

8.2. Appendix 2: Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats (SWOT) Analysis

Strengths	
Economic	• Clear economic strategy identified through the Energising Dorset Economic Prospectus. • Dorset has lots of small and medium enterprises (SMEs). • Portland and Winfrith (including the Dorset Innovation Park) are potential focal points for investment. • Successful existing employment sectors. • The Employment Land Study identifies continuing demand for industrial premises, logistics and distribution facilities, flexible business space and modern premises suitable for expanding local firms.
Tourism & Place	• Dorset has a strong, internationally recognised environmental, coastal, landscape and heritage offer. • Approximately 22 million annual visitors generating around £1.66 billion in direct expenditure. • Market towns provide focal points across a dispersed rural area. • Coastal and historic centres already benefit from tourism-related activity.
Town Centres	• Many centres provide a broad range of uses. • Overall vacancy levels below national averages. • Good rail connections to some centres (Dorchester, Weymouth, Gillingham, Wareham, Wool, Sherborne).
Social & Community	• Settlements have strong identities. • The population is, on average, healthier and longer-lived than the England average.
Environment & Climate	• Dorset has an exceptional natural environment: heathlands, National Landscapes, Poole Harbour. • Strong environmental quality across Dorset reinforces its attractiveness as a place to live, work and visit. • Strong council commitment to climate resilience and net zero objectives.
Housing	• A track record of planning for and supporting the delivery of homes.

Strengths	
	• A commitment to delivery of housing, and in particular affordable housing, as a council priority (including an adopted housing strategy focused on affordability).

Weaknesses	
Economic	• High dependence on small businesses, lower productivity sectors and seasonal employment. • Dispersed settlement pattern makes it difficult to provide infrastructure and business support efficiently. • Identified priority growth sectors are ambitious and the council may not yet have sufficiently mature local supply chains or skills pipelines. • Existing employment premises do not always provide the quality, size or flexibility required by modern businesses. • Limited evidence of strong demand for large-scale conventional office development.
Tourism & Place	• Visitor economy is highly seasonal, with 36% of overnight visits taking place in July and August, creating insecure and temporary employment, pressure on local services, congestion, and environmental damage. • High visitor numbers do not necessarily translate into high productivity, wages or local retention of expenditure.
Town Centres	• Vacancy concerns in Dorchester, Gillingham, Stalbridge and Fortuneswell. • Some centres are car-dependent with limited public transport options. • Changing retail patterns reduce the ability of traditional retail uses to solely sustain centre vitality.
Social & Community	• Nearly half of the population live in rural areas with limited access to services, employment and public transport. • Rural isolation, poor public transport and declining local services can exacerbate physical and mental health inequalities. • Ageing population. • Coastal deprivation concentrated in parts of Weymouth and Portland. • Approximately 62% of adults are overweight.

Weaknesses	
	• Health deprivation concerns in Dorchester, Bridport, Weymouth and Portland. • Healthy life expectancy is significantly shorter than overall life expectancy, with an estimated gap of 17 years for men and 21 years for women. • High levels of second home ownership can weaken the year-round population. • Poor broadband connectivity in some areas. • New housing may worsen pressure on services unless supporting infrastructure is delivered.
Environment & Climate	• Environmental issues including Green Belt, proximity to designated heathlands and Poole Harbour impact large parts of south-east Dorset. • National Landscapes pose issues across Dorset. • Requirements for environmental mitigation and biodiversity net gain may reduce development viability. • Settlements and infrastructure are exposed to coastal erosion; rising sea levels; fluvial, surface water and coastal flooding; heatwaves; drought and water-resource pressure. • Existing dispersed settlement patterns create dependency on cars.
Housing	• Housing affordability is poor, with average house prices around 10 times earnings. • Current assessed housing need of 3,246 homes per year is much higher than in previous plans and more than twice the recent delivery rate. • Increasing the supply of homes may not in itself provide the homes people need. • High levels of second home ownership in particular localities reduces availability of permanent homes.

Opportunities	
Economic	• The A31 and A303, with key rail-linked settlements, provide the basis for a corridor-led approach to employment and housing growth. • Translate the economic prospectus into a clear spatial strategy which links Portland and Winfrith with clean energy; Dorset Innovation Park with defence, security, marine and advanced engineering; appropriate locations with data and digital infrastructure; strategic corridors with logistics and distribution. • Significant opportunities in the clean energy, engineering, marine, defence and security, and data and digital infrastructure sectors. • Safeguard successful existing employment areas whilst allowing carefully managed modernisation and intensification. • Allocate a portfolio of sites of different sizes, capacities and employment types. • Build upon private investment to further economic ambitions. • Link employment allocations to skills, education and training provision, particularly Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) and industry-linked pathways. • Require large employment developments to prepare workforce, skills, sustainable-travel and local-procurement strategies.
Tourism & Place	• Support a shift in tourism policy from increasing visitor numbers towards increasing visitor value, length of stay, off-season activity, local expenditure and employment quality. • Support tourism enterprises that operate year-round. • Promote car-free and low-carbon tourism linked to active travel routes and sustainable public transport initiatives. • Link tourism growth to the regeneration of coastal and historic town centres.
Town Centres	• Respond to changing retail patterns and reposition town centres as mixed-use hubs rather than traditional principal retail destinations. • Reuse of vacant units for uses including housing, workspace, community facilities, leisure uses and health uses. • Review town centre boundaries to reflect current functions and facilitate targeted future growth.

