Lambert Smith Hampton

Dorset Retail, Leisure and Town Centres Study Update

Main Report

Prepared for:

Dorset Council

March 2026

lsh.co.uk

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For and on behalf of Lambert Smith Hampton

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1. INTRODUCTION

1. This report has been prepared by Lambert Smith Hampton ('LSH') on the instruction of Dorset Council ('the Council' / 'DC'). It provides an updated assessment of retail and commercial leisure provision and needs in the Dorset Council area and is intended to inform the emerging draft Dorset Council Local Plan 2027 - 2042 (DCLP).

Background

2. Dorset Council is a unitary local authority that came into being on 1 April 2019 and covers the previous administrative areas of:

- East Dorset District Council
- North Dorset District Council
- Purbeck District Council
- West Dorset District Council
- Weymouth & Portland Borough Council and
- Dorset County Council (majority)

3. A Dorset Retail and Leisure Study Update ('DRLSU') was prepared by LSH in January 2023. It was informed by the outputs of studies for the previous authority areas, specifically the:

- Joint Retail and Commercial Leisure Study (2018) for North Dorset District Council, West Dorset District Council, and Weymouth & Portland Borough Council;
- Joint Retail and Leisure Study (2017) for Bournemouth Borough Council, Christchurch and East Dorset Councils and Update Addendum Report (March 2019); and
- Poole and Purbeck Town Centres, Retail and Leisure Study (2014).

4. However, the 2023 study did not include any updates on shopping behaviour.

5. A key purpose of this report is to update the primary evidence base on retail and leisure expenditure flows and market shares and to assess how recent and future economic and market changes will affect the town centres in Dorset. In doing so it seeks to provide a robust evidence base which the Council can use to inform the policies in the emerging DCLP.

Report Structure

6. The report is structured as follows:

- **Section 2** sets out the planning policy context for the study and Dorset area. It looks at what is required by national planning policy in terms of local plan preparation and summarises the relevant policies in the local plans that make up the current Local Development Plan (LDP). It also consider other planning regulations and guidance that may affect development in town centres;
- **Section 3** looks at the economic and market trends that have and will continue to affect retail and commercial leisure uses in Dorset, with detailed information on national trends provided in Appendix A;

- **Section 4** introduces the existing available information on the study area and trading patterns within it, based on the new expenditure data for Dorset, with the detailed findings presented in Appendix B;
- **Section 5** summarises the key findings from the health checks of the main centres. Full details are provided in Appendix C;
- **Section 6** summarises the key outputs from our quantitative assessment of retail and leisure capacity/need; and
- **Section 7** provides a summary of our findings and provides advice to the Council on the policy implications for the DCLP.

2. PLANNING POLICY CONTEXT

National Planning Policy and Regulations

7. The planning system in England provides a ‘plan-led’ approach to the regulation of land and development and places local plans at the heart of the planning system. Local planning authorities are legally required to prepare plans for their area and these are expected to provide a positive vision for the future of each area as well as forming the policy basis against which any planning applications for development will be assessed.

National Planning Policy (NPPF)

8. The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) sets out national Government’s planning policies and how they should be applied, including the requirements for preparing a Local Plan (Section 3). The NPPF was last updated in February 2025 but a new draft was published in December 2025 for consultation until 10 March 2026.

9. The current NPPF indicates that the preparation and review of all policies should be underpinned by relevant and up-to-date evidence and take into account relevant market signals (NPPF, para 32).

10. The NPPF requires planning policies and decisions to support the role that town centres play at the heart local communities, by taking a positive approach to their growth, management and adaptation (NPPF, para 90) and specifically requires that planning policies:

    a) define a network and hierarchy of town centres and promote their long-term vitality and viability – by allowing them to grow and diversify in a way that can respond to rapid changes in the retail and leisure industries, allows a suitable mix of uses (including housing) and reflects their distinctive characters;

    b) define the extent of town centres and primary shopping areas, and make clear the range of uses permitted in such locations, as part of a positive strategy for the future of each centre;

    c) retain and enhance existing markets and, where appropriate, re-introduce or create new ones;

    d) allocate a range of suitable sites in town centres to meet the scale and type of development likely to be needed, looking at least ten years ahead. Meeting anticipated needs for retail, leisure, office and other main town centre uses over this period should not be compromised by limited site availability, so town centre boundaries should be kept under review where necessary;

    e) where suitable and viable town centre sites are not available for main town centre uses, allocate appropriate edge of centre sites that are well connected to the town centre. If sufficient edge of centre sites cannot be identified, policies should explain how identified needs can be met in other accessible locations that are well connected to the town centre; and

f) recognise that residential development often plays an important role in ensuring the vitality of centres and encourage residential development on appropriate sites (NPPF, para 90).

11. The NPPF also:

- Requires local planning authorities to apply a sequential test to planning applications for main town centre uses which are neither in an existing centre or in accordance with an up-to-date plan (NPPF, para 91);
- Indicates that local planning authorities can set a local threshold for requiring an impact assessment for retail and leisure planning applications outside of a defined centre. If no local threshold is set, then the national default threshold of 2,500 sqm applies (NPPF, para 94);
- Defines main town centre uses as ‘Retail development (including warehouse clubs and factory outlet centres); leisure, entertainment and more intensive sport and recreation uses (including cinemas, restaurants, drive-through restaurants, bars and pubs, nightclubs, casinos, health and fitness centres, indoor bowling centres and bingo halls); offices; and arts, culture and tourism development (including theatres, museums, galleries and concert halls, hotels and conference facilities)’;
- Defines a town centre as the ‘area defined on the local authority’s policies map, including the primary shopping area and areas predominantly occupied by main town centre uses within or adjacent to the primary shopping area. References to town centres or centres apply to city centres, town centres, district centres and local centres but exclude small parades of shops of purely neighbourhood significance. Unless they are identified as centres in the development plan, existing out-of-centre developments, comprising or including main town centre uses, do not constitute town centres’;
- Defines ‘edge of centre’ for retail purposes and other main town centre uses as locations that are well connected to and up to 300m from the primary shopping area of a centre (retail) and within 300m of a town centre boundary for all other main town centre uses, except offices which have a separate definition;
- Defines out of centre as areas that are not in or on the edge of a centre; and
- Defines ‘primary shopping areas’ as the ‘area where retail development is concentrated’.

12. The NPPF is supported by additional Planning Policy Guidance, with that relating to town centres set out in the section ‘Town centres and retail’ (https://www.gov.uk/guidance/ensuring-the-vitality-of-town-centres). This also includes summary information on other regulations that affect landuses in town centres, the most important of which are outlined below.

Consultation Draft NPPF

13. The 2025 Consultation Draft of the NPPF (DNPPF) and the associated Consultation Document (NPPF CD) provide an indication of the changes that are likely to be made to the NPPF in the coming months. At this stage neither document can be given weight and therefore the current requirements relating to retail and town centre policies are as set out above. However, this may change during the preparation of the Dorset Local Plan.

14. The proposed changes to the NPPF are intended to achieve three principal objectives:

- To ensure that national planning policy is accessible and understandable for everyone who uses it;
- To establish a comprehensive suite of national policies on general planning matters which will apply across the country, to avoid these matters being repeated or deviated from in locally-produced plans; and
- To make the policy which it contains more 'rules-based' and certain, and so more capable of supporting timely and consistent planning (DNPPF, page 10).

15. For retail and town centres support for town centres is retained (Section 8), but possible changes include:

- Removal of the reference to such uses under the definition of strategic development (PM1, para 2b). This suggests retail and main town centre uses will be considered primarily at a local level;
- A statement that evidence required for plan-making should use existing data where possible (PM8, para 1) and that once a need has been identified at an early stage of plan preparation, it should not normally require reviewing and updating (PM8, para 3);
- Potential changes to the criteria for finding a plan sound, including a requirement for site allocations to be realistic (PM15, para 1c). The implications of this for sites intended for retail and main town centre uses may need more detailed consideration;
- Retention of the need to define town centre boundaries (Policy S2, paras 1b & 2) but removal of the reference to Primary Shopping Areas;
- Introduction of national decision-making policies for proposals within settlements (Policy S4) and outside of settlements (Policy S5);
- Potential inclusion of local shops in rural areas within the definition of rural business development (Policy E4);
- Extending the policy requirements when developing a hierarchy of centres to include a consideration of areas within them that may be particularly suitable for a greater diversity and/or intensification of use, including through residential development and where infrastructure and public realm improvements are proposed (Policy TC1);
- Specific encouragement to utilise design guides, design codes and masterplans to support town centre visions and the potential use of Article 4 directions to remove a permitted development right where these are justified as a means to support the vitality and viability of particular centres and maintain their character (Policy TC1);
- Removal of the specific reference to markets, because, as noted in the accompanying Consultation document *"….their existence is not controlled directly by planning"*;
- Introduction of two national decision-making policies that (i) support development in town centres (Policy TC2) and (ii) require new development to demonstrate compliance with the sequential test (Policy TC3). However, the current wording does not require a sequential test for other development proposals;

- Potential requirement to consider disaggregation when applying the sequential test (Policy TC3, para 3). The impact test is retained (Policy TC4);
- Discouraging single use, low density development and encouraging the re-use of under-utilised retail sites (Policy L1);
- New/amended definitions for:
    - Community facilities (meeting places, public houses, places of worship, cultural venues, allotments and facilities for play, sport and informal recreation); and
    - Main town centre uses (including banks and professional services); and
- Possible removal of the need to undertake a sequential test is consulted on in the NPPF CD (page 15).

