and Wales\) Regulations \(2017\)](#) [See reference 202] seeks to protect inland surface waters, transitional waters, coastal waters and groundwater, and outlines the associated river

basin management process. These Regulations require authorities to manage the water environment in a way that helps reduce the damage and impacts caused by floods.

7.21 [Drought: how it is managed in England \(2026\)](#) [See reference 203] is a policy paper that addresses how drought affects England and how the Environment Agency works with government, water companies and others to manage the effects on people, business and the environment. It aims to ensure consistency in the way we co-ordinate drought management across England. It sets out:

- how impacts of drought in England;
- who is involved in planning, managing and responding and how we work together
- the actions we and others take to effectively manage droughts
- how we report on drought and communicate with others
- our role in recovery and learning from drought events.

7.22 [The Flood and Water Management Act 2010](#) [See reference 204] and [The Flood and Water Regulations \(2019\)](#) [See reference 205] sets out measures to ensure that risk from all sources of flooding is managed more effectively. This includes incorporating greater resilience measures into the design of new buildings; utilising the environment in order to reduce flooding; identifying areas suitable for inundation and water storage to reduce the risk of flooding elsewhere; rolling back development in coastal areas to avoid damage from flooding or coastal erosion; and creating sustainable drainage systems (SuDS).

7.23 [The Environmental Protection Act 1990](#) [See reference 206] makes provision for the improved control of pollution to the air, water and land by regulating the management of waste and the control of emissions. Seeks to ensure that decisions pertaining to the environment are made in an integrated manner, in collaboration with appropriate authorities, non-governmental organisations and other persons.

Local

7.24 [Dorset Council's Natural Environment, Climate and Ecology Strategy 2023 to 25 \(refresh\) \(2025\)](#) [See reference 207] aims to create a carbon neutral, nature positive, and resilient Dorset through a clean, green, and fair transition that supports prosperous, stronger, and healthier communities. It focuses on three main challenges: reducing greenhouse gas emissions to address climate change,

protecting and enhancing ecosystems to reverse biodiversity loss, and adapting to unavoidable environmental impacts to build resilience.

7.25 [The Dorset Coast Strategy 2023-2026 \(2023\)](#) [See reference 208] which sets out how the members of the Dorset Coast Forum will work to improve the planning and management of the Dorset Coast, contains the following objectives:

- **Enjoy the coast** – Increase inclusive access to promote the coast as a place for everyone to enjoy;
- **Respect the coast** – Safe, considerate behaviour will be encouraged when visiting the coast, minimising the impact while maximising access and enjoyment. Information on code of conduct will be shared through a variety of mediums, allowing people to enjoy the coast responsibly;
- **Coastal Innovation** – The Dorset Coast will lead the way in innovative solutions to the challenges we face. These solutions will be implemented in every aspect of the coast through socioeconomic, technological, and environmental approaches.
- **Coastal Connection** – Opportunities will be taken to connect communities with the coastline, increasing access, awareness and understanding.
- **Coastal Recovery** – Dorset’s coastal landscapes and seascapes, with its wide range of species and habitats, will be prioritised. Members, residents, and visitors will not only protect and enhance Dorset’s natural environment, but also repair and restore damaged and degraded ecological processes.

7.26 [Dorset Council Level 1 Strategic Flood Risk Assessment \(2023\)](#) [See reference 209] provides information and guidance on flood risk for Dorset Council, noting that there is a history of documented flood events in Dorset, with the main sources being fluvial, tidal, groundwater and surface water. The Assessment also identifies a number of communities across Dorset at risk of surface water flooding, most notably Dorchester, Bridport and Sherborne, and provides recommendations including the development of new flood risk policy and enhancement and restoration of river corridors and habitat.

7.27 [The Poole Harbour and Dorset Stour Catchment Strategy 2022 – 2027 \(2022\)](#) [See reference 210] sets out the high level priorities and ambition of the Dorset Stour Catchment Partnerships for the next five years to 2027. The full list of priorities are presented in Chapter 2 above. However, in relation to flood risk, the strategy highlights targeted measures to reduce nutrient and sediment inputs, particularly by addressing agricultural soil and water runoff in upper catchments and headwaters. This focus will also help to improve hydrological connectivity and provide secondary benefits by reducing downstream flood risk.

7.28 [The South West river basin management plan: updated 2022 \(2022\)](#) [See reference 211] describes the challenges that threaten the water environment and how these challenges can be managed. The plan identifies key challenges affecting the region's water bodies, including pollution from agriculture and wastewater, physical modifications to watercourses, over-abstraction of water, and the impacts of climate change. It sets environmental objectives for rivers, lakes, estuaries, coastal waters, and groundwater, aiming to achieve or maintain good ecological and chemical status.

7.29 [The Water Action Plan \(2021\)](#) [See reference 212] outlines the need to significantly reduce water demand and waste in the authority area and manage water resources in a way that eliminates emissions and ensures long-term sustainability by 2050. The Plan recommends 16 specific actions, with initial targets set for 2023 to ensure that progress stays on track.

7.30 [The Dorset National Landscape Management Plan 2026 – 2031 \(2026\)](#) [See reference 213] has the following objectives (A3 adapting to environmental change) relating to coastal change:

- Implement nature-based solutions for climate adaptation and resilience, including restoring natural floodplain function, wetlands, and valley mires to enhance carbon sequestration, flood mitigation, and drought resilience; and
- Support coastal management which promotes natural processes, seeking opportunities for nature recovery and reinstating natural processes through Shoreline Management Planning, and ensuring the Outstanding Universal Value of the Dorset & East Devon World Heritage Site is protected.

7.31 [The Local Flood Risk Management Strategy \(2014\)](#) [See reference 214] sets out the following vision for managing local flood risk across the Dorset Council Local Plan area: area:

"working together to manage local flood risk in Dorset so communities are resilient and prepared for flooding".

7.32 The strategy aims to deliver this vision by achieving the following objectives:

- understand flood risk across Dorset;
- manage the likelihood and impacts of flooding;
- help Dorset's communities to manage their own flood risk;
- ensure flood risk is considered in local land development proposals; and

- improve flood prediction, warning, response and flood recovery.

7.33 The role of Catchment Flood Management Plans (CFMPs) is to establish flood risk management policies which will deliver sustainable flood risk management for the long term within 77 hydrological catchments across England and Wales.

7.34 CFMPs consider all types of inland flooding, from rivers, ground water, surface water and tidal flooding, but not flooding directly from the sea (coastal flooding), which is covered by Shoreline Management Plans which are considered later in this section.

7.35 The Dorset Council Local Plan area is largely within three catchment areas:

- Dorset Stour;
- Frome and Piddle; and
- West Dorset

7.36 The West Dorset catchment occupies most of coastal areas along the Western coast of the Dorset Council Local Plan area, including Swanage, Beaminster, and Bridport. The [Dorset Wild Rivers' West Dorset Rivers and Coastal Streams Issues Appraisal \(2022\)](#) [See reference 215] presents the findings of work on the waterbodies of the catchment. The main issues identified affecting the water environment in the West Dorset Rivers and Coastal Streams Catchment are:

- Pollution from rural areas caused by agriculture;
- Physical modifications to the channel;
- Pollution from sewage treatment works and other water industry infrastructure;
- Invasive species; and
- Flows

7.37 Several potential opportunities have been highlighted for the sub-catchments of the West Dorset and Rivers and Coastal Streams area. Of particular relevance:

- Wessex Water are developing Drainage and Waste Water Management Plans that set out how Wessex Water will enhance their assets and networks to ensure they continue to deliver for their customers and the environment in a sustainable and affordable way and in the face of future challenges such as population growth and climate change; and
- Woodland planting areas have been prioritised by Bridport Town Council for several reasons, including reducing flood risk.

7.38 The relevant statutory marine plan for the Dorset coast is the South Inshore and Offshore Marine Plan (2018) [See reference 216]. It 12 objectives, with the relevant ones to flooding and coastal change being:

- To support the reduction of the environmental, social and economic impacts of climate change, through encouraging the implementation of mitigation and adaptation measures that:
 - avoid proposals' indirect contributions to greenhouse gas emissions
 - reduce vulnerability
 - improve resilience to climate and coastal change
 - consider habitats that provide related ecosystem services.
- To support marine protected area objectives and a well-managed ecologically coherent network with enhanced resilience and capability to adapt to change.
- To safeguard space for, and improve the quality of, the natural marine environment, including to enable continued provision of ecosystem goods and services, particularly in relation to coastal and seabed habitats, fisheries and cumulative impacts on highly mobile species.

7.39 Shoreline Management Plans (SMPs) are large scale assessments of the risks associated with coastal processes and help to reduce the risks to people and the developed, historic and natural environment. SMPs also identify the most sustainable approach to managing the flood and coastal erosion risks to the coastline in the short-term (0 to 20 years), medium term (20 to 50 years), and long term (50 to 100 years) and cover the entire shoreline of England and Wales.

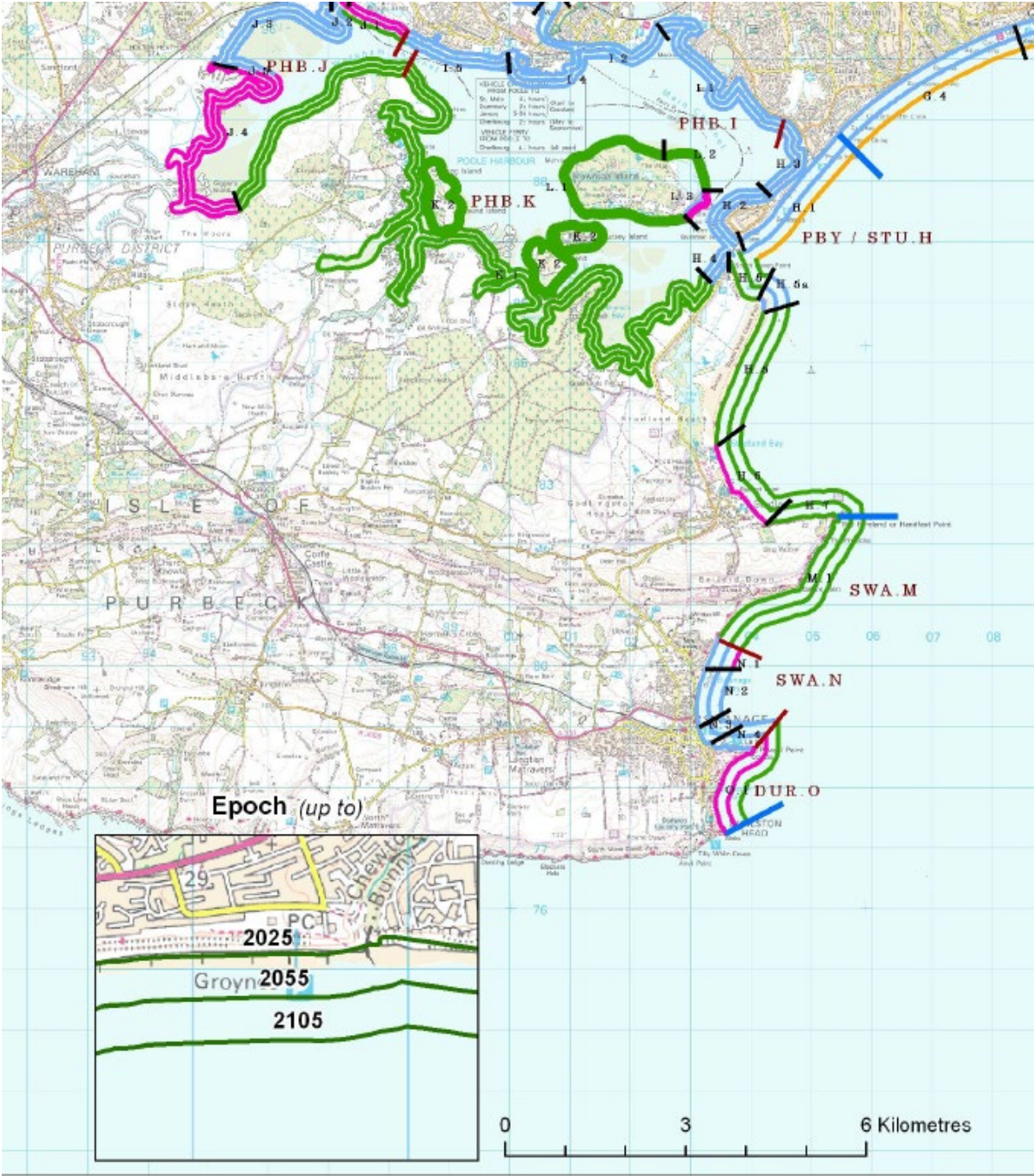
7.40 The Dorset Plan Area is covered by two SMPs, both of which have been reviewed since the original SMPs were published:

- Poole & Christchurch Bays Shoreline Management Plan Review (2010) considers the coastline between Hurst Spit in the east, which is outside the Dorset Council Local Plan area, and Durlston Head in the west, within the Dorset Council Local Plan area and on Isle of Purbeck; and
- Durlston Head to Rame Head Shoreline Management Plan Review (2011) covers the section of coastline from Durlston Head (which is on Isle of Purbeck) to White Nothe in the west (which is beyond the western boundary of the Dorset Council Local Plan area).

7.41 The Poole & Christchurch Bays Shoreline Management Plan Review (2010) includes the following policy approaches towards shoreline management within the Dorset Council Local Plan Area, as summarised in Figure 7.1:

- Managed realignment of coastal defences at Wareham, allowing coastal processes to realign the 'natural' coastline configuration;
- Maintain or upgrade the level of protection provided by defences or the natural coastline in the long term at the chain ferry at Shell Bay, to maintain access to the ferry;
- No active intervention within the western section of Poole Harbour (including the islands within Poole Harbour) and Studland Dunes, largely allowing natural processes to take place;
- Managed realignment of coastal defences at Studland Village in the short term (up to 2025), with no active intervention in the medium and long term;
- Maintain or upgrade the level of protection provided by defences or the natural coastline at Swanage; and
- Managed realignment at Durlston Bay, from Peveril Point to Durlleston, with no active intervention in the medium and long term.

Figure 7.1: A map summarising the policy approach towards coastal management in the Poole & Christchurch Bays Shoreline Management Plan Review (2010) [See reference 217]



- Key:
- Policy Development Zones
 - Management Units
 - Policy Units
 - Hold the Line
 - Managed Realignment
 - No Active Intervention
 - Hold the Line/Advance the Line

7.42 The Durlston Head to Rame Head Shoreline Management Plan Review (2011) includes the following policy approaches towards shoreline management within the Dorset Council Local Plan Area:

- Durlston Head: The preferred policy along this rocky cliffed shoreline is to continue to allow natural development along this coast;
- White Nothe (east of Ringstead Bay) to Redcliff Point (to the east of Weymouth, between Bowleaze Cove and Osmington Mills): may experience episodic landslide events that can cause tens of metres of retreat as a result of a single event. In places there is a risk of relict landslide complexes becoming reactivated, which makes management of this coastline more difficult. The continuation of the natural erosion process is integral to the World Heritage and SSSI status of the cliffs. Therefore, the long term plan is to allow this coastline to remain in its natural state, ceasing to intervene where this presently occurs;
- Redcliff Point to Portland Bill: the coastline here is more developed, incorporating Weymouth and Portland. The protection of commercial and social assets is key in this area, and the shoreline management plan is to continue to protect built assets but seek more sustainable means of achieving this. That includes some local realignment and possible beach enhancement;
- North-west shore of Portland Harbour: unlikely to be appropriate to intervene along the entire stretch of coast, at least in the short to medium term. The Isle of Portland and Portland Harbour breakwaters are key controls on future evolution as they provide shelter and influence the movement of sediment. The preferred plan includes the assumption that the breakwaters will remain and be maintained.
- Portland Bill to Thorncombe Beacon: coastline is dominated by Chesil Beach, which acts as a natural sea defence in addition to a Habitats site. A key driver of policy is to maintain the natural status of Chesil Beach and take measures to ensure its future sustainability. Therefore for most of this stretch no intervention is planned.
- Freshwater Beach and Burton Bradstock: Some minimal intervention to manage the realignment of the coast in line with the retreat of adjacent undefended cliffs. This approach, supported by construction of a secondary defence further inland, will reduce local flood risk to properties at Burton Bradstock without compromising natural functioning of the beach.
- West Bay: continued defence of West Bay will also require a secondary defence behind East Beach to enable sustainable long term management of flood risk to be achieved whilst also allowing more natural functioning of the beach.

- Chiswell: The long term plan is to continue to maintain existing defences.

Baseline information

7.43 The Dorset Council Local Plan area is largely occupied by three hydrological catchments:

- Dorset Stour;
- Frome and Piddle; and
- West Dorset.

7.44 Figure 7.2 shows the extent of flood risk areas across Dorset. It specifically identifies flood zones 2 and 3 which follow the Rivers Stour, Frome and Piddle and their tributaries. Figure 7.2 also shows how the combined extent of flood zones 2 and 3 could increase with climate change over the next century.

7.45 The Stour catchment includes much of Bournemouth and the Christchurch, as well as smaller, locally important towns such as Blandford, Shaftesbury and Gillingham. The catchment includes 12 chalk streams which cover 141km, as well as 38 waterbodies, including the rivers Crane, Allen, Tarrant, Winterbourne and Lodden. The catchment drains into Christchurch Harbour, where it meets the mouth of the Hampshire Avon and flows out to Christchurch Bay.

7.46 The upper catchment consists of impermeable clays of the Blackmore Vale resulting in shallow valleys with wide floodplains. The central band of permeable chalk on Cranborne Chase results in steeper valleys and narrow floodplains. The lower catchment has the semi-permeable sands, clays and gravels of the Dorset Heaths.