Opportunities	
	• Develop targeted regeneration strategies for centres with concerns, particularly regarding persistent vacancies. • Coordinate town centre regeneration with active travel and sustainable transport investment. • Prepare local impact thresholds which reflect differences between larger towns, smaller towns, local centres and centres of purely neighbourhood significance.
Social & Community	• New development may provide new opportunities to support independent living, strengthen local services and regenerate deprived neighbourhoods. • Use planning obligations to deliver the facilities needed to support developments. • Use Suitable Alternative Natural Greenspace (SANGs) and green infrastructure to deliver physical and mental health benefits and provide inclusive, accessible recreation. • Create connected walking and cycling networks that make active travel a realistic and desirable daily choice. • Protect and enhance local green spaces and recreation facilities. • Embed health impact assessments into strategic allocations and major development. • Plan neighbourhoods around everyday access to facilities, services, employment and public transport. • Protect community facilities unless robust evidence demonstrates they are no longer needed or viable. • Design age-friendly and dementia-friendly places that support independent living and social connections.
Environment & Climate	• Use SANG and green infrastructure to deliver habitat mitigation and to assist in climate mitigation. • Make energy efficiency and climate adaptation and mitigation central to the location and design of development. • Concentrate growth around the most sustainable locations to reduce car-dependency and encourage active travel and public transport use. • Direct development away from areas at greatest current and future flood and coastal change risk.

Opportunities	
	• Require high standards of energy efficiency and biodiversity enhancement. • Improve existing habitats alongside development. • Establish a strategic green and blue infrastructure network serving both new and existing communities. • Explore larger, strategic SANGs. • Use development to fund catchment-scale habitat restoration, flood management and recreational mitigation. • Coordinate the local plan with Shoreline Management Plans, water-resource planning, transport planning, corporate net zero targets and energy-network investment. • Use mixed-use strategic development to reduce long-distance commuting and create more self-contained communities. • Support renewable and low-carbon infrastructure while protecting Dorset's environmental and cultural assets.
Housing	• New development provides opportunities to increase the supply of affordable housing and accessible and adaptable homes. • The scale of housing need provides an opportunity to plan comprehensively rather than relying on small, incremental developments. • The required uplift in housing delivery may be used to secure more affordable homes; accessible and adaptable homes; smaller homes for younger households; other housing needed by those who wish to live in Dorset. • Provide the right types of housing in the right places. • Use development phasing and infrastructure triggers to ensure facilities are delivered at the right time, coordinating housing delivery with healthcare, education, public transport, utilities, green infrastructure and employment opportunities. • Consider a principal-residence requirement for new homes in areas where second homes cause demonstrable harm.

Threats	
Economic	• Infrastructure constraints may delay employment development. • Land values, construction costs and environmental mitigation requirements may make some schemes unviable. • Competition between housing and employment uses could result in the loss of strategically important business land. • New employment allocations may remain undeveloped if they do not match market requirements for location, access, size and infrastructure. • Technology and investment priorities may change over the plan period, particularly in emerging energy sectors. • Aspirational sector targets may not translate into delivery without clear site allocations, infrastructure programmes and partner commitments. • Concentrating growth along the A31, A303 and around larger settlements could widen inequality between accessible growth areas and more remote rural or coastal communities. • Growth without sufficient affordable housing could increase in-commuting and exclude younger and lower-income residents from local jobs. • The clean-energy, defence, digital and logistics ambitions depend upon adequate grid, water, transport, digital and skills infrastructure.
Tourism & Place	• Dependence on tourism leaves coastal and historic centres exposed to economic downturns and changing visitor preferences. • Increasing visitor accommodation could remove homes from permanent occupation. • More intense tourism could reduce the qualities that make Dorset attractive in the first place.
Town Centres	• Continued online retail growth and changing consumer behaviour may increase vacancies despite current relatively healthy performance. • Out-of-centre development could weaken town centres if policy thresholds are too high or impact tests are insufficiently robust.

Threats	
	• Conversion of town-centre commercial premises to residential use could undermine employment, leisure and community functions in town centres. • Regeneration activity could displace established businesses.
Social & Community	• Regeneration activity could displace existing residents. • Concentrating growth around the most sustainable locations may worsen rural isolation for those living outside of these areas. • Focus on provision for older residents may neglect younger residents and young families. • Growth may have negative impacts on the distinct character of settlements without adequate safeguarding measures.
Environment & Climate	• Housing and economic growth may increase recreational pressure on heathlands, Poole Harbour and other sensitive environments. • Inadequate or poorly maintained mitigation could fail legal ecological requirements and delay development. • Climate change may make land currently considered developable increasingly vulnerable during the plan period and beyond. • Coastal communities face combined risks from erosion, flooding, ageing infrastructure, seasonal economies and deprivation. • Data centres, hydrogen production and other growth sectors may place significant demands on energy and water resources. • Major energy or logistics development could harm landscape character, tranquillity, biodiversity and residential amenity if poorly located. • Tourism growth could conflict with habitat protection and climate objectives if it generates additional traffic and peak-season pressures.
Housing	• The gap between assessed housing need and historic completions risks that the housing requirement will not be delivered. • Infrastructure constraints may delay housing development. • Land values, construction costs and environmental mitigation and affordable-housing requirements may make some schemes unviable. • If delivery is concentrated on a small number of complex strategic sites, delays could undermine the housing trajectory.

Threats	
	• If second-home restrictions are geographically narrow, demand may move to nearby unregulated settlements. • Concentrating housing delivery and public transport infrastructure around the most sustainable locations may worsen rural isolation for those living outside of these areas. • Focus for housing delivery needs to look beyond quantities to ensure outcomes relating to affordability and accessibility are monitored too. • Insufficient rural development could accelerate population ageing and service decline; excessive dispersed growth could increase car dependence and harm landscape character. • Regeneration activity could increase property prices and worsen housing unaffordability.