Use Classes Order

16. The Town and Country Planning (Use Classes) Order 1987 (as amended) puts uses of land and buildings into various categories known as 'Use Classes' , with the most recent changes made to the Use Classes Order in September 2020.

17. Changes of use within a defined Use Class are not considered to be development and as such do not normally require planning permission.

18. The 2020 changes were introduced to reflect the diversity of uses found on high streets and in town centres and were intended to provide flexibility for businesses to adapt and diversify to meet changing demands, particularly in the immediate aftermath of the Covid-19 pandemic. It was recognised that town centres now seek to provide a wider range of facilities and services and therefore a new Use Class (Class E) was introduced incorporating the previous Class A uses.

19. The single 'Commercial, business and service' class (Class E) incorporates:

- Retail Shops (Previously Class A1);
- Financial & Professional services (previously Class A2);
- Restaurants & cafes (previously Class A3);
- Offices (previously Class B1);
- Medical or health services, principally to visiting members of the public, except the use of premises attached to the residence of the consultant or practitioner (previously Class D1);
- Creche, day nursery or day centre (previously Class D1); and
- Gymnasium or areas for indoor sport, recreation or fitness, not involving motor vehicles or firearms, principally to visiting members of the public (previously Class D2).

20. Unless a property is subject to a condition limiting the use to a specific type of use within one of the earlier Use Classes, planning permission is no longer required to change from one Class E use to another.

21. The main positive benefit of the change is that a wider range of occupiers can now be considered for existing retail units without the owner/occupier needing to obtain planning permission first. This can prove helpful in reducing the length of time units are vacant and has started to attract new uses into centres, such as those relating to health services.

22. However, from a local policy perspective the introduction of Class E has meant that policies which sought to retain minimum proportions of retail uses within parts of town centres have become unimplementable, as planning permission is no longer required to change from a retail use to a café, restaurant use etc.

23. The changes to the Use Classes Order in 2020 also introduced:

- Class F1 (learning and non-residential institutions), which includes some of the former uses under Class D1 (non-residential institutions), including museums, public libraries, art galleries, schools, and places of worship;
- Class F2 (local community uses) which includes former Class D2 uses (assembly and leisure), such as meeting places/halls, indoor/outdoor swimming baths, skating rinks, and outdoor sport and recreation. A new category of community shop has also been introduced. This is unlikely to be relevant in high street locations but may be in rural locations/outside of the retail hierarchy; and
- An extension to the Sui Generis uses (which fall outside the specified use classes) to include uses previously classified under D2 (assembly and leisure), including cinemas, concert halls, live music venues, bingo and dance halls. The former Use Classes A4 (pubs and drinking establishments) and A5 (hot food takeaways) have also been made Sui Generis uses.

Permitted Development and Changes of Use

24. In addition to changes of use within a defined Use Class not being considered to be development and therefore not requiring planning permission, the Government also made changes to Permitted Development Rights (PDR) in August 2021.

25. Permitted Development Rights (PDR) are a national grant of planning permission which allows certain building works and changes of use to be carried out without having to make a planning application. Permitted development rights are subject to conditions and limitations to control impacts and to protect local amenity and are set out in the Town and Country Planning (General Permitted Development) (England) Order 2015, as amended.

26. Permitted development rights therefore by-pass the local planning authority's policies contained in its development plan, with the grant of permission only subject to the conditions and limitations set out in legislation.

27. Since 2013, central government has gradually expanded the remit of permitted development rights, as a way of speeding up the planning system. In August 2021, permitted development rights were expanded to reflect the introduction of the new Use Classes Order and to encourage residential development. This means that buildings falling within Use Class E (commercial, business and service) have the right to change to residential use (Use Class MA).

28. Planning permission is not required for this change of use, but before beginning development under Class MA, the developer must apply to the local planning authority for a determination as to whether the prior approval of the authority will be required, due to:

- The transport impacts of the development, particularly to ensure safe site access;

- Contamination risks in relation to the building;
- Flooding risks in relation to the building;
- Impacts of noise from commercial premises on the intended occupiers of the development;
- The building being located in a conservation area, and the development involving a change of use of the whole or part of the ground floor. The impact on the character or sustainability of the conservation area is then a consideration;
- The provision of adequate natural light in all habitable rooms of the dwelling houses;
- The impact on intended occupiers of the development of the introduction of residential use in an area the authority considers to be important for general or heavy industry, waste management, storage and distribution, or a mix of such uses; and
- The impact on local provision where the development involves the loss of a registered nursery, or health centre.

29. The original 2021 changes to PDR rights also required properties for conversion to satisfy a number of key requirements, including having been vacant for a period of at least 3 months and having a floorspace of less than 1,500 sqm. However, these restrictions were removed in March 2024.

30. This means that a council’s ability to control the conversion of Class E properties to residential use is limited and significantly the impact on the vitality and viability of the retail core or shopping area is not a consideration.

31. The August 2021 changes to the General Permitted Development Order 2015 (GPDO) also introduced a number of other measures that allow specific forms of development to be undertaken under PDR:

- Extensions of existing buildings by increasing their height by one to two storeys; and
- The demolition of unused or derelict office/industrial buildings with redevelopment for residential use (Class ZA).

32. The Class ZA PDR is currently limited to:

- Certain previous uses (office, R&D or light industrial);
- Buildings built before 1990;
- Units that have been vacant for at least 6 months; and
- Buildings with a footprint of under 1,000 sqm, with the rebuild restricted to the same footprint.

33. The previous government had consulted on a possible extension to these PDRs by removing some or all of the above limitations[i] and the consultation period ended on 9 April 2024. However, there is no indication that the new government are intending to make any immediate changes to PDRs.

Article 4 Directions

34. There is little a council can do to prevent a change from a Class E use to Class MA, or redevelopment under Class ZA once a proposal has come forward, but a

local planning authority can restrict permitted development rights in an area under an Article 4 Direction, named after Article 4 of the General Permitted Development Order.

35. An Article 4 Direction removes permitted development rights over a specifically defined area and requires full planning permission to be obtained. This gives the local planning authority scope to consider other planning matters that are within policies in its development plan, rather than only those issues specified by legislation.

36. A local planning authority can issue an Article 4 Direction at any time, although these cannot apply retrospectively. There are two types of Article 4 Direction:

- An immediate direction which removes permitted development rights from the day it is issued, and it can then be confirmed or withdrawn following a consultation; or
- A non-immediate direction which only comes into effect following a 12-month grace period. This is to ensure the council is not subject to potential compensation claims.

37. The use of Article 4 Directions is supported by central government subject to it being limited to situations where it is necessary to avoid wholly unacceptable adverse impacts, it being based on robust evidence and applying to the smallest possible geographic area (NPPF, para 54).

38. The NPPF acknowledges that a wholly unacceptable impact could include the loss of the essential core of a primary shopping area which would seriously undermine its vitality and viability; but notes that it would be very unlikely to extend to the whole of a town centre.

39. The procedures involved in introducing an Article 4 Direction include publicising the Direction locally and informing the Secretary of State by sending a copy of the direction and the notice (including a copy of a map defining the area).

40. If it is considered that an Article 4 Direction is inappropriately applied, the Secretary of State can make a direction cancelling or modifying the direction at any time before or after its confirmation.

Development Plan Context

41. The development plan is defined in Section 38 of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 and includes adopted local plans, neighbourhood plans that have been made and published spatial development plans together with any regional strategy policies that remain in force. Neighbourhood plans that have been approved at referendum are part of the development plan unless the local planning authority decides that the neighbourhood plan should not be made (NPPF, Annex 2).

42. The Dorset Council area was created in 2019 following local government reorganisation which amalgamated the nine previous administrative areas into two authorities, one comprising Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole, with the rest forming the Dorset Council area. The latter is therefore an amalgamation of some of the previous administrative areas of East Dorset, North Dorset, Purbeck and

West Dorset District Councils, Weymouth & Portland Borough Council and the majority of Dorset County Council.