7.47 The Frome and Piddle hydrological catchment occupies around 900km² and is largely rural with the exception of Poole at the southern end of the catchment

7.48 The Frome and Piddle catchment is characterised in the upper reaches of the North Dorset Downs by open chalk downland with clay and alluvial deposits at the lower end. The rivers Frome and Piddle discharge into Poole Harbour at sea level just downstream of Wareham.

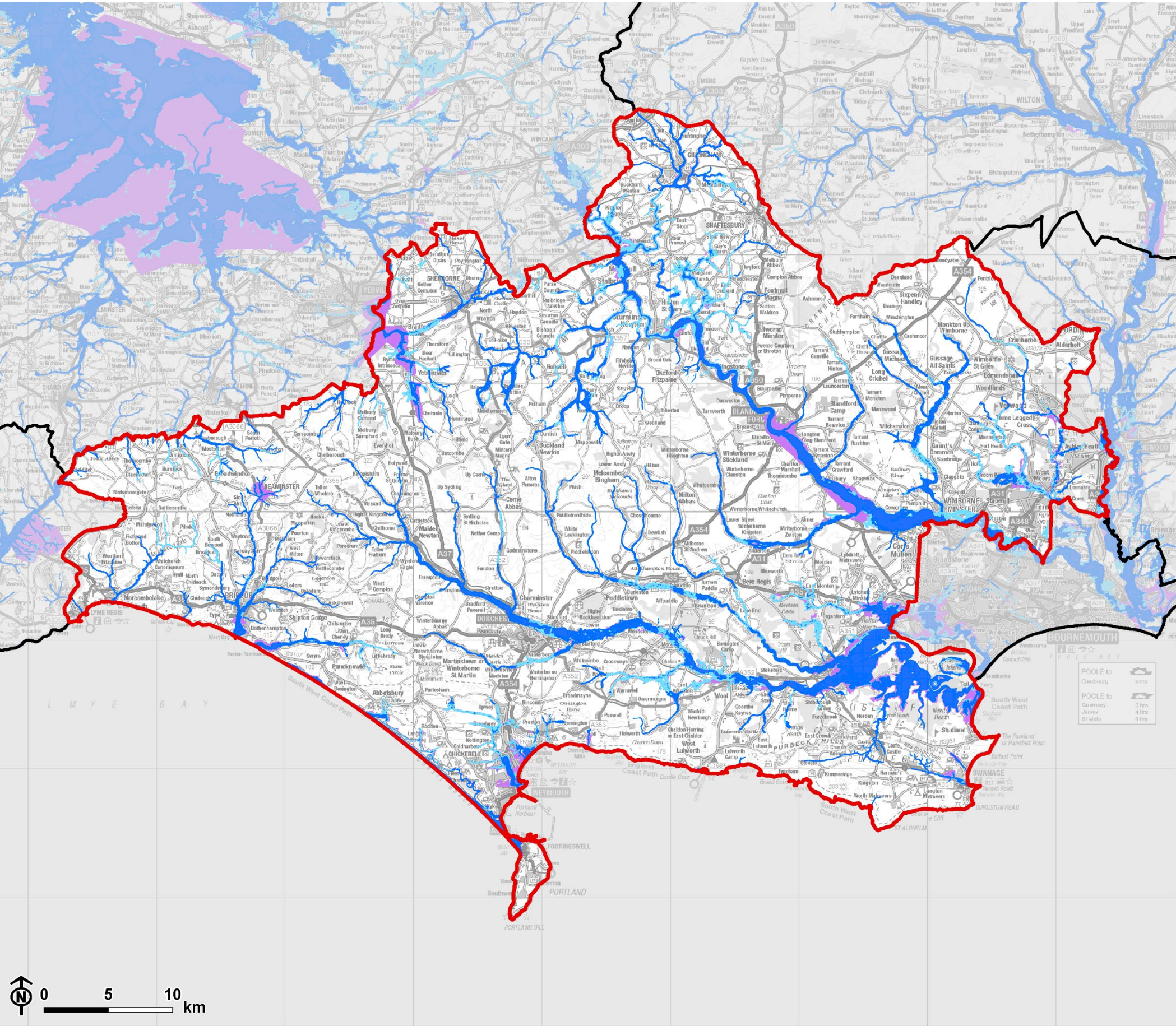
7.49 The West Dorset hydrological catchment occupies around 370km² and comprises a series of smaller catchments from the Rivers Char, Brit, Bride and Wey, which each flow directly into the sea on the south coast.

7.50 The West Dorset catchment is predominantly rural in character, and characterised by broad, bowl shaped vales incised by steep sided river valleys.

7.51 The Dorset Council Local Plan area includes approximately 144km of coastline, extending from the southern end of Poole Harbour in the east to Lyme Regis in the west.

7.52 The coastline within the Dorset Council Local Plan area includes a great variety of coastal landforms and associated coastal processes

Figure 7.2: Flood zones



Environmental and sustainability issues and likely evolution of the issues without the Local Plan

7.53 Analysis of the baseline information has enabled the following key environmental and sustainability issue relating to flooding and coastal change facing Dorset to be identified. Reference is made to the relevant SEA objective that has been identified to help address this issue:

- The frequency and severity of flood events which is predicted to increase as a result of climate change. The challenge is to deliver housing and development whilst not increasing and where possible reducing the risk of flooding to people and properties (see SEA objective 6).
- Implementing the appropriate management of coastal areas to ensure that wildlife designations and areas of geological interest are protected along with the communities which live in these areas. The environmental designations in coastal areas often rely on natural processes being allowed to take place, which may conflict with the management of these areas for the protection of local communities (see SEA objective 6); and
- Lack of financial resources available to implement coastal protection schemes (see SEA objective 6).

7.54 Without the new Local Plan, flood risk will continue to affect the local plan area through increased and higher intensity flooding (see SEA objective 6).

SEA objectives

7.55 The draft SEA objective and accompanying assessment questions designed to capture the objectives of relevant international and national plans, programmes and policies and the relevant environmental and sustainability issues identified in this chapter are set out below. We propose to use these to assess the Dorset Council Local Plan and its reasonable alternatives.

Flooding and Coastal Change SEA objectives and assessment questions

SEA objective 6: To limit the effects of flooding and coastal change

Assessment questions

- Will the plan/option ensure that development does not expose people and property to risk of flooding?
- Will the plan/option manage coastal change to ensure that environmental designations and local communities are protected?

Relevant SEA topics

- Climatic Factors
- Water
- Population

Chapter 8

Landscape

8.1 This chapter sets out the baseline and policy context for Dorset's landscape. The SEA will consider how the Local Plan can help to maintain a high-quality landscape by shaping distinct and attractive places, which can help to enhance biodiversity and climate resilience, improve quality of life, recreation opportunities and the setting of heritage assets.

8.2 The landscapes of the 21st century have been shaped by a combination of natural processes and human activity.

8.3 Geological activity and environmental processes through time have created the hugely diverse range of landforms. The diversity of these landforms across the world reflects the range of geology, climate and natural systems, all of which interact in a complex manner.

8.4 The onset of civilisation has made a physical impression on these natural landscapes through the ages. Human activity, particularly land management through farming and forestry, and urban development, largely for residential and industrial processes and the growth of urban settlements, have altered the character and quality of the landscape.

8.5 The pace of social, economic and environmental change is increasing. Without careful planning and management, the quality and condition of the landscape will be irreversibly changed.

Key messages from other plans, programmes and objectives

International

8.6 [The European Landscape Convention \(2002\) promotes](#) [See reference 218] landscape protection, management and planning. The Convention is aimed at the protection, management and planning of all landscapes and raising awareness of the value of a living landscape.

National

8.7 In relation to landscape, the [National Planning Policy Framework \(2026\)](#) [See reference 219] (NPPF) sets out the approach that Local Plans should have in relation to biodiversity and the landscape, particularly through plan-making policy N1: Improving the natural environment, which states that plans should “set out the hierarchy of international, national and locally designated sites and areas of importance for their landscape, geodiversity or biodiversity in the plan area, and identify other features which require particular consideration in managing development due to their environmental value such as chalk streams.” Plans should also identify opportunities for the “conservation, enhancement and recovery of landscapes, sensitive waterbodies, habitats and priority or threatened species, including through habitat restoration, the use of nature-based solutions, and the creation and strengthening of ecological networks that are more resilient to current and future pressures (including opportunities which exist at a catchment or landscape scale across plan boundaries)”.

8.8 [The Environment Improvement Plan 2023](#) [See reference 220] for England is the first revision of the 25YEP: It builds on the 25YEP vision with a new plan setting out how we will work with landowners, communities and businesses to deliver each of our goals for improving the environment, matched with interim targets to measure progress. Taking these actions will help us restore nature, reduce environmental pollution, and increase the prosperity of our country. To achieve its vision, the 25YEP set out 10 goals. We have used those 10 goals set out in the 25YEP as the basis for this document: setting out the progress made against all 10, the specific targets and commitments made in relation to each goal, and our plan to continue to deliver these targets and the overarching goals. The environmental goals are:

- Goal 1: Thriving plants and wildlife
- Goal 2: Clean air
- Goal 3: Clean and plentiful water
- Goal 4: Managing exposure to chemicals and pesticides
- Goal 5: Maximise our resources, minimise our waste
- Goal 6: Using resources from nature sustainably
- Goal 7: Mitigating and adapting to climate change
- Goal 8: Reduced risk of harm from environmental hazards
- Goal 9: Enhancing biosecurity

- Goal 10: Enhanced beauty, heritage, and engagement with the natural environment

8.9 [The 25 Year Environment Plan: progress reports \(2023\)](#) [See reference 221] sets out the progress made in improving the environment through the 25 Year Plan and the indicator framework, which contains 66 indicators arranged into 10 broad themes.

8.10 [The Landscapes Review \(2019\)](#) [See reference 222] looked at the statutory purposes of National Parks and AONBs and how effectively they were being met. It identified that they should be strengthened, a recommendation that was accepted by the Government in its [2022 response](#) [See reference 223]. Through the Levelling Up and Regeneration Act 2023, it strengthened the duties of public bodies in respect of National Parks and AONBs, which it renamed National Landscapes.

8.11 [The Countryside and Rights of Way Act \(2000\)](#) [See reference 224] confirmed the significance of Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty and created improved arrangements for their management. Section 85 places a statutory duty on all 'relevant authorities' to have regard to the purpose of conserving and enhancing natural beauty when discharging any function affecting land in AONBs National Landscapes).

8.12 [The Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 \(as amended\)](#) [See reference 225] was enacted primarily to implement the Birds Directive and Bern Convention in Great Britain. It is addressed in more detail in Chapter 2, but relevant parts of the Act for landscape are:

- Part 2: Nature conservation, the countryside and National Parks (including the designation of protected areas).
- Part 3: Public rights of way.

8.13 [The National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act 1949](#) [See reference 226] is an Act of Parliament to make provision for National Parks and the establishment of a National Parks Commission; to confer on the Nature Conservancy and local authorities' powers for the establishment and maintenance of nature reserves; to make further provision for the recording, creation, maintenance and improvement of public paths and for securing access to open country.

Local

8.14 [The Dorset Local Nature Partnership's Vision and Strategy \(2023\)](#) [See reference 227] sets out the following strategic priorities for the partnership (listed in Chapter 2 above), with one specifically referring to landscape:

- Natural understanding – improving engagement in Dorset's environment: Dorset residents and visitors already value their environment. We will support and develop greater understanding of the impacts we have on the terrestrial and marine environment to ensure good stewardship now and in the future.

8.15 [The Jurassic Coast Partnership Plan 2020-2025 \(Management Framework for the Dorset and East Devon Coast World Heritage site\) \(2020\)](#) [See reference 228] seeks to protect the World Heritage Site, with the following strategic aims:

- Protect the Site's Outstanding Universal Value and World Heritage Status;
- Conserve and enhance the Site, its attributes, presentation and setting;
- Inspire and engage people with the Site and deepen their understanding of its values;
- Maintain and improve access to and experience of the Site; and
- Enable the Site's World Heritage Status to be of benefit to people and communities.

8.16 [Dorset National Landscape Management Plan 2026-31 \(2026\)](#) [See reference 229] has the following objectives relating to landscape:

- Remove existing and avoid creating new features which are detrimental to landscape character, tranquillity, and the National Landscape's special qualities;
- Require the use of previously developed land where this will limit the expansion of built development into sensitive undeveloped countryside;
- Protect and where possible enhance the quality of views into, within and out of the National Landscape;
- Protect the pattern of landscape features, including settlements, that underpin local identity;
- Avoid and reduce cumulative effects that erode landscape character and quality;
- The landward and seaward setting of the National Landscape will be planned and managed in a manner that conserves and enhances the character and appearance of the National Landscape;

- The conservation, enhancement and creation/restoration of appropriate landscape features such as landmarks, artworks, boundary features, tree clumps etc, will be regarded favourably. There should be a net gain in terms of the landscape and its constituent elements; and
- Support development that conserves and enhances the National Landscape, ensuring sensitive siting and design respects local character. Development that does not conserve and enhance the National Landscape will only be supported if it is necessary and in the public interest. Major development decisions need to include detailed consideration of relevant exceptional circumstances.

8.17 The [Cranborne Chase National Landscape Management Plan 2025-2030 \(2025\)](#) [See reference 230] sets out the following outcomes for those responsible for looking after the Cranborne Chase National Landscape:

- The landscape character, tranquillity and special qualities of the National Landscape are fully understood by policy makers and land managers;
- The landscape character, tranquillity and special qualities of the National Landscape and its settings are conserved and enhanced;
- Understand the rate and degree of landscape change within the National Landscape;
- Dark Night Sky status is secured for the National Landscape ;
- Farmers, foresters, fishery managers and gamekeepers are aware of how their activities can strengthen landscape character and enhance the natural environment of the National Landscape; and
- Strategic and local decisions are formulated taking full account of the purposes of designation and are implemented in a comprehensive, coherent and consistent way with regard to the character and quality of the area and its setting, together with views into and out of the National Landscape such that these decisions result in no net detriment to the special qualities of the National Landscape.

Baseline information

8.18 The Dorset landscape is unique in its landscape character, variety and quality. This diversity is a product of the range of natural, physical factors such as geology, soils and climate.

8.19 Geology dominates the landscape and local character of Dorset [\[See reference 231\]](#) as the great diversity of rock types, erosional processes and structures have created the unique, variable and distinctive countryside.

8.20 The ongoing Dorset Landscape Character Assessment (LCA) Study identifies the different landscape character areas in Dorset.

8.21 The central parts of Dorset are dominated by the vast swathe of chalk which runs across Dorset from the southeast to the northeast, and beyond the Dorset Council Local Plan area to Salisbury Plain in Wiltshire. It is an elevated, spacious landscape with a prominent escarpment with a series of ridge tops which offer uninterrupted panoramic views of the surrounding landscape, with undulating farmlands which define large areas of Dorset.

8.22 The shallow dip slope of the southern extent of the chalk transitions to the heathland landscapes of the Poole Basin towards the southeast of the Dorset Plan Area. The Poole Basin is defined by an undulating lowland with remnants of a once extensive area of heathland which has been largely lost due to land use change.

8.23 A high chalk ridge, which once linked Purbeck to the Isle of Wight, separates the heathlands of the Poole Basin from the secluded clay valley to the south.

8.24 The sequence of cliff and bays along the Purbeck coastline, and the remaining coastline of the Dorset Council Local Plan area, have been carved by the powerful forces of coastal erosion and deposition, leaving a legacy unique landscape features like Lulworth Cove, Durdle Door, Chesil Beach, and the beaches of Studland Bay.

8.25 To the north of the chalk escarpment and towards the northern site boundary lies the Blackmore Vale, an extensive, flat clay vale bordered by limestone ridges to the North West and deeply undulating foothills beside the escarpment to the south and east of the vale.

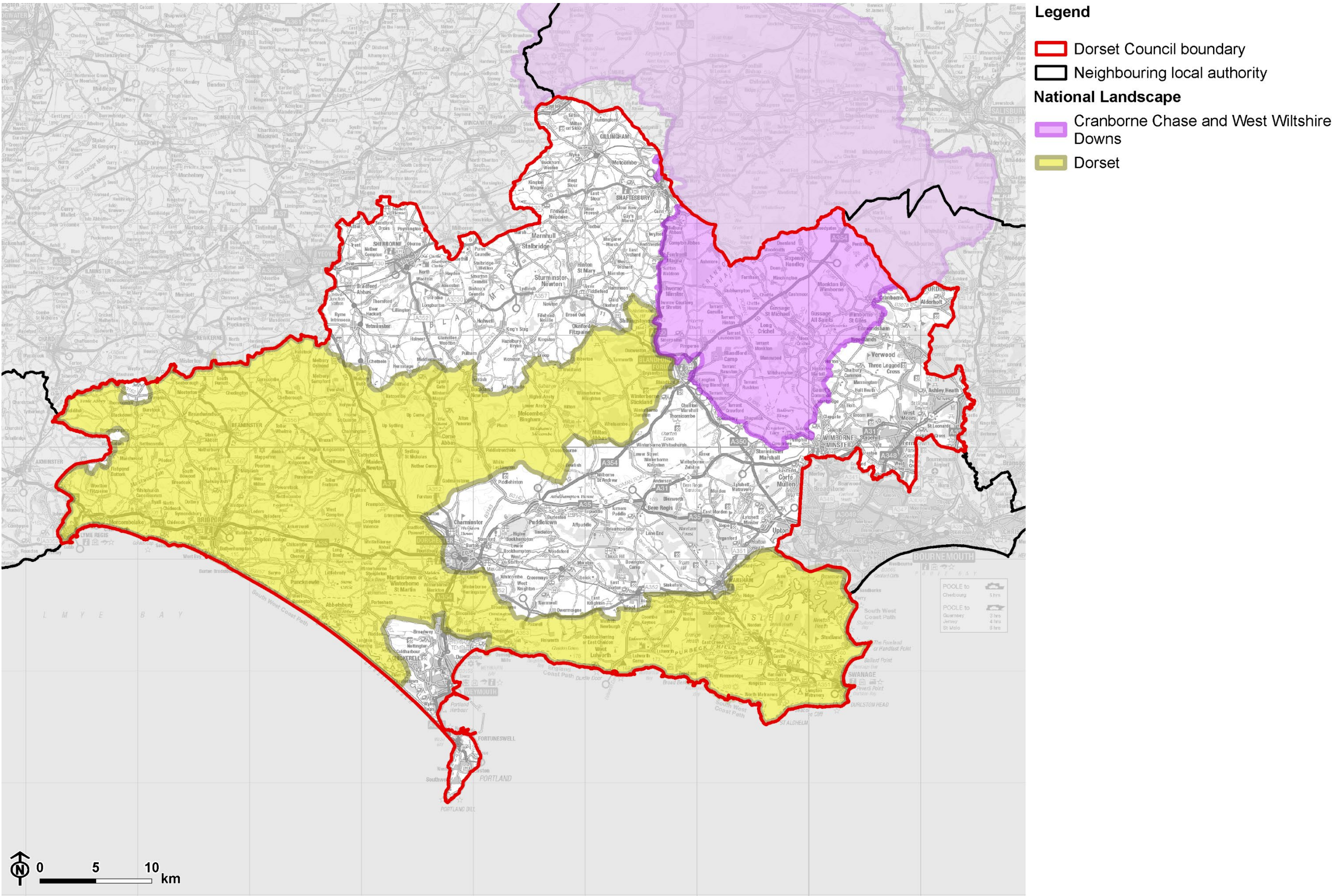
8.26 The landscape of the west of the county is more varied, reflecting the complex geology, with steep distinctive greensand ridges separating clusters of deeply incised valleys and broad rolling farmland.

8.27 The Dorset Council Local Plan area contains the following National Landscapes, which have been designated for conservation in recognition of outstanding scenic quality and significant landscape value of these areas (Figure 8.1):

- Dorset National Landscape: occupies approximately 1,128km² or 44.7% of the plan area and is characterised by chalk downland with agriculture being the major land use including mixed arable and livestock grazing; and

- Cranborne Chase and West Wiltshire National Landscape: Occupies approximately 278km² or 11.0% of the plan area and is characterised by rolling downland fringed to the west by a steep scarp slope. The agricultural and forestry sectors are the main employers in the area and these have a significant influence over the landscape.

Figure 8.1: A map showing the extent of the Dorset National Landscape and Cranborne Chase and West Wiltshire National Landscape and UNESCO World Heritage Site within the Dorset Council Local Plan area [See reference 232]



8.28 In addition, the vast majority of the 144km coastline within the Dorset Council Local Plan area is part of the Dorset and East Devon Coast UNESCO World Heritage Site (Figure 8.2). The designation stretches 155km of coastline from Exmouth in Devon which lies beyond the plan area to the west to Studland Bay towards the eastern end of the Dorset Council Local Plan area. The designation only includes the undeveloped areas of the coast, and therefore omits the sections of the urbanised coastline such as Weymouth, Portland, Bridport, Lyme Regis and Swanage.

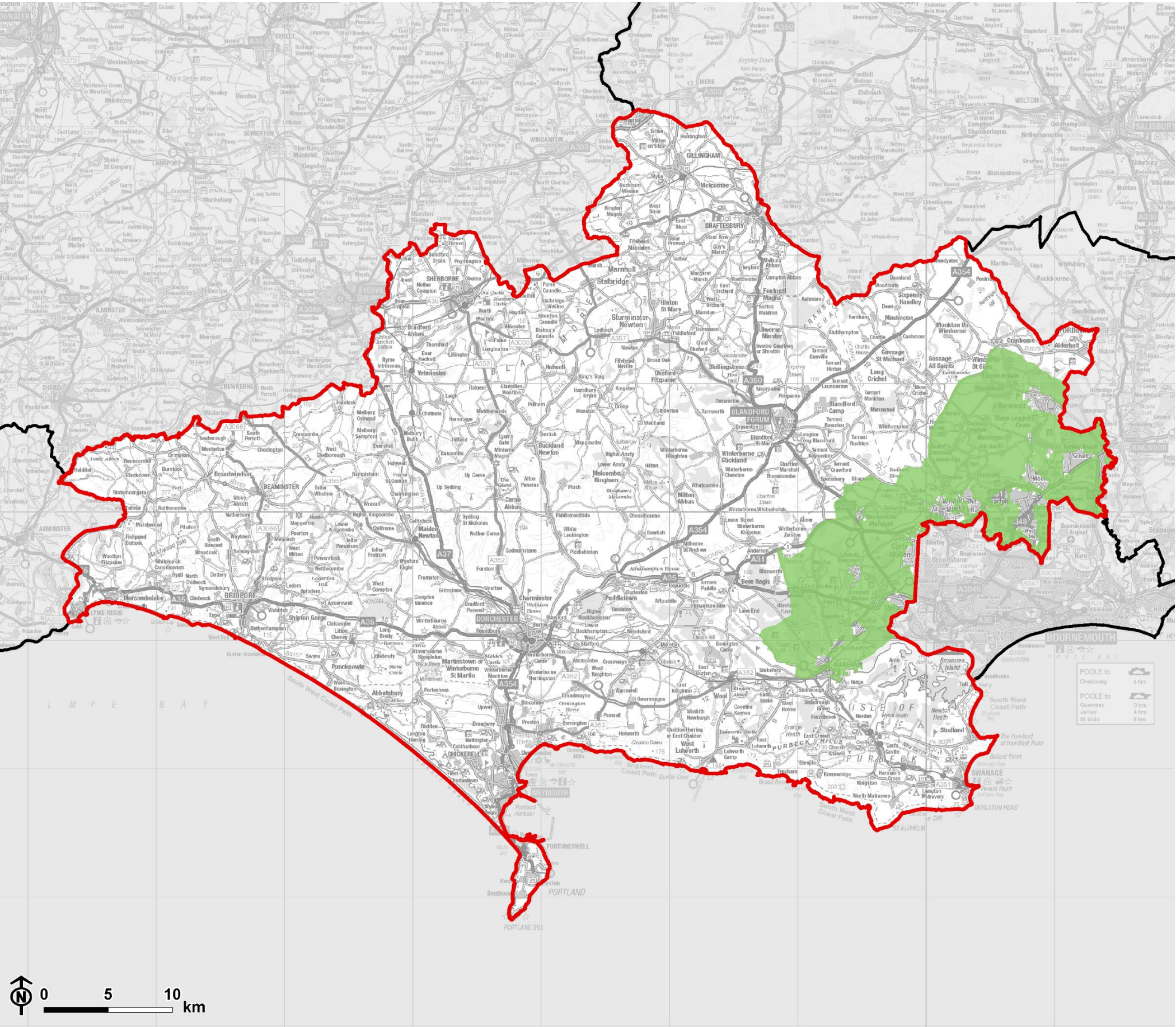
8.29 The Dorset and East Devon Coast UNESCO World Heritage Site recognises the worldwide importance of this section of coastline for the outstanding combination of geological, paleontological and geomorphological features.

8.30 The site displays approximately 185 million years of the Earth's history, including a number of internationally important fossil localities and a range of outstanding examples of coastal geomorphological features, landforms and processes.

8.31 The South East Dorset Green Belt occupies approximately 168km² of open land in and around Upton, Wimborne, Ferndown, Poole, Bournemouth and Christchurch and stretching south-west as far as Wareham (See Figure 8.2).

8.32 The fundamental aim of Green Belt policy is to prevent urban sprawl by keeping land permanently open; the essential characteristics of Green Belts are their openness and their permanence **[See reference 233]**.

Figure 8.2: A map showing the extent of the Green Belt within the Dorset Council Local Plan area [See reference 234]



Created by LUC - Figure 8.2: Green Belt extent 26/08/2026
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Environmental and sustainability issues and likely evolution of the issues without the Local Plan

8.33 Analysis of the baseline information has enabled the following key environmental and sustainability issues relating to the landscape to be identified. Reference is made to the relevant SEA objective that has been identified to help address this issue:

- To conserve and enhance the landscape character and special qualities of the Dorset National Landscape and Cranborne Chase and West Wiltshire National Landscape, which together cover approximately 1,407km² or 55.7% of the Dorset Council Local Plan area, whilst also providing for development (see SEA objective 7).
- Protecting the Dorset and East Devon Coast World Heritage Site's outstanding universal value and setting whilst also providing for development (see SEA objective 7).
- Controlling urban sprawl in southeast Dorset by restricting harmful development within the Green Belt (see SEA objective 7).

8.34 Without the new Local Plan, it is more likely that piecemeal and ad-hoc development come forward, which are not located or designed to take account of the variation in character and sensitivity across Dorset (see SEA objective 7).

SEA objectives

8.35 The draft SEA objectives and accompanying assessment questions are designed to capture the objectives of relevant international and national plans, programmes and policies and the relevant environmental and sustainability issues identified in this chapter. We propose to use these to assess the Dorset Council Local Plan and its reasonable alternatives.

Landscape SEA objectives and questions

SEA objective 7: Protect and enhance valued landscapes

Assessment questions

- Will the plan/ option protect and where possible enhance valued landscapes?

- Will the plan/ option conserve and where possible enhance the Dorset National Landscape and the Cranborne Chase National Landscape and the character and quality of its distinctive landscapes and associated features?
- Will the plan/ option conserve and enhance the Dorset and East Devon Coast World Heritage Site's outstanding universal value and its setting?
- Will the plan/ option ensure that development is not harmful to the purposes of the Green Belt?

Relevant SEA topics

- Landscape

Chapter 9

Cultural Heritage

9.1 This chapter sets out the baseline and policy context for Dorset's cultural heritage. The SEA will consider how the Local Plan can help to conserve and enhance the historic environment by reinforcing local identity, sense of place and cultural value, in turn contributing to regeneration, tourism, improving deprivation and community well-being.

9.2 Cultural heritage is defined by UNESCO as:

“the legacy of physical artefacts of a group or society that are inherited from past generations, maintained in the present and bestowed for the benefit of future generations.”

9.3 Cultural Heritage comprises of tangible cultural heritage, which refers to physical things like buildings and monuments, and intangible cultural heritage, which refers to things that are not physical but exist spiritually or socially, such as customs and ways of life.

9.4 Cultural heritage makes a positive contribution to the economy, the character and identity of a place, and general wellbeing in the community.

9.5 Heritage helps to drive the economy largely through tourism and by providing an attractive environment to work, study and undertake business. England's heritage sector is estimated to have contributed £44.9 billion in Gross Value Added (GVA) to the UK economy in 2022 and supported the employment of over 523,000 workers. This includes providing approximately 201,000 direct jobs, constituting 0.72% of England's workforce [\[See reference 235\]](#).

9.6 Historic buildings play a key role in defining local character and distinctiveness, providing a sense of place and a visual link to the history of an area.

9.7 Whilst the wider social value of culture on the wellbeing of the community is more difficult to measure, it is clear that it influences views, values and relationships across the community, controls social behaviour and increases mutual understanding and social cohesion. In terms of the built environment, studies have shown the positive influence upon quality of life and place, indicating that:

- 81% of people said that ‘looking after historic buildings, monuments and archaeology to safeguard the places people love’ was personally important to them;
- 20% of people said that historic buildings were an important source of local pride—ranking third after local parks/green spaces (36%) and people (35%);
- 69% of people said that community heritage was important or very important for instilling local pride and bringing communities together.

9.8 For these reasons, maintaining cultural heritage is a key element of ensuring that sustainable development is achieved.

Key messages from other plans, programmes and objectives

International

9.9 The [Valletta Treaty \(1992\) formerly the European Convention on the Protection of the Archaeological Heritage \(Revisited\)](#) [See reference 236] aims to protect the European archaeological heritage “as a source of European collective memory and as an instrument for historical and scientific study”.

9.10 The [European Convention for the Protection of the Architectural Heritage of Europe \(1985\)](#) [See reference 237] defines ‘architectural heritage’ and requires that the signatories maintain an inventory of it and take statutory measures to ensure its protection. Conservation policies are also required to be integrated into planning systems and other spheres of Government influence as per the text of the convention.

9.11 The [UNESCO World Heritage Convention \(1972\)](#) [See reference 238], the key objective of which was to protect cultural and natural heritage, considers ‘that parts of the cultural or natural heritage are of outstanding interest and therefore need to be preserved as part of the world heritage of mankind as a whole’.

National

9.12 Plan-making Policy HE1: Planning for the historic environment in the [National Planning Policy Framework \(2026\)](#) [See reference 239] (NPPF) states that, plans should “deliver a positive strategy for the conservation, enhancement and enjoyment of the historic environment”. This includes through identifying the “heritage assets

within the plan area, including those heritage assets at most risk through neglect, decay or other threats, set out the key issues facing them and identify where these assets can be used to support sustainable development”, as well as taking opportunities, for example through “site allocations, design guides, design codes and masterplans, to draw on the contribution which the historic environment can make to the character and quality of development, and its context”.

9.13 It should also be considerate of the wider benefits of conserving the historic environment, the contribution new development can make in terms of character and distinctiveness and the opportunity for the historic environment to contribute to this character and distinctiveness. Local authorities should also maintain or have access to a historic environment record which is to be supported by up-to-date evidence.

9.14 [Historic England’s Strategic Plan 2026-2031](#) **[See reference 240]** (2026) contains the action plan which sets out how the aims of the corporate plan will be delivered. The plan includes priorities to demonstrate how Historic England will continue to work towards delivering the heritage sector’s priorities for the historic environment.

9.15 The plan also sets out how the Government will support the heritage sector and help it to protect and care for our heritage and historic environment, in order to maximise the economic and social impact of heritage and to ensure that everyone can enjoy and benefit from it. It includes reference to promoting the role of the historic environment within the Government’s response to climate change and the wider sustainable development agenda.

9.16 [The Environment Act 2021](#) **[See reference 241]** sets out the UK’s new framework for environmental protection. It includes the creation of Conservation Covenant agreements between a landowner and a responsible body for the purposes of conservation. This can include to preserve land as a place of ‘archaeological, architectural artistic, cultural or historic interest.’

9.17 [Sustainability Appraisal and Strategic Environmental Assessment, Historic England Advice Note 8 \(2016\)](#) **[See reference 242]** sets out requirements for the consideration and appraisal of effects on the historic environment as part of the Sustainability Appraisal/Strategic Environmental Assessment process.

9.18 [The Town and Country Planning \(Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas\) Act \(1990\)](#) **[See reference 243]** requires local authorities to “have special regard to the desirability of preserving the building or its setting or any features of special architectural or historic interest which it possesses” when considering applications for listed building consent. With respect to any buildings or other land in a Conservation

Area, special attention must be paid to the desirability of preserving or enhancing the character or appearance of that area.

9.19 [Ancient Monuments & Archaeological Areas Act 1979](#) [See reference 244] is a law passed by the UK government to protect the archaeological heritage of England & Wales and Scotland. Under this Act, the Secretary of State has a duty to compile and maintain a schedule of ancient monuments of national importance, in order to help preserve them. It also creates criminal offences for unauthorised works to, or damage of, these monuments.

9.20 [Historic Buildings and Ancient Monuments Act 1953](#) [See reference 245] is an Act of Parliament that makes provision for the compilation of a register of gardens and other land (parks and gardens, and battlefields).

Local

9.21 [Dorset Historic Environment Record Forward Plan 2021-25 \(2021\)](#) [See reference 246] sets out the operating framework for Dorset's Historic Environment Record (HER). The Plan provides comprehensive information on the historic environment as an evidence base for management strategies. It also outlines how the HER supports sustainable development by ensuring that heritage considerations are integrated into the decision-making process.

9.22 [The Dorset National Landscape Management Plan 2026 – 2031 \(2026\)](#) [See reference 247] has the following objectives relating to the historic environment:

- The historic environment and its setting are conserved and enhanced, ensuring its cultural significance is protected for future generations..

9.23 [Cranborne Chase National Landscape Management Plan 2025-2030 \(2025\)](#) [See reference 248] is covered in more detail in Chapter 8 but in respect of the historic environment, it sets the following outcomes for those looking after the National Landscape:

- The historic environment and cultural heritage of the National Landscape is conserved and enhanced.
- The historic environment, cultural heritage and traditions of the National Landscape are understood, valued and celebrated.

Baseline information

9.24 The Dorset Council Local Plan area includes a rich historic and built heritage which include the following designations:

- Scheduled Monuments: Nationally important archaeological sites;
- Conservation Areas: Areas of special architectural or historic interest, the character or appearance of which it is desirable to preserve or enhance;
- Historic Parks and Gardens: Gardens which are of special historic interest.
- Listed Buildings: Buildings of special architectural and historic interest. Includes Grade I (Building of exceptional interest); Grade II* (particularly important and more than special interest); and Grade II (special interest) Listed Buildings (Figure 9.1).