43. The current Development Plan comprises a number of different local plan documents reflecting the previous administrative structure. In addition to the Minerals Strategy, the Minerals Site Plan and the Waste Plan which cover the whole of the Dorset area, the relevant development plan documents for the Dorset Council area comprise:

- Christchurch and East Dorset Local Plan Part 1: Core Strategy (2014) (CEDLP) (noting that Christchurch is not within the Dorset Council area and the policies within the plan relating to it are not relevant to Dorset);
- East Dorset Local Plan (2002): Saved policies only (EDLP);
- North Dorset Local Plan Part 1 (2016) (NDLP);
- North Dorset District-Wide Local Plan (2003): Saved policies only (NDDWLP);
- Purbeck Local Plan 2018 – 2034 (2024) (PLP);
- Swanage Local Plan (2017) (SLP); and
- West Dorset, Weymouth and Portland Local Plan (2015) (WDWPLP)

44. Adopted (or ‘Made) neighbourhood plans (NP) are set out in the table below.

Table 1: Neighbourhood Plans in Dorset

Neighbourhood Plan	Date ‘made’	Neighbourhood Plan	Date ‘made’
Alderholt	December 2024	Lytchett Matravers	June 2017
Arne	June 2021	Melbury Abbas and Cann	January 2026
Askerwell	January 2019	Milborne St Andrew	October 2019
Bere Regis	June 2019	Milton Abbas	22 June 2021
Blandford + (including Bryanston and Blandford St Mary)	October 2023	Motcombe	December 2019
Bridport	May 2020	Piddle Valley	May 2018
Bourton	January 2018	Pimperne	November 2022
Broadwindsor	October 2019	Portland	June 2021
Buckhorn Weston and Kington Magna	July 2024	Puddletown	June 2021
Buckland Newton	December 2017	Shaftesbury	June 2021
Charmouth	March 2022	Shillingstone	February 2017
Chesil Bank	November 2023	Stinsford	June 2022
Chickerell	June 2021	Sturminster Marshall	October 2024
Cerne Valley	January 2015	Sturminster Newton	March 2019
Fontmell Magna	November 2018	Upper Marshwood Vale	May 2020
Gillingham	July 2018	Wareham Town	November 2021
Hazelbury Bryan	March 2024	Weymouth	January 2026
Holwell	September 2021	Wimborne St Giles	April 2025
Knightsford	September 2025	Wool	April 2025

Loders	July 2016	Yetminster & Ryme Intrinseca	April 2022

45. The other adopted document that is relevant to the current study is the Weymouth Town Centre Masterplan SPD (2015).

Current Development Plan Policies

46. The current development policies relevant to town centre uses including retail within the Dorset Council area Local Plans are summarised in Figure 1.

Figure 1: Current Retail and Town Centre Policies in Dorset

NPPF Requirement	Christchurch & East Dorset	North Dorset	Purbeck	Swanage	West Dorset, Weymouth & Portland
Network & Hierarchy of Town Centres	Policy KS6	Policies 11, 12	Policy EE3		Paras 4.4.2 & 4.4.3 & Glossary
Town Centre Boundaries	Policies WMC1 (Wimborne), FWP1 (Ferndown), VTSW1 (Verwood), VTSW9 (West Moors)		Policy EE3	Policy STC	Para 4.4.2
Primary Shopping Area (PSA) Boundaries	Policies KS7, WMC1 (Wimborne), FWP1 (Ferndown), VTSW1 (Verwood), VTSW9 (West Moors)	2003 LP Policies 3.16 & 3.17 until replaced		Policy STC	Policy WEY2 & para 4.4.2
Floorspace Requirements	Policies KS8, WMC1, FWP1, VTSW1, VTSW9		Policy EE3	Policy STC	
Site Allocations	Policies KS8, WMC1, WMC4, WMC7, WMC8, CM1, FWP5, FWP6, VTSW9	Policies 11, 16 (Blandford), 17 (Gillingham), 18 (Shaftesbury), 19 (Sturminster Newton)	Policies EE3, H4 & H5	Policy TCR	Policies WEY1, WEY2, WEY3, WEY6, WEY7, LITT1, CHIC2, DOR4, DOR5, BRID4, SHER2
Local Impact Threshold	Policy KS7		Policy EE3		Para 4.4.11
Markets		Policy 12			
Other	Policy PC5 Shops & community facilities in Local Centres and Villages	Policy 11(d): The Economy - rural communities to plan to meet their own local needs			

47. NP policies also form part of the Development Plan and in Dorset a number of NPs contain specific policies for the town centre within their plan area:

- **Alderholt** – Policy 8: The Village "High Street" is defined as the village envelope that fronts onto the village "High Street". Within this area Class E uses appropriate to a local centre are encouraged provided they are compatible with adjoining uses. Policy 15: Safeguarding Local Facilities seeks to avoid the loss of existing retail, leisure and other local facilities;
- **Bere Regis** – Policy BR9: Community Facilities and Services which encourages new retail development up to 200 sqm gross where the facility will meet local need and where the proposal is in accordance with the sequential and impact tests set out in the NPPF;
- **Blandford +** - Policy B2: Land North & East of Blandford Forum includes a proposal for a new convenience store to serve the locality as part of a wider residential-led development proposal. Policy B7: Blandford Forum Town Centre defines the Town Centre Area and PSA;
- **Bridport** – Policy COB2 Ropewalks Car Park & Bus Station car park supports the redevelopment of the two sites for a mix of town centre uses subject to satisfying a number of specific criteria. Policy COB3: Small Business Support seeks to resist the enlargement or merging of existing units within the defined town centre and encourages the provision of smaller units in any redevelopment proposals;
- **Charmouth** – Policy BET1: Charmouth's Retail Hub which defines a retail hub in the centre and seeks to avoid the loss of the existing commercial uses unless extensive marketing has shown that the commercial use is no longer

viable. Policy BET2: economic Development and Premises for New Businesses supports the creation, relocation and/or expansion of premises for small-scale Class E uses subject to a number of criteria;

- **Chickerell** – Policies CNP1: Chickerell Local Centre and other valued community facilities and CNP5: Charlestown Local Centre and other valued community facilities which define the extent of the two local centres and support appropriate uses within them;
- **Gillingham** – Policy 7 and accompanying Figure 8.1 define the town centre boundary and primary shopping frontages. Policy 8 sets out the development principles for the redevelopment of the Station Road area for mixed uses and requires a masterplan to be prepared for the site and Policy 9 supports appropriate town centre uses in the local centres of Milton-on-Stour, Lodbourne, Broad Robin and the new local centre in the southern extension. Policy 15 identifies the town centre as one of the preferred locations for new education and training sites, with Policy 16 also seeing the town centre as one of the preferred areas for new community, leisure and cultural venues.
- **Lytchett Matravers** – defines a village centre zone, while Policy SVI 1 identifies the parish owned car park for new and enhanced village centre uses and activities. Policy SVI 2 encourages further commercial uses along the High Street;
- **Milborne St Andrew** – Policy MSA4 encourages improved community facilities including a village shop and post office and Policy MSA5 allocates the Camelco site for mixed use development including former Class A and B1 uses;
- **Portland** – Policy Port/SS1 and Map 12 defined the local centres of Easton and Fortuneswell and the neighbourhood centres of Castletown and Chiswell. Development affecting the former will be assessed against Policy ECON4 of the Local Plan;
- **Shaftesbury** – Map SFTC defines the extent of the town centre, the PSA and the frontages where shops and active frontages should be maintained and Policy SFTC1 supports appropriate development within the area. Policy SFTC3 provides guidance on design but includes an encouragement to redevelop the late 20th and early 21st buildings that detract from the historic character of the town centre, while Policy SFTC4 seeks to encourage the provision of additional car parking;
- **Sturminster Newton** – Maps 10 and 11 define the extent of the town centre and a shopping frontage protection zone. Policy 19 seeks public realm improvements and Policy 20 sets out the proposals for the mixed-use development of Station Road. Policy 21 supports main town centre uses or residential development on the Market Hill site and Policy 22 supports similar development at the Clarkes Yard site and other land at Bath Road/Old Market Hill junction;
- **Wareham** – Policy TC1 and the Policies Map define the town centre, while Policy TC2 identified the Carey Road Local Centre. Policy TC3 sets a 200 sqm for an impact assessment, while Policy TC6 seeks to protect existing town centre car parks from development. This would include The Quay which is considered important for public events including the market;

- **Weymouth** - Policy W32: Town Centre Car Parks which seeks to prevent the loss of existing town centre car parks through redevelopment; Policy 39: Weymouth Town Centre and Map 28 which define the town centre boundary and support the Town Centre Masterplan although noting that it is in need of review. The policy also supports the development of an appropriate evening economy; Map 28 which restates the town centre strategy areas identified in the 2015 Masterplan, namely:
  - WEY 2 Town Centre Core and Commercial Road area
  - WEY 3 Station area and Swannery Car Park
  - WEY 4 Custom House Quay and Brewery Waterfront
  - WEY 5 The Esplanade (south)
  - WEY 6 Ferry Peninsula
  - WEY 7 Westway Road and North Quay area
  - WEY 8 Lodmoor Gateway
  - WEY 9 Bincleaves Cove

  The Plan also includes a potential leisure site at Lodmoor Old Tip (Policy W23B) in accordance with LP Policy WEY8.
- **Wimborne St Giles** – Policy 15 supports new and improved community facilities and considers the Wood Yard has potential for some retail and café provision.

Network & Hierarchy of Town Centres

48. The purpose of defining a network and hierarchy of retail centres is to ensure that new development is directed to the appropriate location, with all areas being served by centres of differing roles and draw. Smaller centres tend to serve a more local catchment and provide for the day-to-day needs of the local community. At the other end of the scale are the largest city and sub-regional centres which provide a more specialist offer and an extensive catchment area.