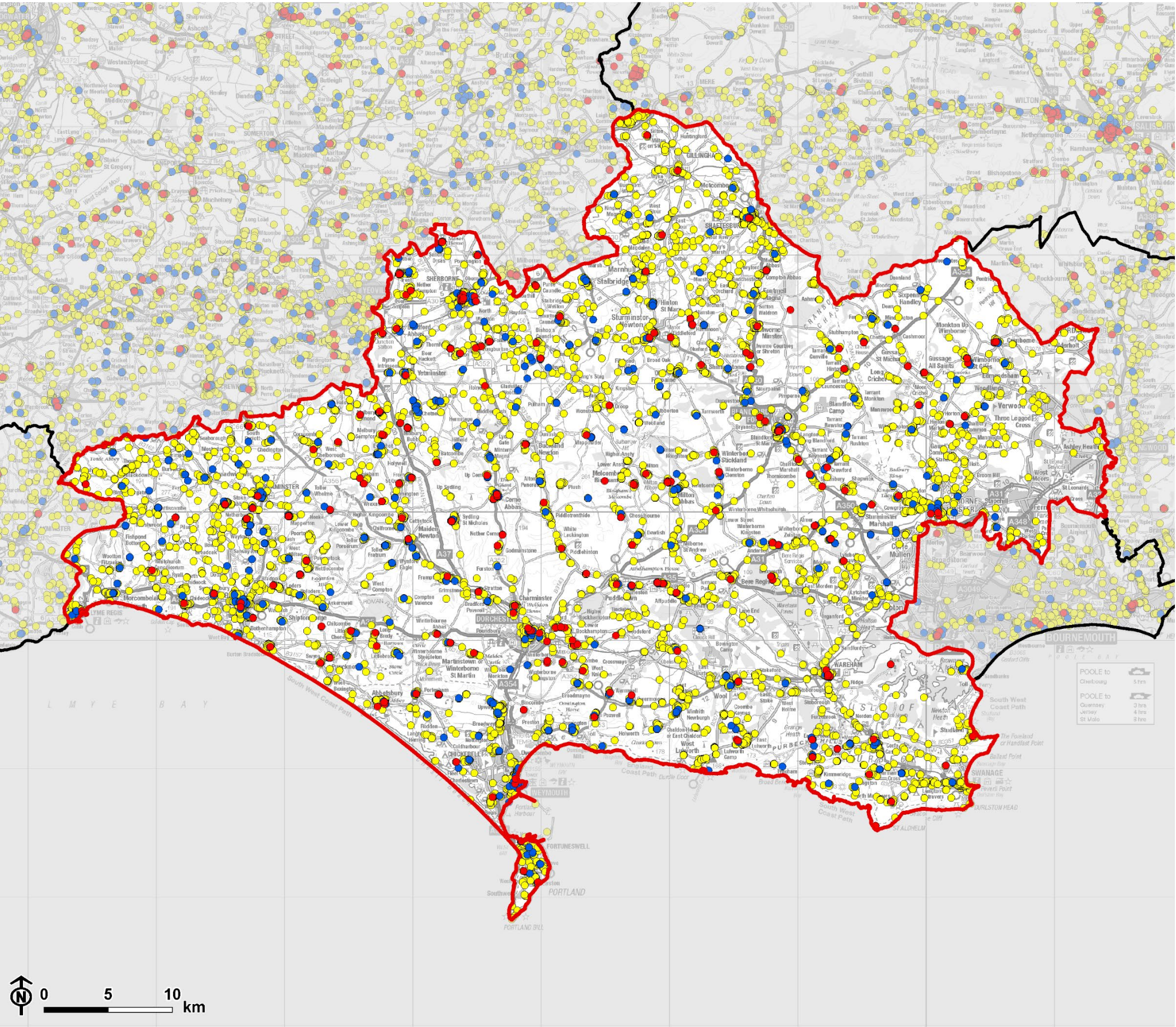
9.25 There are 1,016 Scheduled Monuments of national archaeological importance in Dorset, representing approximately 5% of England's Scheduled Monuments. These areas of archaeological importance on a national level are widely distributed across the Dorset Council Local Plan Area. There are also over 100 Conservation Areas in Dorset, as well as numerous Registered Parks and Gardens (Figure 9.2).

9.26 The Heritage at Risk Register is published annually by Historic England and provides a list of heritage assets, such as listed buildings, or scheduled monuments that are at risk as a result of neglect, decay or inappropriate development, or are vulnerable to becoming so. [Approximately a quarter of the scheduled monuments in Dorset are 'at risk'.](#) [See reference 249]

9.27 There are currently 208 items on the Heritage At Risk Register in the Dorset Plan Area, comprising:

- Scheduled Monuments: 196
- Listed Buildings: 11
- Registered Parks and Gardens: 1.

Figure 9.1: A map showing the location of listed buildings within the Dorset Council Local Plan Area [See reference 250]



Legend

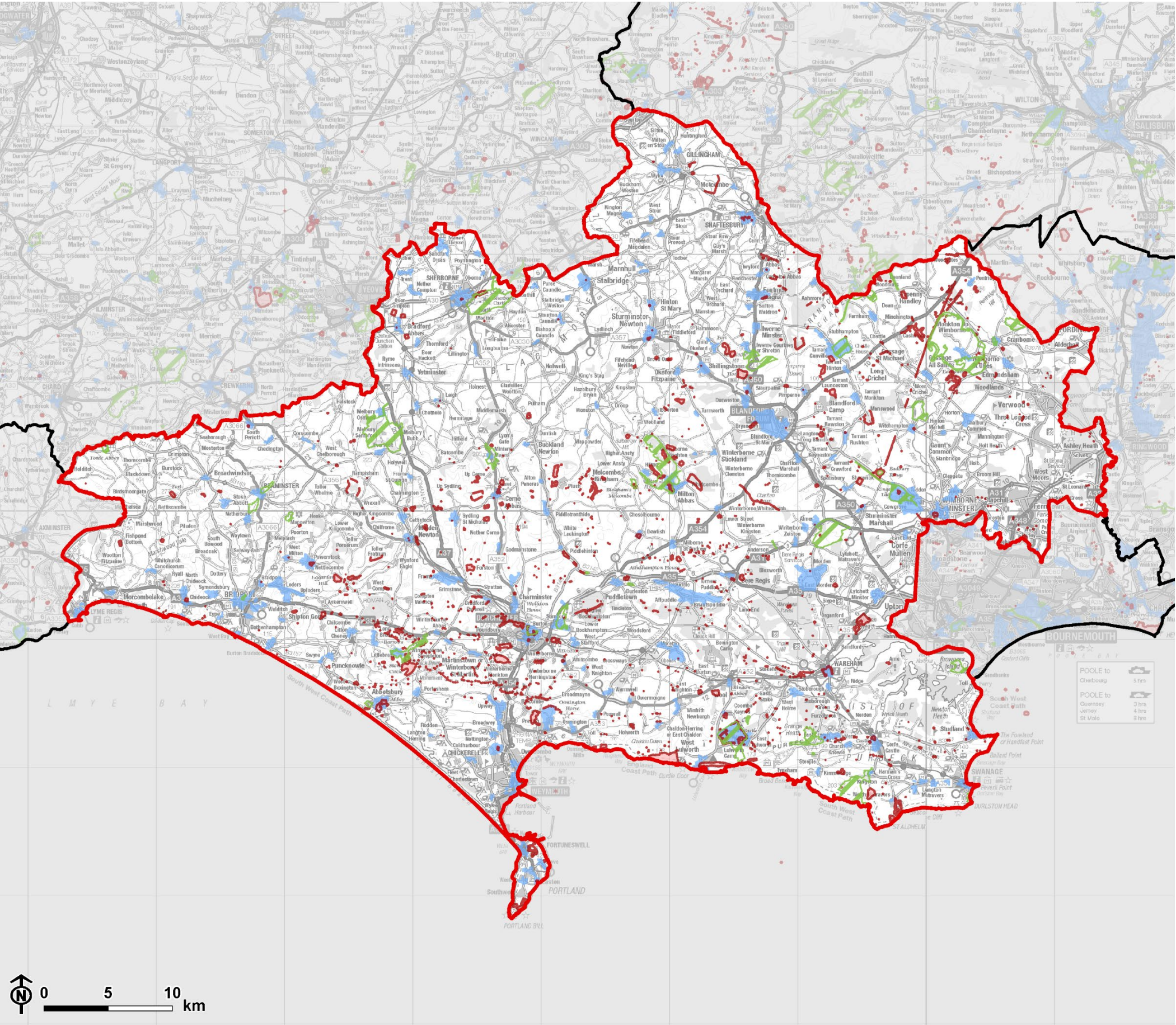
Dorset Council boundary

Neighbouring local authority

Listed building

- Grade I
- Grade II*
- Grade II

Figure 9.2: A map showing the extent of heritage assets within the Dorset Council Local Plan Area [See reference 251]



- Legend**
- Dorset Council boundary
 - Neighbouring local authority
 - Conservation area
 - Registered Parks and Gardens
 - Scheduled monument

Environmental and sustainability issues and likely evolution of the issues without the Local Plan

9.28 Analysis of the baseline information has enabled the following key environmental and sustainability issues relating to the district's cultural heritage to be identified. Reference is made to the relevant SEA objective that has been identified to help address this issue:

- The rich historic and built heritage of the plan area is an irreplaceable resource, and important features of historic, cultural and archaeological interest must be conserved and enhanced to prevent their loss (see SEA objective 8);
- Sustaining and enhancing the significance of heritage assets by putting them to viable uses which are consistent with their conservation (see SEA objective 8); and
- Ensuring that new development makes a positive contribution to local character and distinctiveness and take opportunities to draw on the contribution made by the historic environment to the character of a place (see SEA objective 8).

9.29 Without the new Local Plan, the historic environment is less likely to be protected and enhanced and the conditions of assets may worsen (see SEA objective 8).

SEA objectives

9.30 The draft SEA objectives and accompanying assessment questions designed to capture the objectives of relevant international and national plans, programmes and policies and the relevant environmental and sustainability issues identified in this chapter are set out below. We propose to use these to assess the Dorset Council Local Plan and its reasonable alternatives.

Historic environment SEA objectives and questions

SEA objective 8: Conserve and enhance heritage assets and the historic environment

Assessment questions

- Will the plan/ option safeguard, protect, and where appropriate enhance the significance of heritage assets and their setting?
- Will the plan/ option ensure that new development is sympathetic to local character and history?

Relevant SEA topics

- Cultural heritage

Chapter 10

Human Health and Population

10.1 This chapter sets out the baseline and policy context for Dorset's human health and population. The SEA will consider how the Local Plan can deliver sustainable places that support healthy, inclusive communities by ensuring housing, services, open space and access to healthcare keep pace with population change.

10.2 The term 'health' is defined by the World Health Organisation as a:

"State of complete physical, mental, and social wellbeing, and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity".

10.3 The health of a person is often determined by a person's individual characteristics and behaviours, their social and economic environment, and the physical environment [\[See reference 252\]](#).

10.4 It follows therefore that health is closely related to social conditions. A strong, inclusive society, with equal opportunities for all and where crime and fear of crime do not undermine community cohesion, promotes personal wellbeing and encourages a higher quality of life, improving health overall.

10.5 Whilst the link between public health and the economic environment is complex, it is generally true that wealthier countries have healthier populations and poverty adversely affects life expectancy. In the UK, the increase in lifestyle related and chronic diseases has been experienced particularly among socio-economically disadvantaged groups and areas [\[See reference 253\]](#).

10.6 Since the health of an individual is also closely linked to the physical environment in which they exist, the environmental problems considered in the preceding chapters, such as air pollution and flooding, also influence human health.

10.7 This chapter also explores the issues relating to the population and demographic structure, and social issues such as crime, healthcare and education.

Key messages from other plans, programmes and objectives

International

10.8 The United Nations developed a series of global development goals which aim to deliver sustainable development in the document titled [Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development \(2015\)](#) [See reference 254] which include:

- End poverty in all its forms everywhere;
- End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture;
- Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages;
- Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls;
- Ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all;
- Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all;
- Reduce inequality within and among countries;
- Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable; and
- Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels.

10.9 The [United Nations Declaration on Sustainable Development \(Johannesburg Declaration\) \(2002\)](#) [See reference 255] sets a broad framework for international sustainable development, including building a humane, equitable and caring global society aware of the need for human dignity for all, renewable energy and energy efficiency, sustainable consumption and production and resource efficiency.

10.10 The [United Nations Convention on Access to Information, Public Participation in Decision-Making and Access to Justice in Environmental Matters \(the 'Aarhus Convention'\) \(1998\)](#) [See reference 256] establishes a number of rights of the public (individuals and their associations) with regard to the environment. The Parties to the Convention are required to make the necessary provisions so that public authorities (at national, regional, or local level) will contribute to these rights to become effective.

National

10.11 The [National Planning Policy Framework \(NPPF\)](#) (2026) **[See reference 257]** promotes healthy, inclusive and safe places which promote social integration, are safe and accessible, and enable and support healthy lifestyles.

10.12 Plan-making policy HC1: Planning for healthy communities states that development plans should “promote the creation of healthy and inclusive places, and the provision, retention and enhancement of appropriate community facilities and public service infrastructure”. Development plans should “set out the facilities and contributions expected from development, including as part of allocations for major development involving the provision of housing”. Additionally, they should “identify wider opportunities to promote good health, prevent ill-health, reduce health inequalities and support social interaction through their spatial strategy and land allocations, including through policies for strengthening town centres, locating development where it will support walking, wheeling and cycling and promoting mixed-use developments”. Through Policy HC2: Local Green Space, the NPPF supports the designation of land as Local Green Space “where this would safeguard green areas of particular value to the local community”.

10.13 The delivery of new housing is considered to support local communities and their wellbeing by meeting housing needs and addressing shortages. Policy HO2: Setting requirement figures for homes states that “Spatial development strategies should establish a housing requirement, and set pitch and plot requirements where a need has been identified, for each local planning authority within the strategy area”. It specifies that these figures should not be retested as part of Local Plan preparation unless there has been a significant change in circumstances which affects the overall requirement and its distribution to each local planning authority area. According to policy HO3: Providing land for homes, ‘Local plans should identify a sufficient supply and mix of sites to meet or exceed the housing requirement figure and pitch and plot requirements for their areas over the plan period’.

10.14 The [Renters' Rights Act \(2025\)](#) **[See reference 258]** aims to improve renters’ security and rights, including by ending Section 21 ‘no fault’ evictions. The intention is that the Act will improve the current system for both the 11 million private renters and 2.3 million landlords in England. It seeks to give renters much greater security and stability so they can stay in their homes for longer, build lives in their communities, and avoid the risk of homelessness.

10.15 The [Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, Levelling Up and Regeneration Act \(2023\)](#) **[See reference 259]** sets out the direction for planning and makes provisions to support the levelling-up agenda. It seeks to streamline the

planning process whilst attaching greater weight to development plans. It also aims to improve infrastructure delivery with a new levy system, improve alignment between plans to address cross-boundary issues, and will introduce added protection for heritage assets. The Act also states that existing EU-generated systems of SEA, HRA and EIA will eventually be replaced by a simpler process known as 'Environmental Outcomes Reports'.

10.16 The [Green Infrastructure Framework \(2023\)](#) [See reference 260] will help increase the amount of green cover to 40% in urban residential areas. The Green Infrastructure Framework provides a structure to analyse where greenspace in urban environments is needed most. It aims to support equitable access to greenspace across the country, with an overarching target for everyone being able to reach good quality greenspace in their local area. From parks to green roofs, and increased tree cover, the Green Infrastructure Framework will make a significant contribution to nature recovery by embedding nature into new developments. Increasing the extent and connectivity of nature-rich habitats will also help increase wildlife populations, build resilience to the impacts of climate change, and ensure our cities are habitable for the future

10.17 The [Anti-Social Behaviour Action Plan \(2023\)](#) [See reference 261] sets out a comprehensive strategy to combat anti-social behaviour (ASB) and restore public confidence in community safety. The plan emphasises a zero-tolerance approach and introduces several key measures, including increasing the use of hotspot policing and enforcement, and changing laws and systems to take a zero-tolerance approach to anti-social behaviour.

10.18 The [Homes England Strategic Plan 2023 to 2028 \(2023\)](#) [See reference 262] sets out a vision to drive regeneration and housing delivery, to ensure that more homes are built in areas of greatest need, to improve affordability, and make a more resilient and diverse housing market.

10.19 [The State of the Environment: Health, People and the Environment \(2023\)](#) [See reference 263] focuses on the relationship between human health and people's access to and connection with a clean, high quality natural environment. It presents information on England's environment, and people's exposure to environmental pollutants, flooding and climate change in relation to human health. It highlights environmental inequalities that contribute to differences in health outcomes for people in England.

10.20 The [National Design Guide \(2021\)](#) [See reference 264] sets out the Government's priorities for well-designed places in the form of ten characteristics: context, identity, built form, movement, nature, public spaces, uses, homes and buildings, resources and lifespan.

10.21 [Build Back Better: Our Plan for Health and Social Care \(2021\)](#) [See reference 265] sets out the Government's plan for health and social care. It provides an overview of how this plan will tackle the elective backlog in the NHS and put the NHS on a sustainable footing. It sets out details of the plan for adult social care in England, including a cap on social care costs and how financial assistance will work for those without substantial assets. It covers wider support that the government will provide for the social care system, and how the government will improve the integration of health and social care. It explains the government's plan to introduce a new Health and Social Care Levy.

10.22 [COVID-19 Mental Health and Wellbeing Recovery Action Plan \(2021\)](#) [See reference 266] sets out the Government's plan to prevent, mitigate and respond to the mental health impacts of the pandemic during 2021 and 2022. Its main objectives are to support the general population to take action and look after their own mental wellbeing; to take action to address factors which play a crucial role in shaping mental health and wellbeing outcomes; and, to support services to meet the need for specialist support.

10.23 [Using the planning system to promote healthy weight environments \(2020\)](#) [See reference 267], [Addendum \(2021\)](#) [See reference 268] provides a framework and starting point for local authorities to clearly set out in local planning guidance how best to achieve healthy weight environments based on local evidence and needs, by focusing on environments that enable healthier eating and help promote more physical activity as the default. The Addendum provides updates on the implications for planning for a healthier food environment, specifically on the hot food takeaways retail uses, and sets out recommended actions in light of changes to the Use Class Order (UCO) in England from 1st September 2020.

10.24 [A Green Future: Our 25 Year Plan to Improve the Environment \(2018\)](#) [See reference 269] sets out goals for improving the environment within the next 25 years. It details how the Government will work with communities and businesses to leave the environment in a better state than it is presently. Identifies six key areas around which action will be focused. Those of relevance to the topics of population growth, health and wellbeing are 'using and managing land sustainably' and 'connecting people with the environment to improve health and wellbeing'. Actions that will be taken as part of these two key areas are as follows:

- Using and managing land sustainably:
 - Embed an 'environmental net gain' principle for development, including housing and infrastructure.
 - Connecting people with the environment to improve health and wellbeing:

- Help people improve their health and wellbeing by using green spaces including through mental health services.
- Encourage children to be close to nature, in and out of school, with particular focus on disadvantaged areas.
- ‘Green’ our towns and cities by creating green infrastructure and planting one million urban trees.

10.25 The [Environmental Noise Regulations \(2018\)](#) [See reference 270] apply to environmental noise, mainly from transport. The regulations require regular noise mapping and action planning for road, rail and aviation noise and noise in large urban areas. They also require Noise Action Plans based on the maps for road and rail noise and noise in large urban areas. The Action Plans identify Important Areas (areas exposed to the highest levels of noise) and suggest ways the relevant authorities can reduce these. Major airports and those which affect large urban areas are also required to produce and publish their own Noise Action Plans separately. The Regulations do not apply to noise from domestic activities such as noise created by neighbours; at workplaces; inside means of transport; or military activities in military areas.

10.26 [Planning Policy for Traveller Sites \(2015\)](#) [See reference 271] sets out the Government’s planning policy for traveller sites, replacing the older version published in March 2012. The Government’s overarching aim is to ensure fair and equal treatment for travellers, in a way that facilitates the traditional and nomadic way of life of travellers while respecting the interests of the settled community.

10.27 [Technical Housing Standards – Nationally Described Space Standard \(2015\)](#) [See reference 272] sets out the Government’s new nationally described space standard. The standard deals with internal space within new dwellings and sets out requirements for the Gross Internal (floor) Area of new dwellings at a defined level of occupancy, as well as floor areas and dimensions for key parts of the home.

10.28 [Select Committee on Public Service and Demographic Change Report Ready for Ageing? \(2013\)](#) [See reference 273] warns that society is underprepared for the ageing population. The report states “longer lives can be a great benefit, but there has been a collective failure to address the implications and without urgent action this great boon could turn into a series of miserable crises”. The report highlights the under provision of specialist housing for older people and the need to plan for the housing needs of the older population as well as younger people.

10.29 [Fair Society, Healthy Lives \(2011\)](#) [See reference 274] investigated health inequalities in England and the actions needed in order to tackle them. Subsequently, a supplementary report was prepared providing additional evidence relating to spatial

planning and health on the basis that there is “overwhelming evidence that health and environmental inequalities are inexorably linked and that poor environments contribute significantly to poor health and health inequalities”. [Marmot Review 10 Years On \(2020\)](#) [See reference 275] revisits Fair Society, Healthy Lives. It found that, since 2010, life expectancy in England has stalled, which suggests society has stopped improving. In addition, there are marked regional differences in life expectancy – the more deprived the area, the shorter the life expectancy. Mortality rates are increasing in those aged 45-49, child poverty has increased and there is a housing crisis and rise in homelessness.

Local

10.30 [The Pan-Dorset Reducing Reoffending Strategy 2024 to 2027 \(2024\)](#) [See reference 276] seeks to reduce reoffending rates among adult and young offenders in the Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole (BCP) and Dorset Council areas. The Reducing Reoffending Strategy demonstrates direct alignment with two of the main priorities set by the BCP CSP of tackling violent crime in all its forms, and tackling issues related to Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG), including domestic abuse (DA).

10.31 [The Community Safety Plan 2023 - 2026 \(2025-2026 Refresh\) \(2023\)](#) [See reference 277] aims to:

- reduce crime and the fear of crime;
- address risk, threat and harm to victims and local communities; and
- facilitate the strengthening of Dorset's communities in the delivery of local initiatives

10.32 [The Dorset Local Nature Partnership's Vision and Strategy \(2023\)](#) [See reference 278] sets out the following strategic priorities for the partnership (listed in Chapter 2 above), with one specifically referring to human health:

- Naturally healthy – developing Dorset's ‘natural health service’: Working with the healthcare system, providers, and land managers, we will aid collaboration to improve access to and connection with nature, build green infrastructure and support better information on how to use the natural world to live better and reduce inequalities.

10.33 [Health and Wellbeing Strategy 2020 to 2023 \(2020\)](#) [See reference 279] seeks to improve health and wellbeing and reduce health inequalities. The health and wellbeing strategy focuses on three priorities:

- empowering communities;
- promoting healthy lives; and
- support and challenge

10.34 [The Dorset National Landscape Management Plan 2026 – 2031 \(2026\)](#) [See reference 280] has the following objectives relating to human health and population:

- Promote sustainable living among communities in the National Landscape to reduce impacts on the local environment and increase access to environmental benefits;
- Support and develop activities that increase health and wellbeing by establishing and strengthening connections to the landscape and nature;
- Develop and support measures to improve accessibility to the coast & countryside for all, where compatible with the purposes of National Landscape designation;
- Rationalise and improve interpretation to enhance visitor experience, reduce clutter in the landscape and inform the public about the landscape and safety;
- Support initiatives for children and young people to understand more about the Dorset National Landscape and its special qualities through learning outside the classroom, curricular and extra-curricular activities;
- Support lifelong learning opportunities in the Dorset National Landscape;
- Support measures to improve connectivity and functionality of the public rights of way network, including long distance routes, to meet local and visitor needs;
- Develop, support and promote integrated sustainable access and travel options in the National Landscape;
- Develop and support inland visitor experiences compatible with the purposes of National Landscape designation to spread economic benefits and reduce pressure on the coast; and
- Develop and support measures to engage communities, cultural organisations and tourism businesses to create and promote sustainable visitor experiences, including use of assets such as local food and drink.

10.35 The [Dorset Sustainable Community Strategy 2010-2020 \(2010\)](#) [See reference 281], written by the Dorset Strategic Partnership, has the following vision:

‘a living thriving Dorset where everyone has a part to play in creating a better quality of life.’

10.36 This strategy includes the following aims:

- Narrowing the inequality gap so that people across Dorset have fairer access to opportunities which can improve their quality of life;
- Everyone can live in a good quality home and neighbourhood that meets their needs;
- Dorset people can access work, education and training, healthcare, essential shopping and leisure opportunities;
- People are safe and feel safe in their communities;
- Communities thrive: everyone feels they belong, can take an active part in community life and can influence decision making;
- Everyone has the opportunity to live a long and healthy life...and to receive high quality care that meets their needs;
- Children and young people realise their potential; and
- Older people are healthy, active and independent in their communities.

Baseline information

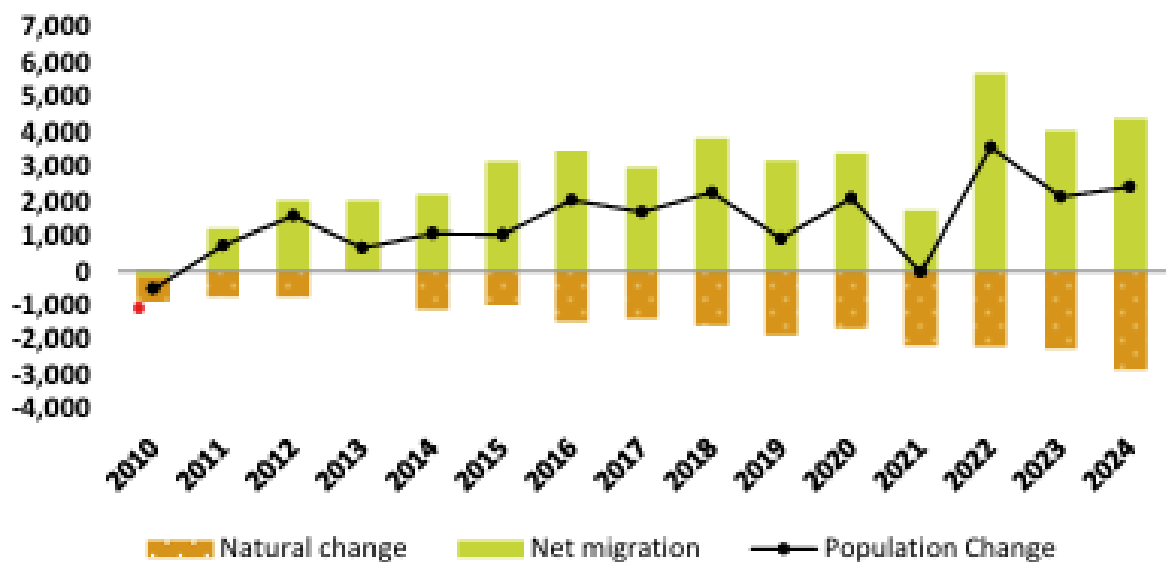
10.37 The population of the Dorset Council Local Plan area was 389,950 in 2024.

10.38 The population of the plan area grew by 14,400 between 2011-2021, which represents about a 4% growth compared with 7% nationally. Over the period 2025 to 2035, the population is projected to grow by another 5% which is the same as the national population.

10.39 The number of deaths within the plan area outnumbered the number of births in 2024/24. This resulted in a decrease in the natural population (shown in the orange bar in Figure 10.1). The growth in population experienced within the plan area is attributed to the positive net in-migration into the area.

10.40 The population of those aged over 65 grew by 19,800 between 2013 and 2023, an increase of 20%. The working age population decreased by 1,400 and the number of children stayed the same.

Figure 10.1: Annual population change (shown by the black line), net migration (shown by the green bar) and natural population change (shown by the orange bar) between 2010-24 within the Dorset Council Local Plan area

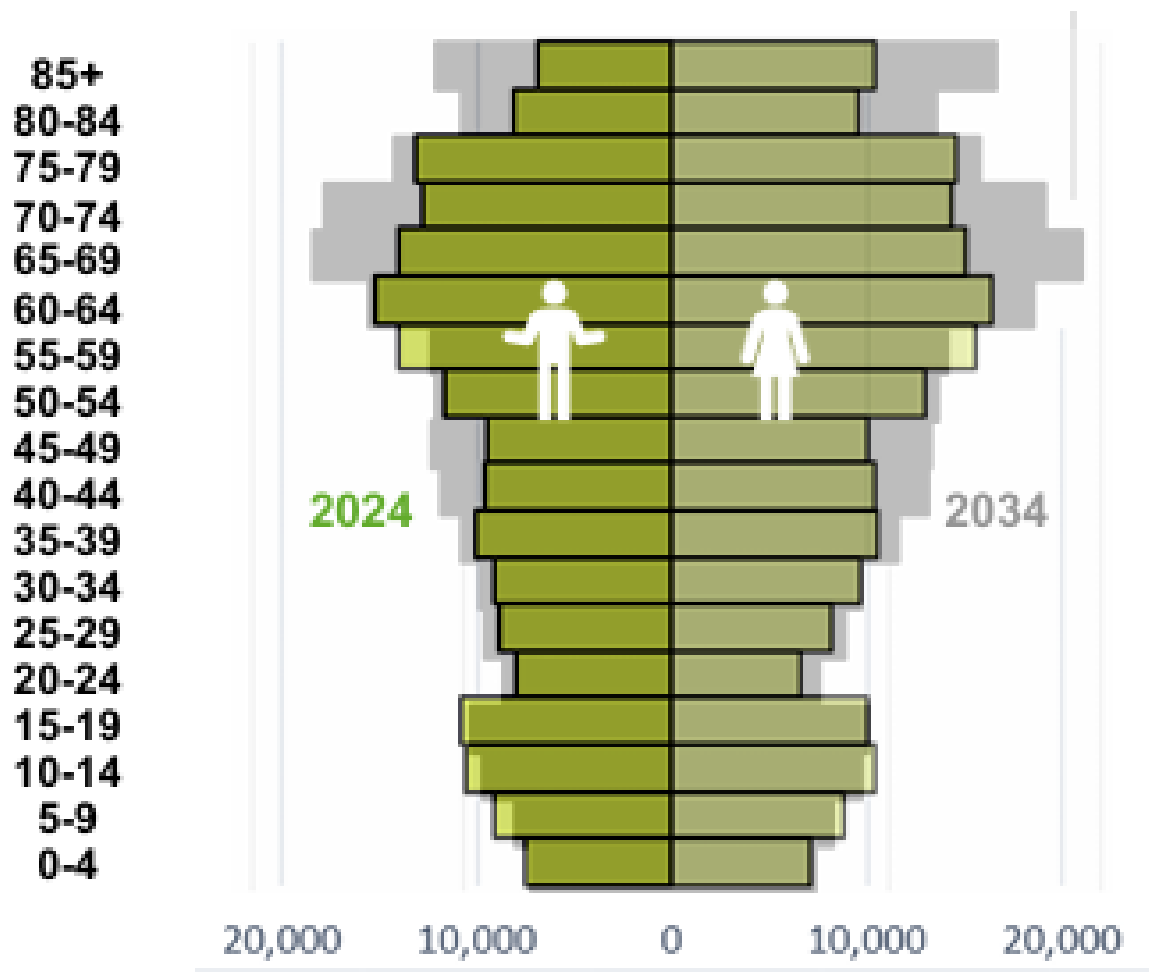


10.41 In terms of future population trends, it is projected that the population of the Dorset Council Local Plan area will increase another 5% over the period 2025 to 2035, which is the same as the national population.

10.42 As life expectancy continues to rise, the projected increase in population of those aged over 65 years old will increase from 30% of the total population to 36% in 2033 (Figure 10.2).

10.43 The population of those within working age is expected to rise by just 700 between 2013 and 2033 compared to a marginal growth nationally, and the number of children is expected to fall, continuing the trend experienced in the Dorset Council Local Plan area since 2007.

Figure 10.2: Population demographics in the Dorset Council Local Plan area in 2024 and 2034. [See reference 282]



10.44 These projected future trends in population indicate an ageing population within the Dorset Council Local Plan area. area. The growing number of older people is likely to increase demand for health and social care services.

10.45 Dorset residents are generally healthy, have a high life satisfaction rating and feel that the things they do in their lives are worthwhile. However, 15.3% of Dorset residents described their health as ‘fair’ or ‘bad’, and 62% of adults in Dorset are classified as obese, which is slightly below the national average (64%).

10.46 Of the 223 areas within the Dorset Council Local Plan area, nine are among the top 20% most deprived nationally for multiple deprivation; seven of these areas are within Weymouth.

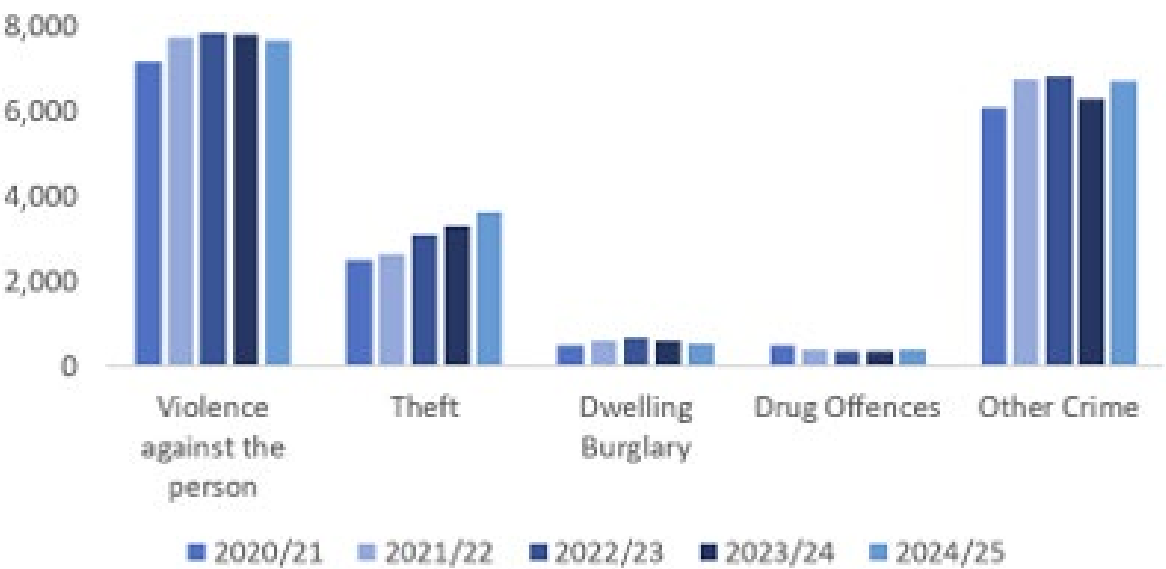
10.47 Deprivation has a significant effect on health and wellbeing. The life expectancy in the former Dorset County Council area is 4.9 years greater for males

and 3.2 years greater for females in the least socially deprived area in comparison to the most socially deprived area.

10.48 In terms of economic deprivation, seven neighbourhoods in Dorset fall within the top 20% nationally for income deprivation, five of which are in the former district of Weymouth & Portland.

10.49 Crime in the Dorset Council Local Plan area is well below the national average for England. Total recorded crime has risen by 2% in the 2024/25 fiscal year compared to the previous year, although antisocial behaviour incidents have decreased by 12%. The number of domestic abuse incidents has increased by 12%.