49. The types of centres seen in Dorset (largest to smallest) comprise:

    - Town Centres – These are the principal centres within an area. In rural areas they can often be found within market or coastal towns. They function as important service centres, providing a range of facilities and services for extensive rural catchment areas. The retail offer tends to include a higher proportion of comparison (non-food) stores;

    - District Centres - These will usually comprise groups of shops often containing at least one supermarket or superstore, and a range of non-retail services, such as banks and restaurants, as well as local public facilities such as a library. The retail offer is likely to include a higher proportion of convenience (food uses) and a more limited comparison offer;

    - Local Centres - These include a range of small shops of a local nature, serving a small catchment. Typically, local centres might include, amongst other shops, a small supermarket, a newsagent, and a pharmacy. Other facilities could include a hot-food takeaway, hairdressers and launderette. In rural areas, large villages may perform the role of a local centre; and

    - Parades of shops – These are not counted as ‘centres’ in planning policy terms but will provide a mix of retail and service uses serving a local neighbourhood. Unless defined otherwise single or small groups of shops in villages and smaller settlements would normally be expected to fall under this category.

50. The current hierarchy for centres within Dorset, as set out in the adopted Local Plans, is as follows:

- **East Dorset**
  - Town Centres: Ferndown, Verwood and Wimborne Minster.
  - District Centres: West Moors
  - Local Centres: Corfe Mullen and West Parley
  - Parades: All other clusters of shops
- **North Dorset**
  - Town Centres: Blandford Forum, Gillingham, Shaftesbury and Sturminster Newton
- **Purbeck**
  - Town Centres: Swanage, Wareham, Upton
  - Local Centres: Wool, Bere Regis, Lytchett Matravers, Corfe Castle
- **Swanage**
  - Town Centre: Swanage
- **West Dorset, Weymouth & Portland**
  - Town Centres: Weymouth, Dorchester, Bridport, Lyme Regis, Sherborne
  - Larger Local Centres: Beaminster, Chickerell, Easton, Fortuneswell, Littlemoor, West Bay

Town Centre Boundaries

51. Town centre boundaries have been defined for the majority of the larger centres within Dorset, either in the adopted Local Plans or made NPs, or have been proposed as part of previous Local Plan consultations. The only centres without any defined or proposed boundaries are Corfe Mullen and West Parley.

Primary Shopping Areas (PSAs)

52. Primary Shopping Areas (PSAs), the area of a town centre where retail activity is concentrated, are defined for the main centres in East Dorset, Swanage, West Dorset and Weymouth & Portland. The 2003 PSAs are to remain in use for North Dorset until superceded by those in an updated LP or NP. PSAs are not defined for Purbeck.

Floorspace Requirements

53. The DPD specified floorspace requirements are as follows:

Table 2: Retail Floorspace Requirements in current Local Plans

Development Plan	Comparison Floorspace requirement	Convenience Floorspace requirement
Christchurch & East Dorset – East Dorset	5,200sqm net additional comparison floorspace to 2031.	4,000sqm net additional convenience floorspace to 2031.

	Of this around 2,500 – 2,550 sqm to be provided in Wimborne town centre for quality niche retail; 1,500 – 1,600 sqm in Ferndown town centre; 700-800sqm in Verwood town centre; 150-200 sqm in West Moors district centre	Of this 400- 500 sqm to be provided in Wimborne town centre; 1,400 – 1,500 in Ferndown town centre; 600-650 in Verwood town centre; 40-50 sqm in West Moors district centre
North Dorset	Not quantified but sites allocated in LP for retail and mixed uses (see below)	Not quantified but sites allocated in LP for retail and mixed uses (see below)
Purbeck	None	700 sqm net, of which 350 sqm will be provided at Moreton Station/Redbridge Pit and the same in Wool
Swanage	1,000 sqm net (majority) to be provided on Swanage Town Centre Redevelopment site between Kings Road West and the railway station	1,100 sqm net (majority) to be provided on Swanage Town Centre Redevelopment site between Kings Road West and the railway station
West Dorset, Weymouth & Portland	Not quantified but sites allocated in LP for retail and mixed uses (see below)	Not quantified but sites allocated in LP for retail and mixed uses (see below)

Site Allocations

54. Site allocations for retail, leisure and other town centre uses in the DPD comprise:

- **Christchurch & East Dorset**:
  - New local centres at Cranborne Road new neighbourhood, Wimborne; new neighbourhood on land south of Leigh Road, Wimborne;
  - New convenience store (800-900 sqm) at new neighbourhood east of New Road, West Parley
  - Improvements to village centre at new neighbourhood west of New Road, West Parley
  - West Parley – as part of the village centre enhancement scheme;
  - Wood Yard, Wimborne St Giles identified for retail and café provision in Wimborne St Giles NP
- **North Dorset**
  - Sites for mixed use regeneration identified at Brewery site, Blandford St. Mary; Station Road area, Gillingham[1] (focus on comparison retail); Station Road area, Sturminster Newton[2]; and land between the town centre and Christy's Lane, Shaftesbury;

[1] Also referenced in Gillingham NP
[2] Also referenced in Sturminster Newton LP

    - Convenience development proposed at Tesco Stour Park, Blandford (extension); new supermarket off Shaftesbury Lane, Blandford;
    - Regeneration of land south of East Street, Blandford; land within and to the east of Shaftesbury town centre
    - Local centre to serve the Strategic Site Allocation, Gillingham[3]
    - New convenience store to be included in the residential-led development on land to the north and east of Blandford Forum (Policy B2, Blandford+ NP);
    - Former Camelco site in Milborne St Andrew allocated for mixed use development including former Class A and B1 uses in NP (Policy MSA4);
    - Main town centre uses or residential development supported on the market Hill, Clarkes Yard and land at Bath Road/Old Market Hill Junction sites in Sturminster Newton (Sturminster Newton NP)
- **Purbeck**
    - Convenience floorspace proposed at Moreton Station/Redbridge Pit (350 sqm) and Wool (350 sqm)
    - Lytchett Matravers NP allocates the parish owned car park for new and enhanced village centre uses (Policy SVI 1)
- **Swanage**
    - Majority of space to be provided at Swanage Town Centre Redevelopment site
- **West Dorset, Weymouth & Portland**
    - Sites for mixed use development In Weymouth identified to the west of the PSA, around the station, Ferry peninsula and Westway Road/North Quay area
    - An extended local service centre is proposed at Littlemoor urban extension;
    - Local centre including a local food store proposed at Chickerell urban extension;
    - Sites at Charles Street and Trinity Street, Dorchester identified for retail development and to form part of the PSA
    - Land at Rope Walks and Coach Station Car Park, Bridport allocated for future expansion of the town centre (also in Bridport NP)
    - Land at Newland Car Park North and Newland Car Park South, Sherborne is identified for the future expansion of the town centre

Local Impact Threshold

55. As outlined above, the NPPF allows local planning authorities to set a local threshold for impact assessments. Within Dorset the following thresholds apply:

Table 3: Current Adopted Retail Impact Thresholds in Dorset

Development Plan	Centre	Retail Impact Threshold (sqm gross)
Christchurch & East Dorset	Ferndown & Wimborne Elsewhere	1,000 sqm 500 sqm

[3] Also referenced in Gillingham NP

North Dorset	All	2,500 sqm
Purbeck (inc Swanage)[4]	All	200 sqm
West Dorset, Weymouth & Portland	All	1,000 sqm

56. If there is no locally set threshold, the NPPF threshold of 2,500 sqm applies.

Markets

57. Whilst the role of markets is recognised as important in the NPPF (NPPF, para 90(c)), only the North Dorset LP includes a policy relating specifically to markets. However, they remain an important activity in town centres, adding variety and dynamism, albeit their existence is not always controlled directly by planning.

Emerging Policy

58. Whilst the purpose of this study is to inform the emerging Dorset Council Local Plan 2027 - 2042 (DCLP), the Council consulted on an earlier version of a single plan for Dorset in early 2021. This draft plan has not been progressed but the draft retail and town centre policies within it, provide an indication of the scope and types of policies likely to need to be considered in the DCLP. Of particular relevance:

- **Figure 5.2** proposed a new network and hierarchy of centres including a number which are not identified as such in the current adopted plans;
- **Draft Policy ECON3: Hierarchy of Centres and the sequential test** set out the requirement for new development to accord with the sequential approach as set out in Figure 5.3, as well as supporting the development of new centres where they are of a scale and type to serve local needs and do not adversely affect the vitality and viability of any centres.
- **Draft Policy ECON4: Town centre impact assessments** and supporting text set out new thresholds for requiring impact assessments, with these ranging from 200 sqm to 1,000 sqm depending on location;
- **Draft Policy ECON5: Management of centres, primary shopping areas and markets** which referenced the town centre boundaries and primary shopping areas defined on the associated Policies Map and supported development proposals for town centres uses if of a type and scale appropriate to the size, role and function of the centre. The policy also set out the form of development that would be supported in primary shopping areas and provided support for existing markets and directed new or relocated markets towards the primary shopping areas in prominent and accessible locations. The use of upper floors of premises in centres for residential or other uses was also encouraged
- **Draft Policy COM5. Hot food takeaways** sought to prevent new hot food takeaway outlets opening within a 400m radius of a school; other educational establishment; play area; skate park; leisure centre or youth centres
- **Draft Policy CORM1: Land south of Blandford Road,** Corfe Mullen allocated land for development comprising retail and community uses, with the

[4] Also referenced in Bere Regis NP and Wareham NP

supporting text indicating the area has the capacity to accommodate another convenience (food) retail store of approximately 2,000 m² gross floorspace, and improve the village's offer of local facilities