Figure 10.3: Crime in the Dorset Council Local Plan area according to the type of offence between 2020/21 and 2024/25



10.50 In 2024/25, there were 4,771 anti-social behaviour incidents in the Dorset Council Local Plan area. Weymouth has the highest rate of anti-social behaviour in the Dorset Council Local Plan area, with 1 in 7 of the anti-social behaviour incidents in the Dorset Council Local Plan area occurring in Melcombe Regis in Weymouth.

10.51 The performance of students in Dorset is generally in line with national figures. 63% of pupils achieved ‘basic measures’ which is defined as a standard pass or higher in English and Maths GCSE, which is below the national figure of 65%.

Environmental and sustainability issues and likely evolution of the issues without the Local Plan

10.52 The analysis of the baseline information has enabled a number of key environmental and sustainability issues facing Dorset to be identified. They are as follows (below each issue, reference is made to the relevant SEA objective that has been identified to help address the issue):

- The [State of Dorset 2025](#) [See reference 283] evidence shows that Dorset's population continues to age faster than the national average. Older people now make up close to three in ten residents, and this will increase demand for health and social care, accessible homes, public transport, community facilities and age-friendly places (see SEA objectives 9 and 10).
- Population change varies across Dorset. Some market towns, coastal communities and rural areas have a smaller working-age population, seasonal pressures from visitors and reduced access to services. New development should support inclusive, well-connected communities with access to services, employment, green infrastructure and adaptable homes (see SEA objectives 9 and 10).
- Deprivation remains concentrated in particular neighbourhoods, including parts of Weymouth and Portland, and can also affect rural communities where low incomes, poor access to services and transport barriers combine. The Local Plan should help reduce inequalities and improve access to jobs, education, health services, open space, culture and community facilities (see SEA objectives 9 and 10).
- Health and wellbeing outcomes are generally positive for many residents, but inequalities persist. Mental health pressures, obesity, loneliness and the needs of an ageing population remain important issues. New development should support walking, cycling, safe streets, accessible green and blue infrastructure, and social infrastructure that helps people stay active and connected (see SEA objective 9).
- Housing affordability remains a major sustainability issue. House prices are high compared with local earnings, and the supply of affordable, accessible and specialist housing has not kept pace with need. The Local Plan should provide a wide choice of high-quality homes, including affordable homes and homes for older and disabled people, in locations that reduce the need to travel by car (see SEA objective 10).
- Dorset's economy has strengths in tourism, agriculture, advanced engineering, marine, defence, creative industries, care, education and environmental

technologies. However, lower workplace wages, skills gaps, a high share of small businesses and a constrained working-age population can limit resilience. New development should support year-round employment, town centre vitality, rural enterprise, green skills, digital connectivity and access to jobs by sustainable transport (see SEA objectives 9 and 10).

- Leisure and culture make a significant contribution to Dorset's identity, health and visitor economy. The coast, countryside, heritage assets, arts, museums, libraries, sports facilities and community venues support wellbeing and local pride. Growth should protect valued cultural and recreational assets, improve access for communities with fewer opportunities, and avoid increasing pressure on sensitive places (see SEA objective 9).
- Dorset's natural and historic environment remains central to the county's character and economy. Internationally and nationally designated habitats, the Dorset National Landscape, the Cranborne Chase National Landscape, the Jurassic Coast, conservation areas, listed buildings, scheduled monuments and locally valued landscapes all require careful protection and enhancement. The Local Plan should respond to biodiversity decline, water quality pressures, climate change, coastal change and recreational pressure while supporting nature recovery and heritage-led placemaking (see SEA objectives 9 and 10).

10.53 Without the new Local Plan, the issue of the increasing demand for particular services created by the ageing population will worsen. In particular this will place a greater burden on local health and social services, with this likely to be most acute in areas of highest deprivation across the area. Alongside this, uptake of active modes of transport, access to green space, community facilities, improved public realm and other recreation opportunities will be limited. The overall effect will be a decline in the population's health and wellbeing.

SEA objectives

10.54 The draft SEA objectives and accompanying appraisal assessment questions designed to capture the objectives of relevant international and national plans, programmes and policies and the relevant environmental and sustainability issues identified in this chapter are set out below. We propose to use these to appraise assess the Dorset Council Local Plan and its reasonable alternatives.

Human health and wellbeing SEA objectives and questions

SEA objective 9: Promote wellbeing and healthy communities for all

Assessment questions

- Will the plan/option enable healthy lifestyles and promote wellbeing through the provision of high-quality accessible natural spaces, green infrastructure, allotments and sports facilities?
- Will the plan/option encourage social interaction by providing mixed-use development, strong neighbourhood centres and improved local accessibility and connectivity, to encourage a more inclusive society and prevent rural isolation?
- Will the plan/option provide safe and accessible environments where crime and disorder, and the fear of crime, do not undermine quality of life or community cohesion?

Relevant SEA topics

- Human Health
- Population

SEA objective 10: Deliver a wide choice of high-quality homes and infrastructure

Assessment questions

- Will the plan/option supply the housing required to meet the needs of present and future generations, including affordable housing, in sustainable locations?
- Will the plan/option provide community facilities such as health, education and cultural infrastructure in sustainable locations?

Relevant SEA topics

- Material Assets
- Population

Chapter 11

Material Assets

11.1 This chapter sets out the baseline and policy context for Dorset's local material asset opportunities. The SEA will consider how the Local Plan can support a strong and diverse variety of material assets by providing jobs, investment and regeneration, which can help reduce deprivation and improve health and well-being

11.2 A key element of achieving sustainable development is to deliver the housing, create the jobs, and provide the infrastructure required to meet current needs whilst not compromising the ability of future generations to do so.

11.3 As the population of England and indeed Dorset continues to grow, so does the need for housing, jobs and infrastructure, such as roads, schools and healthcare facilities. Estimates have put the number of new homes needed in England at 340,000 per year, of which 145,000 should be affordable [\[See reference 284\]](#). New housing supply increased year-on-year from a low point of 125,000 in 2012/13, reaching a high point of 243,000 new homes in 2019/20. Supply declined in 2020/21, in part because of disruption to housebuilding caused by Covid-19 but rose again in 2021/22 [\[See reference 285\]](#), but fell 9% in 2023 to 231,100 homes—marking the fifth consecutive quarterly decline [\[See reference 286\]](#). Meanwhile ONS figures for construction output for housebuilding were at 82% of 2019 levels in November 2023, suggesting an increase in delivery in the near-term is unlikely. [\[See reference 287\]](#)

11.4 This chapter considers the issues surrounding the delivery of 'material assets', which for the purposes of the SEA of the Dorset Council Local Plan refers to the following built and natural assets:

- Built assets: including housing, commercial and industrial premises, transport infrastructure such as rail, roads, cycleways and footpaths, telecommunications, services infrastructure such as water supply/waste water facilities and electricity substations, community, healthcare and educational facilities; and
- Natural assets: including mineral assets such as sand, gravel, rock, and slate.

Key messages from other plans programmes and objectives

International

11.5 The United Nations developed a series of global development goals which aim to deliver sustainable development in the document titled [Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development \(2015\)](#) [See reference 288] which include:

- SDG 1: No Poverty
- SDG 3: Good Health and Well-being
- SDG 6: Clean Water and Sanitation
- SDG 8: Decent Work and Economic Growth
- SDG 9: Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure
- SDG 10: Reduced Inequalities
- SDG 11: Sustainable Cities and Communities
- SDG 12: Responsible consumption and production
- SDG 13: Climate Action
- SDG 15: Life on Land

11.6 [The United Nations Declaration on Sustainable Development \(Johannesburg Declaration\) \(2002\)](#) [See reference 289] sets a broad framework for international sustainable development, including building a humane, equitable and caring global society aware of the need for human dignity for all, renewable energy and energy efficiency, sustainable consumption and production and resource efficiency.

11.7 The [United Nations Convention on Access to Information, Public Participation in Decision-Making and Access to Justice in Environmental Matters \(the 'Aarhus Convention'\) \(1998\)](#) [See reference 290] establishes a number of rights of the public (individuals and their associations) with regard to the environment. The Parties to the Convention are required to make the necessary provisions so that public authorities (at national, regional, or local level) will contribute to these rights to become effective.

National

11.8 The [National Planning Policy Framework \(NPPF\)](#) (2026) [\[See reference 291\]](#) sets out that in terms of economic growth, the objective of the planning system is to contribute towards building a “strong, responsive and competitive economy, by ensuring that sufficient land of the right types is available in the right places and at the right time to support growth, innovation and improved productivity”. There is also a requirement for the planning system to identify and coordinate the provision of infrastructure. Furthermore, planning policies should address the specific locational requirements of different sectors.

11.9 Plan-making Policy E1: Providing the conditions for long-term economic growth stipulates that development plans should “set out a clear economic vision and strategy, which takes a positive, proactive and realistic approach to encouraging sustainable economic growth in both urban and rural areas, having regard to the Industrial Strategy [\[See reference 292\]](#) and any relevant strategic and local strategies for economic development and regeneration”.

11.10 Plan-making Policy TC1: Planning for town centres, sets out how development plans should promote the long-term vitality and viability of town centres, including by setting out the hierarchy of centres and areas within them. Plans should allocate a range of suitable sites in town centres to meet the scale and type of main town centre uses needed over the plan period.

11.11 Through plan-making Policy TR1: Vision-led approach to planning for transport, the NPPF states that ‘sustainable transport should be considered from the earliest stages of plan-making, so that it is reflected in the vision for the plan area and its specific proposals, and forms an integral part of a plan’s strategy for creating well-designed, sustainable, inclusive and popular places’.

11.12 The [Planning and Infrastructure Act \(2025\)](#) [\[See reference 293\]](#) sets out the Government’s plan to support housing and economic growth. The Act aims to speed up and streamline the delivery of new homes and critical infrastructure, supporting delivery of the government’s Plan for Change milestones of building 1.5 million safe and decent homes in England and fast-tracking 150 planning decisions on major economic infrastructure projects by the end of the current Parliament (2029). It will also support delivery of the Government’s ‘Clean Power 2030’ target by ensuring that key clean energy projects are built as quickly as possible.

11.13 [UK Infrastructure: A 10 Year Strategy \(2025\)](#) [\[See reference 294\]](#) sets out an integrated plan to transform economic, housing and social infrastructure over the next decade. It commits to at least £725 billion in public investment, supplemented by private financing via carefully targeted public-private partnership models and a new

National Wealth Fund. The strategy introduces multiyear capital budgets (initially five-year, reviewed biennially) and establishes the National Infrastructure and Service Transformation Authority (NISTA) to unify planning, improve project delivery, assure major schemes, and coordinate a transparent Infrastructure Pipeline launched in July 2025. It aims to boost growth, align infrastructure with government missions, including housing, clean energy, public services and net zero, reduce planning delays, build institutional capacity, support supply chains and skills development, and provide stability and clarity to investors.

11.14 The UK's [Modern Industrial Strategy \(2025\)](#) [See reference 295] outlines a 10-year plan to boost business investment and elevate the UK's performance in eight designated growth driving sectors: advanced manufacturing; clean energy industries; creative industries; defence; digital and technologies; financial services; life sciences; and professional and business services. The strategy aims to provide long term stability and certainty to encourage both domestic and international investment through sector plans, streamlined regulation, enhanced access to finance, including via the National Wealth Fund and British Business Bank, and by accelerating grid connections and infrastructure delivery. It includes regional and place-based initiatives, with targeted support for city regions, industrial clusters and Industrial Strategy Zones to drive inclusive growth across the UK. The strategy is also supported by a robust monitoring framework overseen by a newly established Industrial Strategy Advisory Council, and embeds vocabulary around long-termism, pro-business engagement, competition policy, skills development and innovation.

11.15 [The Plan for Change \(2024\)](#) [See reference 296] outlines the UK Government's framework for long-term policy delivery across five priority areas: economic growth, healthcare, public safety, opportunity, and clean energy. It sets out specific targets within this Parliament, underpinned by aims to ensure economic stability, reform public services, and implement a more mission-focused approach to governance.

11.16 The [Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, Levelling Up and Regeneration Act \(2023\)](#) [See reference 297] sets out the direction for planning and makes provisions to support the levelling-up agenda. It seeks to streamline the planning process whilst attaching greater weight to development plans. It also aims to improve infrastructure delivery with a new levy system, improve alignment between plans to address cross-boundary issues, and will introduce added protection for heritage assets. The Act also states that existing EU-generated systems of SEA, HRA and EIA will eventually be replaced by a simpler process known as 'Environmental Outcomes Reports'.

11.17 [The Green Infrastructure Framework \(2023\)](#) [See reference 298] will help increase the amount of green cover to 40% in urban residential areas. The Green Infrastructure Framework provides a structure to analyse where greenspace in urban environments is needed most. It aims to support equitable access to greenspace across the country, with an overarching target for everyone being able to reach good quality greenspace in their local area. From parks to green roofs, and increased tree cover, the Green Infrastructure Framework will make a significant contribution to nature recovery by embedding nature into new developments. Increasing the extent and connectivity of nature-rich habitats will also help increase wildlife populations, build resilience to the impacts of climate change, and ensure our cities are habitable for the future

11.18 The [waste prevention programme for England: Maximising Resources, Minimising Waste \(2023\)](#) [See reference 299] sets out government's priorities for managing resources and waste, in line with the resources and waste strategy for England.

11.19 The [Homes England Strategic Plan 2023 to 2028 \(2023\)](#) [See reference 300] sets out a vision to drive regeneration and housing delivery, to ensure that more homes are built in areas of greatest need, to improve affordability, and make a more resilient and diverse housing market.

11.20 [The State of the Environment: Health, People and the Environment \(2023\)](#) [See reference 301] focuses on the relationship between human health and people's access to and connection with a clean, high quality natural environment. It presents information on England's environment, and people's exposure to environmental pollutants, flooding and climate change in relation to human health. It highlights environmental inequalities that contribute to differences in health outcomes for people in England.

11.21 [Future of Transport: supporting rural transport innovation \(2023\)](#) [See reference 302] shows how innovative and emerging transport technologies could address some of the major challenges in rural communities. It highlights the importance of transport to everyday life rural life and provides guiding carbonising Transport: Setting the Challenge principles for the introduction of new technologies and services.

11.22 [The Cycling and Walking Investment Strategy Report to Parliament \(2022\)](#) [See reference 303] sets out the objectives and financial resources for cycling and walking infrastructure. It states the Government's long-term ambition is to make walking and cycling the natural choices for shorter journeys. It aims to double cycling by 2025, increase walking activity, increase the percentage of children that usually

walk to school and reduce the number of cyclists killed or seriously injured on England's roads.

11.23 [The Growth Plan 2022](#) [See reference 304] makes growth the government's central economic mission, setting a target of reaching a 2.5% trend rate. Sustainable growth will lead to higher wages, greater opportunities and provide sustainable funding for public services. The Chancellor of the Exchequer's "growth plan" contained a raft of significant tax measures, with major changes being announced for both individuals and businesses.

11.24 The vision of the [Future of freight plan \(2022\)](#) [See reference 305] vision is to create a freight and logistics sector that is cost-efficient, reliable resilient, environmentally sustainable and valued by society. It identifies the main challenges, objectives and actions that need to be taken in the following 5 priority areas:

- National Freight Network (NFN)
- Enabling the transition to net zero
- Planning
- People and skills
- Data and technology

11.25 [Build Back Better: Our Plan for Growth \(2021\)](#) [See reference 306] sets out a plan to 'build back better' tackling long-term problems to deliver growth that delivers high-quality jobs across the UK while supporting the transition to net zero. This will build on three core pillars of growth: infrastructure, skills and innovation.

11.26 [Decarbonising Transport: A Better, Greener Britain \(2021\)](#) [See reference 307] sets out the Government's commitments and the actions needed to decarbonise the entire transport system in the UK. It follows on from the 2020 report and commits the UK to phasing out the sale of new diesel and petrol heavy goods vehicles by 2040, subject to consultation, in addition to phasing out the sale of polluting cars and vans by 2035. It also sets out how the government will improve public transport and increase support for active travel, as well as creating a net zero rail network by 2050, ensuring net zero domestic aviation emissions by 2040, and a transition to green shipping.

11.27 The [Environment Act 2021](#) [See reference 308] sets statutory targets for the recovery of the natural world in four priority areas: air quality, biodiversity, water, and resource efficiency and waste reduction. It also establishes the Office for Environmental Protection which will act as an impartial and objective body for the

protection and improvement of the environment. The Act sets out legislation which covers local air quality management frameworks and the recall of motor vehicles.

11.28 The Government's strategic direction for biodiversity is presented in [Biodiversity 2020: A strategy for England's wildlife and ecosystem services \(2011\)](#), [See reference 309] which includes the following aims with respect to agriculture:

- Priority action 3.1: Improve the delivery of environmental outcomes from agricultural land management practices, whilst increasing food production; and
- Priority action 3.2: Reform the Common Agricultural Policy to achieve greater environmental benefits.

11.29 [The Road to Zero \(2018\)](#) [See reference 310] sets out new measures towards cleaner road transport, aiming to put the UK at the forefront of the design and manufacturing of zero emission vehicles. It explains how cleaner air, a better environment, zero emission vehicles and a strong, clean economy will be achieved. One of the main aims of the document is for all new cars and vans to be effectively zero emission by 2040.

11.30 [A Green Future: Our 25 Year Plan to Improve the Environment \(2018\)](#) [See reference 311] sets out goals for improving the environment within the next 25 years. It details how the Government will work with communities and businesses to leave the environment in a better state than it is presently. Identifies six key areas around which action will be focused. Those of relevance to the topics of population growth, health and wellbeing are 'using and managing land sustainably' and 'connecting people with the environment to improve health and wellbeing'. Actions that will be taken as part of these two key areas are as follows:

- Using and managing land sustainably:
- Embed an 'environmental net gain' principle for development, including housing and infrastructure.
- Connecting people with the environment to improve health and wellbeing:
- Help people improve their health and wellbeing by using green spaces including through mental health services.
- Encourage children to be close to nature, in and out of school, with particular focus on disadvantaged areas.
- 'Green' our towns and cities by creating green infrastructure and planting one million urban trees.

11.31 [Highways England Sustainable Development Strategy and Action Plan \(2017\)](#)

[See reference 312] is designed to communicate the company's approach and priorities for sustainable development to its key stakeholders. Highways England aims to ensure its action in the future will further reduce the impact of its activities seeking a long-term and sustainable benefit to the environment and the communities it serves. The action plan describes how Highways England will progress the aspirations of their Sustainable Development and Environment Strategies. It describes actions that will enable the company to deliver sustainable development and to help protect and improve the environment.

11.32 [Planning Policy for Traveller Sites \(2015\)](#) **[See reference 313]** sets out the Government's planning policy for traveller sites, replacing the older version published in March 2012. The Government's overarching aim is to ensure fair and equal treatment for travellers, in a way that facilitates the traditional and nomadic way of life of travellers while respecting the interests of the settled community.

11.33 [Technical Housing Standards – Nationally Described Space Standard \(2015\)](#)

[See reference 314] sets out the Government's new nationally described space standard. The standard deals with internal space within new dwellings and sets out requirements for the Gross Internal (floor) Area of new dwellings at a defined level of occupancy, as well as floor areas and dimensions for key parts of the home.

11.34 [Door to Door: A strategy for improving sustainable transport integration \(2013\)](#)

[See reference 315] focuses on four core areas which need to be addressed so that people can be confident in choosing greener modes of transport. There are as follows:

- Accurate, accessible and reliable information about different transport options.
- Convenient and affordable tickets.
- Regular and straightforward connections at all stages of the journey and between different modes of transport.
- Safe and comfortable transport facilities.
- The strategy also includes details on how the Government is using behavioural change methods to reduce or remove barriers to the use of sustainable transport and working closely with stakeholders to deliver a better-connected transport system.

11.35 [The Environmental Protection Act 1990](#) **[See reference 316]** makes provision for the improved control of pollution to the air, water and land by regulating the management of waste and the control of emissions. Seeks to ensure that decisions

pertaining to the environment are made in an integrated manner, in collaboration with appropriate authorities, non-governmental organisations and other persons.

Local

11.36 Dorset Council and Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole (BCP) Council's jointly commissioned [Employment Land Study \(2024\)](#) [See reference 317] looks at the Functional Economic Market Area (FEMA) and provides an assessment of employment needs to 2039 using growth forecast data. The Study estimated, in 2020, that employment land demand by 2038 would range from 63.5 to 80.9 hectares in the Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole (BCP) local authority area, and from 87.9 to 131.1 hectares across the Dorset LEP area.

11.37 The [Housing Strategy January 2024 to January 2029 \(2023\)](#) [See reference 318] sets out the Council's priorities for housing over the next five years to 2029. The Strategy seeks to ensure that residents have access to affordable, suitable, secure homes where they can live well as part of sustainable and thriving communities. The strategy is comprised of four key objectives:

- Housing Need - Enabling residents to live safe, healthy, independent lives in homes that meet their needs.
- Housing Supply - Driving the delivery of homes people need and can afford to live in.
- Housing Standards - Improving the quality, standard, and safety of homes.
- Prevention of Homelessness - Support, at the right time, to people in crisis to prevent homelessness.

11.38 The [Dorset Retail and Leisure Study – 2022 update \(2023\)](#) [See reference 319] assesses the future need ('capacity') for new retail (convenience and comparison goods) floorspace over the period to 2040 to take account of latest forecasts. It also assesses the quantitative need for new commercial leisure facilities. The Study states that there is no identified need for retail floorspace.

11.39 The [Gypsy and Traveller Accommodation Assessment Update \(2022\)](#) [See reference 320] relates to the need for pitches and plots between 2022 to 2038 for those people who meet the planning definition for Travellers as set out in the [Planning Policy for Traveller Sites \(2015\)](#) [See reference 321]. The report also provides an assessment of need for those people who do not meet the planning definition for Travellers but associate themselves as Travellers, and who actively choose to live in a caravan rather than a house. In Dorset specifically, the Study identifies a need for 113 pitches for households that met the planning definition. This

is made up of 48 unauthorised pitches; 11 concealed or doubled-up households or single adults; 3 movement from bricks and mortar; 25 from teenagers who will need a pitch of their own in the next 5 years; 5 from in-migration or roadside encampments; and for 29 from new household formation. There is also supply from 3 vacant pitches on the public sites, and from 6 new pitches with planning permission at the Piddlehinton public site.

11.40 The [Dorset Investment Prospectus 2021-30 \(2021\)](#) **[See reference 322]** presents a 10-year investment portfolio for the both the BCP and Dorset areas. Some projects have a significant potential to deliver employment land at scale:

- Southern Growth Corridor: 30 ha employment space;
- Dorset Innovation Park – Defence Cluster: 35 ha development area;
- North-South Transport Connectivity: supporting over 30,000 jobs;
- Coastal Regeneration: 13 ha employment land;
- Medtech Science Park: facilities supporting 500 new jobs;
- Accelerated Economic Zone: £1.7m growth and 5,600 jobs in 20 years.

11.41 The [Dorset and BCP Local Housing Needs Assessment \(2021\)](#) **[See reference 323]** examines the future need for housing as well as the affordable housing need and makes recommendations on the mix of housing and the need for specific groups for BCP and Dorset.

11.42 The [Bournemouth Dorset and Poole Workspace Strategy Evidence Update: Employment Projections \(2020\)](#) **[See reference 324]** provides an update to the 2016 Workspace Strategy employment projections, looking at the projected requirement for employment land over the revised time scale of 2018-2038. Two scenarios were developed to test potential land requirements. The trend scenario indicates over 2018-2038:

- Growth in the number of FTEs of 30,900 (all industries – up from 333,100 to 364,000 over 20 years);
- This is 0.4% per annum growth in FTE employment;
- GVA growth of 2.3% per annum – compared with about 2.1% pa nationally.

11.43 The strategy scenario indicates over 2018-2038:

- Growth in the number of FTEs of 37,900 (all industries – up from 335,800 to 373,800 over 20 years);
- This is 0.5% per annum growth in FTE employment;

- GVA growth of 0.5% pe annum.

11.44 Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole Council's [Economic Development Strategy \(2020\)](#) [See reference 325] aims to “balance the many economic opportunities within the BCP city region – whilst addressing impacts of global, national and local challenges. This strategy will help deliver the government’s levelling up ambitions to strengthen local leadership to drive real change and raise living standards.” Priority area of action include:

- “Supercharging our business community: Focusing on supporting increased productivity across our small and medium sized business community;
- Supporting the BCP exemplar industries: Encouraging growth in BCP priority sectors and clusters as the catalysts to success;
- Opening doors to prosperity: Creating the best local economic conditions to achieve a world-class, sustainable city region and one of the best coastal places in the world in which to live, work, invest and play; and
- Business matters @ BCP: Achieving an outstanding economic development service, acting as the concierge for all Council business-facing functions.”

11.45 The [Dorset Local Economic Assessment \(2019\)](#) [See reference 326] provides a profile of the local economy which gives a detailed understanding of economic strengths, opportunities and challenges in Dorset, and identifies the following future challenges:

- The cost of housing relative to incomes, which is currently a barrier to recruitment, particularly for younger people, including graduates. It will be critical to provide sufficient housing at affordable prices for younger people and graduates if the workforce is to avoid skills depletion as people retire;
- Dorset’s workforce holds lower qualifications on average than nationally, and at the current rate of increase in skills levels, it could be 10 years before the population meets the skills requirements of employers;
- As more skilled and experienced workers reach retirement age and with the drivers of in-migration still favouring those at or nearing retirement age, the pressure will be on to address the loss of skills and maintain a balanced workforce in terms of age and skills;
- need to increase the supply of housing in sustainable locations with good access to services and facilities, including good schools;
- the range of housing in terms of type, size and tenure should reflect housing needs in the area, including those required to support a prosperous economy;

- High levels of multiple deprivation, combined with poor economic performance mark Weymouth and Portland out as a special case in the Dorset sub-region.

11.46 The [Dorset National Landscape Management Plan 2026 – 2031 \(2026\)](#) [See reference 327] the following objectives relating to material assets:

- Support appropriate farm diversification schemes, particularly where these contribute to the conservation, enhancement and sustainable development of the National Landscape;
- Support affordable housing within appropriate rural exception sites that meet proven local need. Good, locally-sensitive design should be pursued;
- Support restoration of traditional barns, buildings and other structures that maintains or enhances landscape character quality, ensuring diversification benefits are not outweighed by adverse effects on the environment;
- Protect the landscape from an overprovision of visitor accommodation including camping, caravanning and glamping sites particularly where existing development weakens the character and appearance of the countryside. Changes in landscape condition will be monitored and assessed to inform appropriate action;
- Avoid large scale and/or high density housing and employment development at settlement edges when such development weakens the character and appearance of the countryside;
- Discourage growth in the number of second homes within the Landscape;
- Resist proliferation of masts and other vertical structures, requiring the sharing of infrastructure by service providers;
- Promote production, distribution and use of products that deliver positive economic, environmental and social outcomes for the landscape;
- Promote the use of local woodland products, including wood fuel and timber for construction, that are economically, socially and environmentally sensitive for the landscape;
- Promote production, distribution and use of products that deliver positive economic, environmental and social outcomes for the Landscape; and
- Maintain and develop appropriate skills required for the Landscape green economy.

11.47 The [Bournemouth Dorset and Poole Workspace Strategy \(2016\)](#) [See reference 328] provides employment land projections to 2033 and business sector

forecasts, and recommends to take forward the 'Step Change growth scenario at 20% Flexibility' which identified the following projections for employment land:

- Eastern Dorset: 222.7ha (20% Flexibility).
- Western Dorset: 56.4ha (20% Flexibility).
- Total (Bournemouth, Dorset and Poole): 279.1ha (20% Flexibility).

11.48 The [Bournemouth, Poole and Dorset Local Transport Plan 2026-2041](#) (2026) [See reference 329] sets the following objectives:

- Safeguard the climate and environment
- Improve health and wellbeing
- Create accessible and prosperous places
- Enable a safer transport system
- Maintain a resilient and fit-for-purpose transport network
- Ensure public transport is inclusive and accessible.

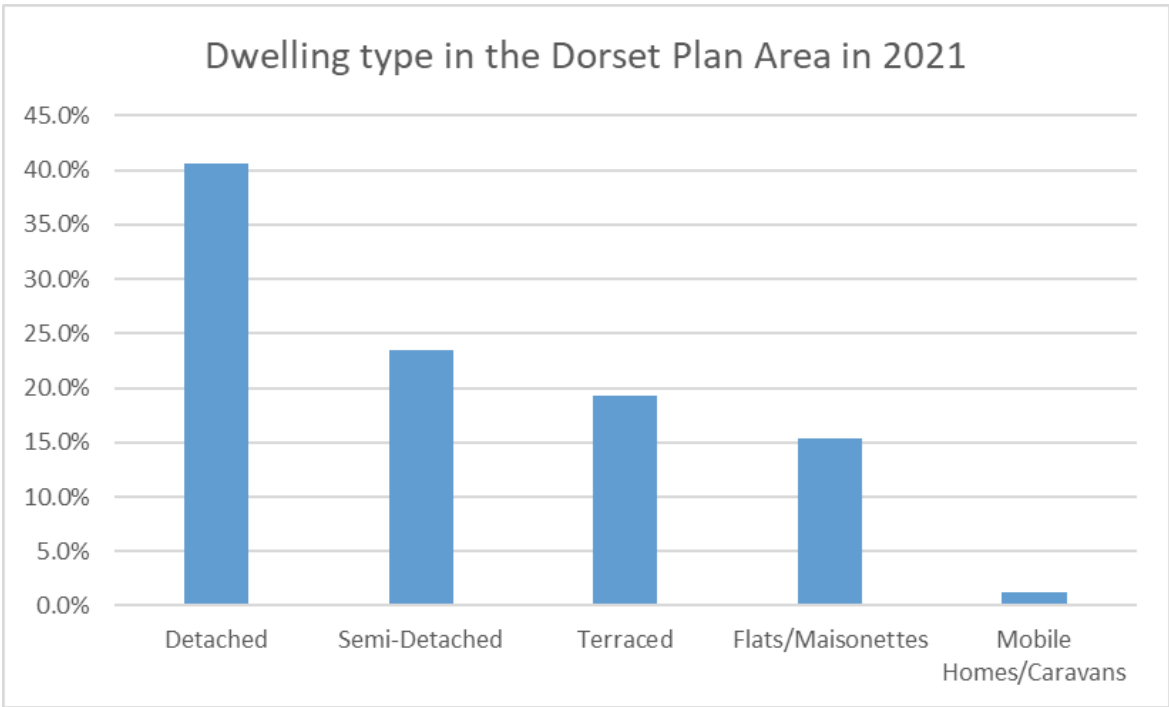
Baseline information

11.49 There were 169,261 households within the Dorset Council Local Plan area as of the latest census data from 2021. This is a 7% increase from the 2011 Census where the total number of households were 158,738 [See reference 330].

11.50 There are 180,349 properties in the Dorset Council Local Plan area, of which 3.2% are second homes, and 0.2% are long-term empty homes [See reference 330].

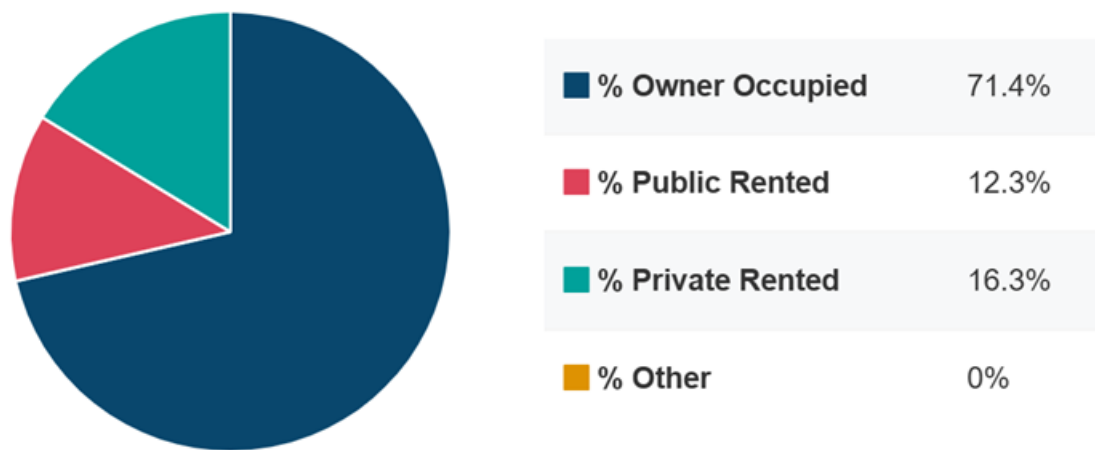
11.51 The majority of dwellings within the Dorset Council Local Plan area are detached (40.6%), with 23.4% semi-detached, 19.3% terraced, 15.4% flats or maisonettes, and 1.2% mobile homes/caravans [See reference 330]. See Figure 11.1 below.

Figure 11.1: Dwelling type in the Dorset Plan Area in 2021



11.52 In terms of tenure, the majority of dwellings are owner occupied (71.4%). The rental sector represents 28.3% of the market, with 12.3% public rented and 16.3% private rented (Figure 11.2) [\[See reference 330\]](#).

Figure 11.2: Tenure type in the Dorset Plan Area in 2021



11.53 House prices across the UK have been rising faster than wages, reducing the affordability of housing.

11.54 Dorset is one of the most desirable places to live in the UK, and consequently has some of the least affordable housing. Home ownership among 25-34 year olds in the former Dorset County Council area is the lowest in the UK at only 16%, according to an article on home ownership on Resolution Foundation website. [\[See reference 331\]](#)

11.55 The average house price in Dorset was £339,000 in March 2025 (provisional), up 3.9% from March 2024. This was lower than the rise in the South West (5.3%) over the same period. However, private rents rose to an average of £1,004 in April 2025, an annual increase of 4.7% from £959 in April 2024. This was lower than the rise in the South West (5.1%) over the year, according to ONS statistics [\[See reference 332\]](#).

11.56 The 2024 housing affordability (see ONS page on house affordability for 2024 [\[See reference 333\]](#)) ratio is calculated by dividing house prices by gross annual workplace-based earnings (based on the median and lower quartiles of both house prices and earnings) to give a ratio which serves as an indicator of relative affordability. A higher ratio indicates that on average, it is less affordable for a resident to purchase a house in their local authority district. In the 318 local authorities in England and Wales, housing affordability improved in 289 (91%) local authorities since 2023. Average house prices increased in 20% of local authority districts in England and Wales, while average earnings increased in 87% of local authorities in 2024.

11.57 The 2024 housing affordability ratio [\[See reference 334\]](#) shows that Dorset has a ratio of 9.77, exceeding both the South West regional average of 9.23 and the national average of 8.27. This highlights that housing in Dorset is significantly less affordable than in many other parts of the region and country.

11.58 The former district of East Dorset has the least affordable housing in East Dorset, with average house prices at nearly 14 times the average annual salary [\[See reference 335\]](#). The most affordable housing is in the former district of Weymouth & Portland, with average house prices at 8.6 times the average annual salary.

11.59 According to Dorset Council Population Reports [\[See reference 336\]](#), as at 31st October 2024, 6,536 households were registered for housing through Homechoice Dorset, the register for those people seeking a move to social housing.