- **Draft Policy BLAN1: Future town centre expansion** which identified land off Langton Road, for the future expansion of Blandford town centre and land at West Street, for town centre related mixed use development.
- **Draft Policy BLAN7: Land north-east of Blandford Forum** which allocated the site for a mix of uses including a local centre including a community centre and a small convenience store on land to the north-west of Salisbury Road.
- **Draft Policy FERN1: Ferndown town centre** which indicated that Ferndown town centre would continue to function as a town centre serving the east of Dorset and will remain a focus for retail development. The town centre environment and road safety should be improved
- **Draft Policy FERN2: West Parley enhancement scheme** which promoted environmental enhancement of the West Parley local centre
- **Draft Policy FERN4: East of New Road, West Parley** which promoted the development of land east of New Road, for a mix of uses including expanded retail provision.
- **Draft Policy SWAN1: Swanage town centre** which defined the town centre boundary and the primary and secondary retail frontages. It identified land between the railway station and Kings Road West; the former depot site at the junction of Court Road and Kings Road West; and the Post Office sorting office site on Kings Road East as the preferred locations for additional town centre uses to serve Swanage
- **Draft Policy VER1: Town centre expansion** which sought the provision of more comparison and convenience goods shopping within the existing town centre, the retention and enhancement of community services and cultural facilities in the town centre, and supported the development of evening economy uses to enhance the vibrancy of the afternoon and evening economy of the town
- **Draft Policy WAR1: Wareham town centre strategy** which supported appropriate development within the town centre boundary, subject to the development not harming the historic interest and character of the conservation area and listed buildings; and maintaining an active and publicly accessible ground floor use that enlivens the street scene.
- **Draft Policy WMC1: Wimborne Minster town centre** which identified that the town centre should serve the town itself, as well as Colehill and the surrounding area. Improvements to the town centre environment and existing community services and cultural facilities, were supported. The Allenview area was identified for redevelopment including a new civic hub. Evening economy uses were supported, and the townscape quality was to be enhanced
- **Draft Policy WMC2: The Allendale redevelopment area** which proposed the redevelopment of the site to provide additional community facilities, retail and other uses complementary to its town centre location
- **Draft Policy WMC4: Cranborne Road** which allocated land for a new neighbourhood including a local centre

- **Draft Policy WMC5: South of Leigh Road** and sports village which allocated land for missed use development including a local centre providing for day-to-day needs;
- **Draft Policy WOOL1: New housing at Wool** which allocated land for residential development and around 350 sqm of convenience retail floorspace;
- **Draft Policy GILL1: The Station Road regeneration area** which supports the development of a mixed use scheme, incorporating town centre uses and, potentially an education facility
- **Draft Policy GILL2: Gillingham Southern Extension** which allocates the site for major residential development including a new ‘local centre’ to be located a local centre near to the Shaftesbury Road corridor. It was expected to include a small scale convenience retail; primary school; pre-school nursery; community hall; health facilities (including a doctors’ surgery, a dentist and a dispensing pharmacy) and other essential local facilities
- **Draft Policy SHAF1: Land at Christy’s Lane** which reserves the former Cattle Market site fronting Christy’s Lane, for development that meets the description of ‘main town centre uses’
- **Draft Policy SHER1: Future town centre expansion** which allocated land at Newland Car Park North and Newland Car Park South for future expansion of the town centre area. Any development was expected to improve linkages to the existing primary shopping frontage and retain the existing level of public car parking. Once developed, the area was expected to form part of the primary shopping area
- **Draft Policy SHER2: Land at Sherborne Hotel** which was allocated for the retention and/or expansion of the hotel and other appropriate business uses
- **Draft Policy STAL1: Town centre development** which proposed that additional town centre use floorspace in Stalbridge should be focused within the town centre boundary and development proposals for town centre uses outside of the town centre would be resisted
- **Draft Policy STNW2: Sturminster Newton town centre** which indicated that proposals for town centre uses would be focused within the town centre boundary. The sites identified in the neighbourhood plan should be the initial focus for additional retail and town centre uses
- **Draft Policy BRID1: Future town centre expansion** identifies land at Rope Walks and Coach Station Car Park, Bridport as the preferred location for future expansion of the town centre area.

59. The 2025 consultation on the DCLP undertaken between August and October included a short commentary on Town Centre development and set out the intention to use the latest projections of need for the main town centre uses to plan for Dorset’s towns. It also indicated that the Council would work with town councils to develop a strategy for each town centre reflecting their strengths and the activities they wish to focus on. These strategies will reflect the town council’s vision for their town centre along with the function and position in the retail centre hierarchy.

60. The consultation also indicated that policies relating to the sequential test, impact, and change of use would be included. As required by national policy, a retail

hierarchy will be defined and additional policies seeking to improve the town centres' vitality and viability and encourage street markets were suggested.

61. The consultation also sought responses on a number of these matters namely:

- Question 24: How do you think we should plan to support town centres in the future?
- Question 25: What types of use do you think will be most important for the future of our town centres?
- Question 26: We are suggesting that retail impact assessments should be undertaken for retail development proposals outside the town centres defined in the Plan, that are over the size of a small food store (280 square metres net). How much do you agree or disagree with the introduction of a threshold of 280 square metres for retail impact assessments?
- Question 27: Should the threshold also apply to leisure uses that are net 280 square metres? Yes/No
- Question 28: We are considering whether the Local Plan should include a policy which supports interim or temporary uses pending a permanent use for a vacant town centre building - we have called these 'meanwhile uses'. To what extent do you agree with the introduction of a meanwhile uses policy?

62. Information on the consultation responses received has yet to be published.

3. ECONOMIC AND MARKET TRENDS

63. Town centres have always been dynamic multi-functional places that have developed in response to the evolving needs of their catchment area. As a result their health and offer will evolve over time in response to wider external factors including the general economic position, consumer shopping and leisure trends and business practices.

64. The effect of these trends will vary depending on the mix of uses and occupiers in a centre, its role and function in the hierarchy. In recent years, the dominance of retail in many of our centres has meant that the health of many centres has been closely linked with changes in the retail sector. However, it is important to understand the wider trends if planning for successful, vital and viable centres is to be effective.

65. The economic, consumer and market trends that have most affected our centres during the last decade and which are expected to continue to shape them in the future are considered in detail in Appendix A of this report. This include:

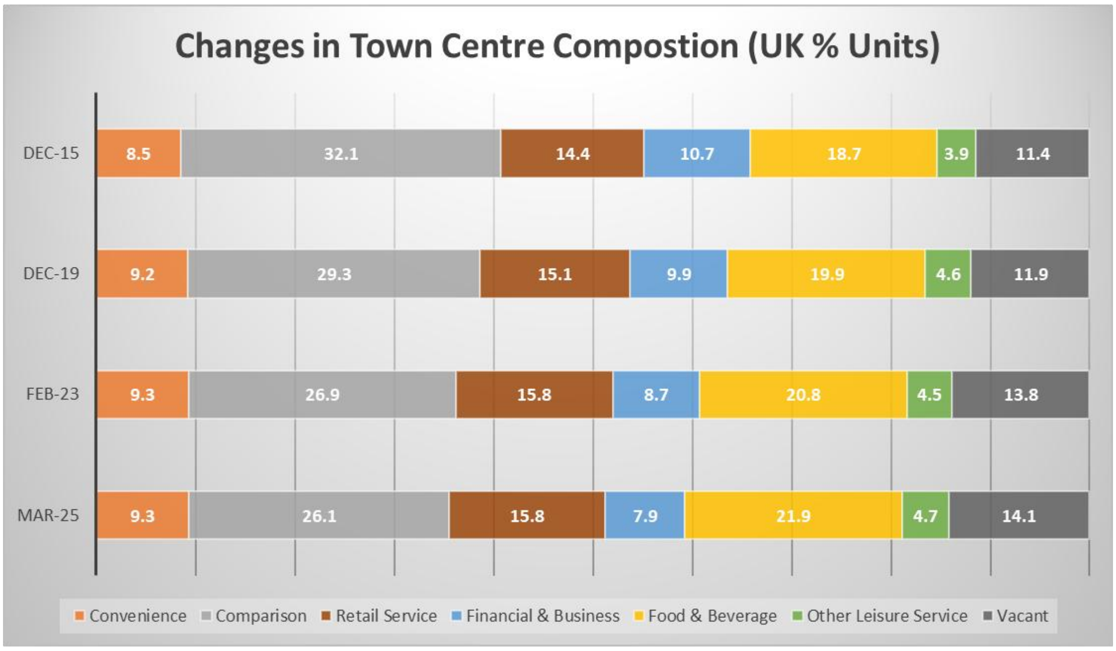
- Economic Outlook
  - The challenges faced by the UK economy over the last five years, many of which are on-going. These include the COVID-19 pandemic, Brexit, high inflation, elevated energy costs, supply chain disruption and trade tensions. As a result, despite a gradual economic recovery being forecast, UK households are experiencing the biggest fall in real disposable income and living standard in decades and consumer confidence remains ‘fragile’;
  - Forecasts for future consumer spending suggest a marginal decline in convenience spend per head in the future (to 2040) but positive growth in comparison spend, although this will be low in the short-term (to 2026);
  - Non-store retail sales, including online sales (Special Forms of Trading) have increased substantially in recent years, accounting for just 3.6% of total UK retail sales in 2006 but rising to 27% in 2020 during the pandemic. Online sales are now estimated to account for 32.1% of comparison spend and 17.5% of convenience spend (2025) and this is expected to increase to 39% and 24.4% by 2040. It is estimated that 25% of comparison spend and 70% of convenience spend on SFT will be sourced through traditional ‘bricks and mortar’ shops, but this still means a very high proportion of retail spend is not available to support physical stores;
- Changing Retail Business Models and Requirements
  - The recent economic challenges and changing customer behaviour has seen retailers react by regularly reviewing and adapting their business strategies, requirements and store formats to ensure they remain profitable. An integrated offer across online, store, social and virtual platforms is essential to long term success but rising costs and transitioning quickly enough to a more technology-focused business model mean many are struggling financially;
  - In the convenience sector the deep discounters are expanding both their store portfolio and looking to develop larger stores, whilst the longer established national multiples have reduced larger new store