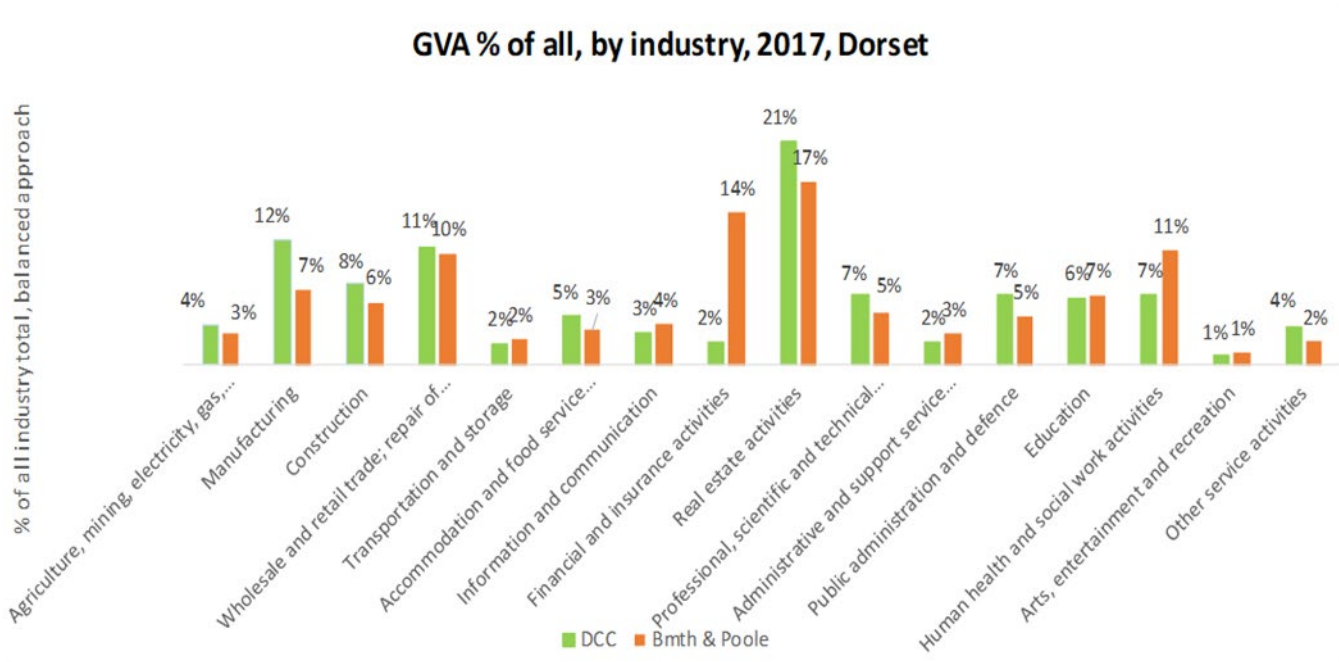
11.60 Global growth has weakened, particularly in Europe, after looking stronger in 2017. The UK economy has also performed below expectation since the Brexit referendum in 2016 with uncertainty having a significant impact on investment growth and private consumption.

11.61 In the South West region, both employment and real GVA saw growth over the year to 2023, according to TBE Bath and Somerset [See reference 337]. However, GVA per head in the Dorset Council area remains below that of neighbouring areas.

11.62 In 2022, the economic output of the pan Dorset area was £19,502m (2019 prices). 57% of this was generated in the BCP area and 43% in the DC area. Between 1998 and 2022, economic output increased by 29% in real terms (2019 prices) (see Dorset LEP Socio-Economic Evidence Base [See reference 338]).

11.63 The GVA by industrial sector indicates that Real Estate is the most significant contributor, followed by Manufacturing and the Wholesale & Retail Trade in the former Dorset County Council area (Figure 11.3).

Figure 11.3: GVA by industrial sector in Dorset in 2017 [See reference 339]



11.64 While Dorset boasts above-average representation in advanced engineering and manufacturing, it lags behind in businesses associated with high productivity and high R&D spending sectors, according to Economy Topic Data for Dorset. [See reference 340]

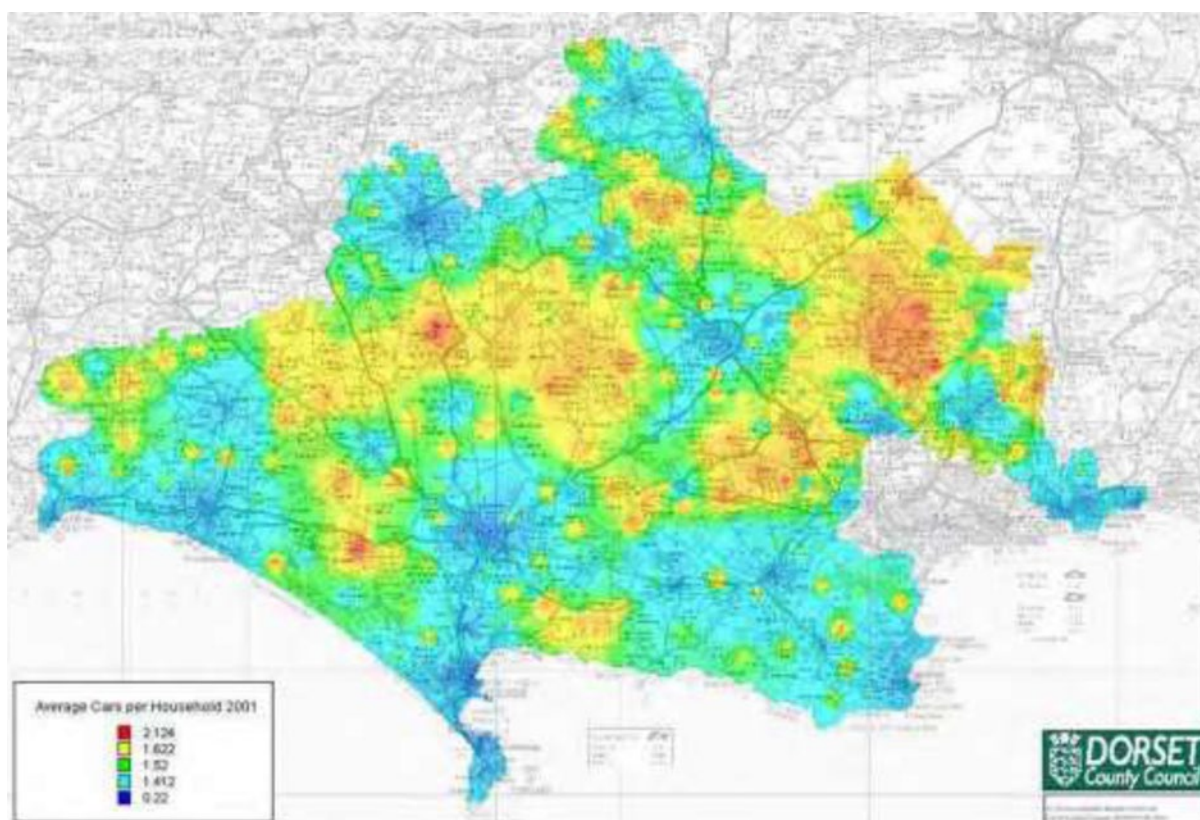
11.65 In the Dorset Council Local Plan area, unemployment and employment is lower than in Great Britain. The unemployment rate of economically active people is 2.7% in the Dorset Council Local Plan area and 3.8% in Great Britain. The employment rate is 77.4% in the Dorset Council Local Plan area and 78.6% in Great Britain (see ONS Labour Market Profile for Dorset [See reference 341]).

11.66 In terms of the working age population, there were 167,777 usual residents aged between 16 and 64 in the Dorset Council Local Plan area in 2021. The highest proportion of residents within the Dorset Council Local Plan area were within the wholesale, retail and repair sector (15.2%), followed by human health and social work activities sector (13.1%) and accommodation and food services sector (11.7%) [See reference 330].

11.67 Dorset's transport system is facing pressures from increased car ownership, reduced funding, and pressures to reduce carbon emissions in a bid to tackle climate change.

11.68 Car ownership and usage in the Dorset Council area is relatively high in the more remote areas of the district, away from the main towns (Figure 11.4). This reflects the dispersed population and the poor provision, or complete lack, of public transport in many parts of the District which results in residents without a car not being able to travel to work, access services or facilities easily or at all.

Figure 11.4: Average number of cars per household in the Dorset Council area in 2021



11.69 In 2021, the percentage of households in the Dorset Council Local Plan area with no cars or vans was 13.7%, with 45.5% of households with 2 or more cars or vans [See reference 330].

11.70 There are three main railway lines that travel through the plan area:

- Weymouth to London Waterloo line: provides an important commuter link to London, and also stops at Southampton Airport Parkway in Hampshire, providing access to the airport;
- Weymouth to Bristol line: includes several stations in the plan area including Dorchester West, Maiden Newton, Chetnole, Yetminster and Thornford; and
- Exeter to London Paddington line: important commuter link to London from the South West of England which runs through the north of the Dorset Council Local Plan area.
- There is also a heritage railway line connecting Swanage to the main line at Wareham.

Environmental and sustainability issues and likely evolution of the issues without the Local Plan

11.71 Analysis of the baseline information has enabled a number of key environmental and sustainability issues relating to material assets that Dorset is facing to be identified. They are as follows (below each issue, reference is made to the relevant SEA objective that has been identified to help address the issue):

- Providing the appropriate size, type, tenure and range of housing to meet the needs of the community without introducing significant environmental impacts (see SEA objective 10).
- Providing sufficient affordable housing to meet the accommodation needs of local communities and reduce the number of people on the housing registers (see SEA objective 10).
- Providing sufficient employment land of the right type, in the right place and at the right time to support growth and innovation, and build a strong, responsive and competitive economy (see SEA objective 11).
- The loss of skills and maintaining a balanced workforce in terms of age and skills, as more workers reach retirement age and in-migration favours those at or nearing retirement age (see SEA objective 11);

- The cost of housing relative to incomes which is a barrier to recruitment, particularly for younger people, including graduates. The challenge is to provide sufficient housing at affordable prices for younger people and graduates to avoid skills depletion as people retire (see SEA objective 10).
- Support for the sustainable growth and expansion of all types of business and enterprise in rural areas, promoting the development and diversification of agricultural and other land-based rural businesses, and support for sustainable rural tourism and leisure development (see SEA objective 11).
- Improving the infrastructure to enable economic growth. This includes providing faster and more extensive broadband and ICT infrastructure to ensure that knowledge-intensive sectors, such as creative industries, are able to prosper (see SEA objective 11).
- Parts of Dorset are not served well by public transport, which is reflected by the fact that car ownership is higher in the more isolated, rural parts of Dorset than the national average. Residents in these more remote areas are unlikely to be able to access services and facilities by more sustainable transport modes (see SEA objective 11).

11.72 Without the new Local Plan, house prices may be more likely to become increasingly unaffordable and there is greater potential for the housing stock to become mismatched to local needs. Alongside this, access to employment will reduce as fewer job and training opportunities are created. Development may also be located in areas that are harder for access for people without a car.

SEA objectives

The draft SEA objectives and accompanying assessment questions designed to capture the objectives of relevant international and national plans, programmes and policies and the relevant environmental and sustainability issues identified in this chapter are set out below. We propose to use these to assess the Dorset Council Local Plan and its reasonable alternatives.

Material Assets SEA objectives and assessment questions

SEA objective 10: Deliver a wide choice of high-quality homes and infrastructure

Assessment questions

- Will the plan/option supply the housing required to meet the needs of present and future generations, including affordable housing, in sustainable locations?
- Will the plan/option provide community facilities such as health, education and cultural infrastructure in sustainable locations?

Relevant SEA topics

- Material Assets
- Population

SEA objective 11: Build a strong, responsive, and competitive economy**Assessment questions**

- Will the plan/option provide sufficient land to support growth, innovation and productivity for all businesses, including those in rural areas?
- Will the plan/ option provide the transport and telecommunications infrastructure to meet business needs?

Relevant SEA topics

- Material Assets
- Population

Chapter 12

SEA Framework

12.1 The SEA process involves assessing the performance of Local Plan policy against a series of environmental and sustainability objectives (the ‘SEA framework’) which are aimed at protecting the environment and promoting sustainable development.

12.2 The SEA framework consists of 11 sustainability objectives, each with decision-making criteria which provide a basis for assessing the environmental and sustainability effects, which are set out in Table 12.1.

12.3 The SEA objectives for the Dorset Council Local Plan were informed by the findings of the review of plans and programmes, the characteristics of the plan area, and the key issues within the plan area, all of which are presented in the preceding chapters of this SEA Scoping Report. This ensures that the SEA framework is relevant and specific to the Local Plan and addresses the key environmental and sustainability concerns.

Table 12.1: The SEA framework, including the SEA objectives, decision-making criteria, and SEA topics covered

Sustainability objective	Decision making criteria	SEA topics
1. Provide net gains for biodiversity	■ Conserve, restore or enhance priority habitats and irreplaceable habitats and promote the protection and recovery of priority species. ■ Maintain or restore the favourable conservation status of Habitats and national sites, and avoid significant adverse effects upon local wildlife designations. ■ Establish coherent ecological networks where possible, with wildlife corridors which connect designated sites of importance for wildlife to prevent habitat fragmentation. ■ Pursue opportunities for securing net gains for biodiversity.	Biodiversity, flora, fauna
2. Protect soil quality and conserve geological conservation interests	■ Protect the most productive agricultural land (grades 1 and 2) to provide food security and achieve sustainable agriculture. ■ Remediate or mitigate the potential impacts of degraded, derelict, contaminated and unstable land where possible, to protect human health, property and the environment. ■ Minimise harm to geological conservation interests, and where possible achieve the enhancement of the geological resource.	Soil, Human Health

Sustainability objective	Decision making criteria	SEA topics
3. Maintain or improve water quality	■ Protect and improve the ecological and chemical status of freshwater, transitional waters and coastal waters, particularly those with 'poor' or 'bad' status. ■ Ensure that development does not contribute to groundwater quality issues particularly within Groundwater Source Protection Zones. ■ Ensure that development does not contribute to the groundwater inundation of the foul drainage network.	Water
4. Maintain or improve air quality	■ Maintain or improve air quality. ■ Ensure that development does not contribute to air quality issues particularly within Air Quality Management Areas and where exceedances in the concentration of airborne contaminants have been recorded.	Air, Human Health, Climatic Factors
5. Limit climate change and improve resilience to future climate change	■ Mitigate climate change by contributing to cutting the emission of greenhouse gases. ■ Adapt to future climate change by ensuring that new development is resilient to future climatic conditions. ■ Increase the use of renewable energy.	Climatic Factors, Air
6. Limit the effects of flooding and coastal change	■ Ensure that development does not expose people and property to risk of flooding.	Climatic Factors, Water, Population

Sustainability objective	Decision making criteria	SEA topics
	■ Manage coastal change to ensure that environmental designations and local communities are protected.	
7. Protect and enhance valued landscapes	■ Protect and where possible enhance valued landscapes. ■ Conserve and where possible enhance the Dorset National Landscape and the Cranborne Chase National Landscape and the character and quality of its distinctive landscapes and associated features. ■ Conserve and enhance the Dorset and East Devon Coast World Heritage Site's outstanding universal value and its setting. ■ Ensure that development is not harmful to the purposes of the Green Belt.	Landscape
8. Conserve and enhance heritage assets and the historic environment	■ Safeguard, protect, and where appropriate enhance the significance of heritage assets and their setting. ■ Ensure that new development is sympathetic to local character and history.	Cultural Heritage
9. Promote wellbeing and healthy communities for all	■ Enable healthy lifestyles and promote wellbeing through the provision of high quality accessible natural spaces, green infrastructure, allotments and sports facilities. ■ Encourage social interaction by providing mixed use development, strong neighbourhood centres and	Human Health, population

Sustainability objective	Decision making criteria	SEA topics
	improved local accessibility and connectivity, to encourage a more inclusive society and prevent rural isolation. ■ Provide safe and accessible environments where crime and disorder, and the fear of crime, do not undermine quality of life or community cohesion.	
10. Deliver a wide choice of high-quality homes and infrastructure	■ Supply the housing required to meet the needs of present and future generations, including affordable housing, in sustainable locations. ■ Provide community facilities such as health, education and cultural infrastructure in sustainable locations.	Material Assets, Population
11. Build a strong, responsive, and competitive economy	■ Provide sufficient land to support growth, innovation and productivity for all businesses, including those in rural areas. ■ Provide the transport and telecommunications infrastructure to meet business needs.	Material Assets, Population

Chapter 13

Consultation and next steps

12.4 In order to meet the requirements of the SEA Regulations, the views of the three statutory consultees (the Environment Agency, Historic England and Natural England) have been sought in relation to the scope and level of detail to be included in the SEA Report.

12.5 The consultees are in particular requested to consider whether:

- The scope of the SEA is appropriate considering the role and priorities of Dorset's Local Plan, and the SEA Regulations.
- The objectives of plans, policies and programmes referenced comprehensively cover those relevant to the SEA of the Dorset Council Local Plan.
- The baseline information provided is robust and comprehensive and provides a suitable baseline for the SEA of the Dorset Council Local Plan.
- All known significant environmental and related sustainability issues of relevance to Dorset and the Local Plan have been accurately represented.
- The defined SEA framework is fit for purpose and includes a suitable set of objectives for assessing the effects of the Dorset Council Local Plan and reasonable alternatives.
- Whether the site assessment assumptions are appropriate for identifying the likely significant effects of site options.

12.6 Responses from consultees will be reviewed and appropriate amendments made to the SEA Report, including to the baseline, policy context and SEA framework and accompanying assessment questions and site-based assumptions where necessary.

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September 2026

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Contents