    developments, concentrating instead on their smaller ‘convenience store’ formats;
  - In the non-food sector retailers are rationalising their store portfolios and this together with business failures is seeing high levels of store closures and job losses;
- Leisure Trends
  - The leisure sector is very diverse but the main spending areas relevant to town centres are on food and beverage (F&B) (restaurants and cafes etc) (60% of all leisure spend) and cultural services (14.5%);
  - Spending levels overall on leisure activities are expected to change little in the future, but there is expected to be significant variation across the sector;
  - In the F&B sector, restaurants are facing similar challenges to those seen in the retail sector, with increased costs but reduced customer spending as disposable income deceases. The growth in home delivery services has the potential to increase sales for some, but for others it means increased competition. It also makes out of centre locations more attractive as they generally offer lower property and operational costs and are better able to provide for delivery or ‘click and collect’ services;
  - The coffee shop/café sector has been particularly successful over the last two decades and is expected to continue to grow in the next five years. However, some rationalisation of company portfolios is expected as customer behaviour changes both in terms of the locations for purchases (more Working from Home) and an increased awareness of price;
  - Public houses and bars however are faring less well and numbers are continuing to decline from over 60,000 pubs in 2000 to 45,000 by 2020. Of these 80% are SMEs and are either independent or ‘leased and tenanted’ meaning they are less likely to have the financial reserves to support them during difficult trading conditions or support investment in efficiency saving equipment;
  - Cultural services such as theatres and cinemas are a major contributor to the evening and night time economy in a centre and can support the F&B sector. Their draw tends to be wider than the retail offer in a centre, but changes to provision are rarely within the remit of planning and depend instead on commercial or arts funding sources;
  - The sector is also facing mounting challenges as operating and building maintenance costs increase but the ability of patrons to pay higher ticket prices reduces;
  - The live music sector is experiencing similar challenges with much of the spend that is being made going to the occasional ‘big venue’ or festival event. Greater residential development in town centres can also threaten existing businesses as areas are redeveloped;
  - In the cinema sector, the increase in streaming services has provided other challenges and major cinema operators are also facing financial pressures. In contrast operators providing a more personalised or specialist customer experience are seeing some growth;

- Property Market
  - The decline in retail businesses has led to an oversupply of space and limited market demand, which in turn has put pressures on the viability of existing stores and shopping centres and on investment proposals;
  - Out-of-centre retailing has also been affected but such locations retain their significant competitive advantages over town centre and high street locations and demand from retailer and other operators is higher; and
  - The need to remain profitable means existing businesses are having to improve their productivity growth rates year on year, to offset higher occupancy costs.

66. The overall effect of the changes in terms of the mix of uses seen in centres nationally, is an on-going decline in the comparison retail offer, and also the financial and professional services sector, as national banks reduce their network. The Food & Beverage (F&B) sector, other leisure services and retail services are increasing and the late 2010's saw a noticeable increase in convenience provision as the national multiples opened a significant number new, small stores. Vacancies have also been increasing.

Figure 2: Composition of UK Towns 2015 - 2025



Source: LSH Analysis of Experian Goad Reports

Trends affecting Dorset's Town Centres

67. There are a considerable number of defined centres in Dorset ranging from Weymouth and Dorchester to some very small local centres providing a limited range of retail and town centre uses. There are also a considerable number of smaller settlements where town centre uses may be limited to a small number of shops and whilst not defined as a centre, as they are of 'purely neighbourhood significance' (NPPF, Annex 2), represent important facilities for their local communities.

68. Each of these centres is unique and will be affected to varying degrees by national trends depending on its role and function in the hierarchy and the proximity of

competing centres both within and outside the Dorset area. For many Dorset centres the proximity to tourist attractions and accommodation will also be a key factor in determining its offer and the impact that national trends have had on it.

69. For the larger centres, the potential negative effects of the cost of living crisis and increased online shopping is likely to have been at least partially offset by on-going tourist spend.

70. As the largest centres and ones that are centrally located within Dorset, both Weymouth and Dorchester town centres would be expected to be seeing some loss of national multiple occupiers as retail and leisure businesses rationalise their offer. Those seeking to maintain a presence are likely to be looking at cheaper operating costs and an on-going demand for out of centre space would be expected.

71. The centres in the larger Tier 1 and 2 settlements are generally more orientated towards local provision and as such may have seen less changes in the number of national multiples trading there, and an on-going demand for convenience space (albeit often out of centre). The fortunes of many of these centres will however be influenced by the presence of higher order centres and shopping facilities outside of the Dorset borders. This is especially likely to be true for centres bordering Poole and Bournemouth where any rationalisations are likely to benefit the higher order centres but some of the Dorset centres will also be affected by their proximity to the likes of Yeovil, Crewkerne and Ringwood.

72. All these centres are likely to be seeing some benefits from the increase in leisure spending, especially on Food & Beverage (F&B), with demand for new space strongest in areas with high visitor numbers.

73. The smallest ‘local’ centres are likely to be seeing fewer changes as a result of national trends as a result of their greater reliance on independent businesses. However, these businesses will be experiencing the challenges of rising business costs and any vacancies arising from closures as a result of business failures or owner retirement may be difficult to fill except in the strongest tourist areas.

74. These areas would be expected to be seeing some increase in demand from F&B operators, particularly café and takeaway operators.

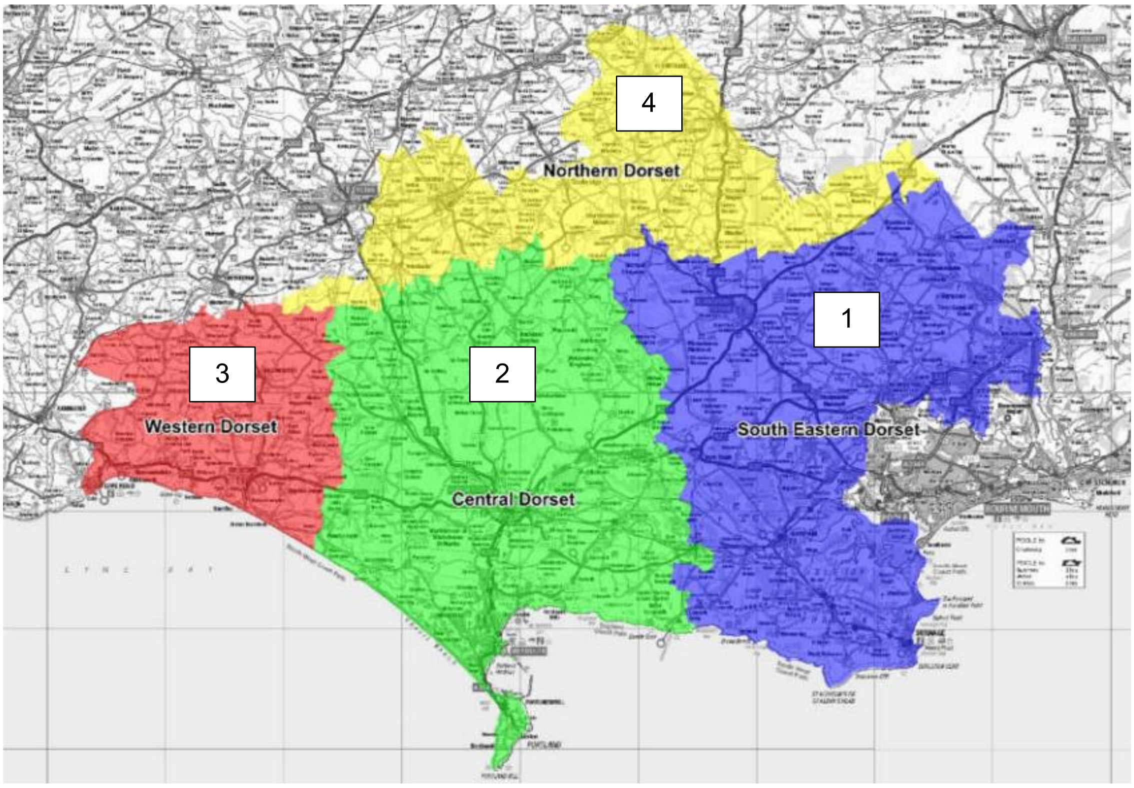
4. THE STUDY AREA AND TRADING PATTERNS

75. The Dorset Council area covers an area of just over 250,000 hectares and had a population of just under 400,000 in 2024. It is located on the south coast of England, immediately to the west of the Bournemouth/Christchurch/Poole conurbation which has a significant influence over the plan area, especially in the east.

76. For the purposes of the Local Plan, the Council area has been sub-divided into four functional areas:

- South Eastern (Zone 1)
- Central (Zone 2)
- Western (Zone 3)
- Northern (Zone 4)

Figure 3: Dorset Functional Areas



Source: Dorset Council

77. To understand retail and leisure market shares within the area we have obtained expenditure data from Experian Insights relating to retail and leisure spend for these areas, the surrounding area and the rest of the UK. This has allowed us to look at retail and leisure spend within the individual functional areas and Dorset as a whole, as well as considering the main inflows and outflows.

78. Full details of the base data and key findings are presented in Appendix B to this report and are summarised below:

- Convenience Retail Spending
  - Spending on convenience goods is usually undertaken on a fairly localised basis and the findings for Dorset are consistent with this, with the highest retention seen in Zone 2 (Central Dorset) reflecting its geographic location;
  - In this zone the main spend is going to out-of-centre locations including Dorchester (17.1% of total spend) and Weymouth, Mercery Road (13.2%), although Waitrose in Dorchester Town Centre attracts 5.5% of total spend;
  - In Zone 1 (South Eastern) Ferndown is the most popular shopping destination with 9.8% of available spend going to out-of-centre stores and 4.3% to town centre shops;
  - In Zone 3 (Western) Bridport attracts nearly half (48.7%) of zone spend, but there is relatively high (but expected) leakage to destinations in Somerset and Devon;
  - The most popular locations in Zone 4 (Northern) are out-of-centre locations in Shaftesbury (15.5%), Gillingham Town Centre (12.2%) and Sherborne (13.1% combined). There is also some leakage to Yeovil and Wincanton;
  - Spend from the area surrounding Dorset are important for Ferndown, Wimborne, Corfe Mullen, Upton, West Parley, Gillingham, Sherborne town centre, Shaftesbury and Stalbridge;
  - Convenience spend by visitors is important for Swanage town centre, Corfe Castle, Weymouth Town Centre, Portland, West Bay, Lyme Regis Town Centre, Sherborne and Shaftesbury;
- Comparison Retail Spending
  - Online spend accounts for 43.5% of comparison spend in Dorset;
  - Leakage from the area is also high, with residents of Zones 1 and 2 going to Bournemouth and Poole, while residents in Zones 3 and 4 are more likely to go to Yeovil;
  - As a result none of the locations in Dorset attract particularly high market shares, with Dorchester Town Centre, the most popular location, attracting just 3.1% of Dorset spend;
  - Some Dorset locations however do see significant levels of trade inflow with Lyme Regis, West Bay and Swanage all getting more than half their spend from those living outside of Dorset;
- Leisure Food & Drink Spend
  - Spend by Dorset residents tends to be very dispersed, as would be expected given the range of purchases covered and choice of venues, with the two most used centres being Weymouth (3.5% of spend) and Dorchester (3.3%);
  - For many centres though trade from visitors is of greater importance than that generated locally, with Lyme Regis, Corfe Castle, Swanage, West Bay and Weymouth seeing more than half of their trade coming from visitors;

79. In terms of the four Functional Areas the trading patterns can be summarised as follows:

- The **South Eastern Functional Area** borders the administrative area of Bournemouth/Christchurch/Poole and there is considerable trade flows across the boundary, both inflows and outflows. Outflows are particularly noticeable for comparison spending although this leakage is lower than spending online.

Out-of-centre locations attract the most trade but Ferndown Town Centre achieves the highest turnover of the defined centres, followed by Wimborne Minster which has a significant draw from outside of Dorset. Many of the smaller centres also see significant levels of inflow reflecting their location or tourist offer.

- The **Central Functional Area** contains the two main town centres in the Dorset Council area, namely Dorchester and Weymouth. As a result of this and the location of the area, trade retention within it is high and both town centres perform well. However, spend at out-of-centre locations is higher. Trade inflows from visitors is particularly important for both town centres.
- The **Western Functional Area** contains just two defined town centres in Bridport and Lyme Regis, with the former providing the main town centre offer and having the highest turnover. Out-of-centre turnover in Bridport is also significant. Trade leakage to locations in Devon is relatively high and the area has the highest use of online for comparison purchases. Visitor spend is significant for most retail destinations in the area.
- The **Northern Functional Area** contains three larger town centres – Gillingham, Sherborne and Shaftesbury, with a smaller offer in Sturminster Newton. In all cases the primary offer relates to convenience spend, with Yeovil being the main draw outside of Dorset. All the main centres also rely on trade inflows from the surrounding areas and visitors.

5. HEALTH CHECK ASSESSMENT

81. Planning policy at all levels seeks to maintain and enhance the vitality and viability of town centres and therefore understanding the current health or performance of a centre and its role and function, is an important element of any evidence-based study to inform town centre policies.

82. The NPPF defines a town centre as

"Area defined on the local authority's policies map, including the primary shopping area and areas predominantly occupied by main town centre uses within or adjacent to the primary shopping area. References to town centres or centres apply to city centres, town centres, district centres and local centres but exclude small parades of shops of purely neighbourhood significance. Unless they are identified as centres in the development plan, existing out-of-centre developments, comprising or including main town centre uses, do not constitute town centres".

83. As outlined above, the way town centres were defined across the former administrative areas that now comprise the Dorset Council area were not consistent and a new hierarchy was proposed in the 2021 Draft Local Plan. One of the purposes of this study is to review this proposed hierarchy and this will be informed by an understanding of the current health of centres.

84. Dorset Council has undertaken health checks of 35 town centres, assessing all designated or proposed town, district and local centres and the findings were published in December 2025[5].

85. The health checks include information on:

- Diversity of uses
- Proportion of vacant street level property
- Customer experience and behaviour
- Retail representation (balance between independents and multiples)
- Accessibility
- Extent to which there is evidence of barriers to new businesses opening and existing businesses expanding and
- Opening hours / availability / extent to which there is an evening and nighttime economy offer.

86. A summary of these health check findings is presented below, together with additional information on:

- Pedestrian flows
- Retailer intentions to change representation and
- Centre turnover and draw.

87. This is then used to inform the analysis provided below for each of the centres. This information is sourced as follows:

[5] Town Centre Health Checks 2023/24 – https://www.dorsetcouncil.gov.uk/w/dorset-council-local-plan-evidence-and-background-papers

Pedestrian Flow

88. Pedestrian Flow data has been obtained from MSCI Property Intel (MSCI) who harvest data from over 10 million mobile devices. All data is fully anonymised and GDPR compliant. Data is collected daily.

89. The data presented here for the larger centres comprises:

- Heat maps showing footfall in August 2024 for each centre. This indicates the areas of greatest use and activity with green indicating lower levels and orange/red higher levels of footfall;
- Graphs showing monthly footfall for a specific point in each centre over the period February 2019 to November 2024. This allows long-term trends and seasonal variations to be seen;
- Graphs showing footfall in each centre by time of day (larger centres only). This distinguishes between Morning (5.00am – 11.00am), Lunch (11.00am – 2.00pm), Afternoon (2.00pm – 5.00pm), Evening (5.00pm – 9.00pm) and Night (9.00pm – 5.00am); and
- Footfall levels for a location in each centre in February and August 2024, allowing an assessment of the effect of seasonal visitor trade.

90. The latter provides an indication of those centres where seasonal trade is of greatest significance:

Table 4: Comparison of Seasonal Footfall in Town Centres

Centre	Feb-24	Aug-24
Blandford Forum	106,926	128,968
Bridport	139,388	160,841
Dorchester (South Street)	122,751	148,120
Dorchester (Weymouth Avenue)	45,292	67,258
Queen Mother Square (Poundbury, Dorchester)	50,675	39,553
Ferndown	28,521	28,852
Gillingham	35,577	42,793
Lyme Regis	48,050	110,038
Shaftesbury	134,807	179,999
Sherborne	52,243	54,316
Stalbridge	76,003	75,913
Sturminster Newton	112,558	117,181
Swanage	84,897	170,378
Upton	37,844	44,619
Verwood	23,046	23,777
Wareham	84,864	90,619
Weymouth (St Thomas Street)	154,256	181,494
Weymouth (Esplanade)	39,695	97,242
West Moors	37,994	49,613
Wimborne Minster	53,385	49,730

Source: MSCI Datscha

91. In most cases footfall is relatively similar over the off-peak and peak tourist seasons, as represented by February and August footfall respectively. However, for Lyme

Regis, Swanage and Weymouth, the uplift in seasonal trade is very high, reflecting the importance of tourist spend to these town centres.

Retailer Representation and Requirements

92. The information on the demand from retailers and leisure operators for representation in a centre is an important indicator of a centre's overall health and longer term viability and information on requirements in the Dorset Council area is provided below.

93. The retail and leisure requirements information is based on published requirements since June 2024 and usually relates to the requirements of national multiples. As such it does not cover all operators seeking representation within a centre, as independents and regional operators are less likely to produce requirements lists. They are also more likely to be seeking space in the lower order centres where demand from national multiples may be more limited.

94. It should also be noted that the locations stated by operators may not specifically reference a town centre, but refer to a town generally, or wider area. As such the requirements may potentially relate to out-of-centre locations and retail parks rather than the town centre in question. The requirements list also relies on the retailer in question (or their agent) updating the list on a regular basis to reflect new acquisitions or changes to company strategy. If this is not done, a requirement may remain listed despite having been met recently.

Dorchester

Figure 4: Retailer Requirements - Dorchester

Recorded Date	Operator	Sector	Min sqm	Max sqm
Oct-25	M&S Food	Convenience Retail	560	2,320
Apr-25	Age UK	Comparison Retail	130	460
May-25	British Heart Foundation	Comparison Retail	140	1,300
Apr-25	David Lloyd	Leisure Services	3,720	5,570
Mar-25	Cotton Traders	Comparison Retail	140	230
Jan-25	Premier Inn	Leisure Services	1,860	1,860
Dec-24	Blue Cross	Comparison Retail	50	50
Nov-24	Evapo	Convenience Retail	30	90
Jun-24	Travelodge	Leisure Services	930	3,720
		Total	7,560	15,600

Source: The Requirement List

95. A review of published operator requirements for Dorchester has identified nine retail, leisure and service operator requirements, seeking a combined maximum floorspace of up to 15,600 sqm. These retailers include M&S Food (Foodstore), David Lloyd (Health Club) and Cotton Traders (Clothing Store).

96. It should be noted that these are not necessarily operators seeking representation within the centre itself but potentially out-of-centre locations and retail parks and it is considered that the Premier Inn requirement is likely to be an out-of-date requirement given the recent permission for a new hotel at South Street.

97. It is also possible that these operators are not looking for opportunities in Dorchester specifically, rather they are looking for opportunities in areas similar to and including Dorchester.

Weymouth

Figure 5: Retailer Requirements - Weymouth

Recorded Date	Operator	Sector	Min sqm	Max sqm
Aug-25	Beauty Outlet	Comparision Retail	110	230
Apr-25	Age UK	Comparision Retail	130	460
May-25	Taco Bell	Leisure Serivces	170	230
May-25	British Heart Foundation	Comparision Retail	140	1,300
Apr-25	Vapestore	Convenience Retail	40	90
Apr-25	Savers	Comparision Retail	190	280
Apr-25	David Lloyd	Leisure Serivces	3,720	5,570
Apr-25	Shoezone	Comparision Retail	190	370
Jan-25	Premier Inn	Leisure Serivces	1,860	1,860
Dec-24	Blue Cross	Comparision Retail	50	50
Jun-24	Travelodge	Leisure Serivces	930	3,720
		Total	7,530	14,160

Source: The Requirement List

98. A review of published operator requirements has identified eleven retail, leisure and service operator requirements for Weymouth, seeking a combined maximum floorspace of up to 14,160 sqm. These retailers include Beauty Outlet (Beauty Product Store), British Heart Foundation (Charity Store) and David Lloyd (Health Club).

99. It should be noted that these are not necessarily operators seeking representation within the centre itself but potentially out-of-centre locations and retail parks.

100. It is also possible that these operators are not looking for opportunities in Weymouth specifically, rather they are looking for opportunities in areas similar to and including Weymouth.

Shaftesbury

Figure 6: Retailer Requirements - Shaftesbury

Recorded Date	Operator	Sector	Min sqm	Max sqm
Jan-26	Baboo Gelato	Lesiure Services	130	190
Oct-25	KFC	Lesiure Services	110	230
Oct-25	Majestic Wine	Convenience Retail	230	460
Oct-25	Mesopotamia	Lesiure Services	140	460
Oct-25	Screwfix City	Comparison Retail	90	330
Apr-25	Fairfax & Favor	Comparison Retail	90	90
Mar-25	Chicken Shop	Lesiure Services	90	190
Jan-25	Premier Inn	Lesiure Services	1,860	1,860
		Total	2,740	3,810

Source: The Requirement List

101. A review of published operator requirements has identified eight retail, leisure and service operator requirements for Shaftesbury, seeking a combined maximum floorspace of up to 3,810 sqm. These retailers include Baboo Gelato (Gelato Store), Screwfix City (DIY & Tool Supplies) and Fairfax & Favor (Clothing Store). The size requirement is lower than in Weymouth and Dorchester due to the absence of hotel and large gym/ health club operator interest.

102. It should be noted that these are not necessarily operators seeking representation within the centre itself but potentially out-of-centre locations and retail parks.

Other Town Centres in Dorset

103. Interest in other locations within the Dorset Council area is limited and, where present, tends to involve only a small number of retailers across a number of centres. One or more requirements have been registered in Blandford Forum, Bridport, Ferndown, Lyme Regis, Sherborne, Swanage, Wimborne, Wareham and Verwood.

104. Lidl has the most requirements, while M&S has registered interest in Verwood. Travelodge is interested in areas of Swanage and Lyme Regis while Premier Inn is interested in Swanage and Bridport.

Figure 7: Retailer Requirements - Rest of Dorset Council Area

Location	Requirement
Wareham	Lidl
Verwood	M&S
Wimborne	Lidl Cook
Swanage	Lidl Premier Inn Travelodge
Sherborne	Age UK Lidl
Lyme Regis	Grape Tree Age UK Cotton Traders Travelodge
Ferndown	Angling Direct Majestic Wine Taco Bell
Bridport	Age UK Premier Inn
Blandford Forum	Savers

Source: The Requirement List

Centre Turnover and Draw

105. Information on Centre turnover and draw is provided by the Experian Insights data outlines above, the details of which are provided in Appendix B. A summary of the

retail spend by centre is provided below and informs the health checks provided below.

Table 5: Retail Spend by Location 2025

Merchant Zone	Retail Location	Convenience Turnover 2025			Comparison Turnover 2025			Total Retail Spend (£m)
		Zones 1-4	% Inflow	Total Convenience Spend (£m)	Zones 1-4	% Inflow	Total Comparison Spend (£m)	
Zone 1	Blandford Forum - Town Centre	£13.26	6.7%	£14.15	£11.68	10.8%	£12.94	£27.09
Zone 1	Blandford Forum - Stour Park, Blandford St Mary	£50.18	8.0%	£54.20	£0.00	0.0%	£0.00	£54.20
Zone 1	Blandford Forum - Elsewhere	£32.03	6.6%	£34.13	£24.16	11.0%	£26.81	£60.94
Zone 1	Ferndown - Town Centre	£25.57	15.7%	£29.58	£7.17	17.9%	£8.45	£38.03
Zone 1	Ferndown - Elsewhere	£58.75	24.7%	£73.27	£13.69	54.5%	£21.15	£94.42
Zone 1	Swanage - Town Centre	£9.88	34.5%	£13.29	£5.29	61.5%	£8.55	£21.84
Zone 1	Swanage - Elsewhere	£2.19	24.7%	£2.73	£2.98	22.9%	£3.66	£6.39
Zone 1	Verwood - Town Centre	£2.71	13.2%	£3.06	£3.04	36.1%	£4.14	£7.20
Zone 1	Verwood - Elsewhere	£41.89	15.9%	£48.57	£3.82	27.6%	£4.87	£53.44
Zone 1	Wareham - Town Centre	£14.68	17.9%	£17.31	£7.17	12.1%	£8.04	£25.35
Zone 1	Wareham - Elsewhere	£1.41	11.4%	£1.57	£5.76	17.9%	£6.79	£8.36
Zone 1	Wimborne Minster - Town Centre	£5.90	25.6%	£7.41	£19.25	40.9%	£27.13	£34.54
Zone 1	Wimborne Minster - Elsewhere	£22.92	27.0%	£29.11	£6.05	49.0%	£9.02	£38.12
Zone 1	Bere Regis	£1.82	7.8%	£1.96	£0.64	1.0%	£0.64	£2.60
Zone 1	Corfe Castle (LC)	£0.29	59.2%	£0.46	£0.30	45.8%	£0.43	£0.89
Zone 1	Corfe Mullen (LC)	£9.66	54.5%	£14.93	£3.35	47.2%	£4.93	£19.86
Zone 1	Lytchett Matravers (LC)	£1.92	15.1%	£2.21	£0.05	84.1%	£0.09	£2.30
Zone 1	Upton (DC)	£18.19	27.7%	£23.22	£1.86	50.9%	£2.80	£26.02
Zone 1	West Moors (DC)	£3.70	27.1%	£4.70	£1.47	18.1%	£1.73	£6.44
Zone 1	West Parley (LC)	£6.32	56.0%	£9.85	£0.74	45.1%	£1.07	£10.92
Zone 1	Wool (LC)	£4.54	15.1%	£5.23	£1.07	8.3%	£1.16	£6.39
Zone 1	Other Zone 1 'South Eastern'	£14.39	40.9%	£20.28	£46.70	61.9%	£75.62	£95.90
Zone 2	Dorchester - Town Centre	£27.15	7.7%	£29.26	£64.02	21.4%	£77.72	£106.98
Zone 2	Dorchester - Queen Mother Square, Poundbury	£11.48	10.9%	£12.73	£7.64	15.9%	£8.86	£21.59
Zone 2	Dorchester - Elsewhere	£83.91	7.7%	£90.37	£56.44	9.3%	£61.68	£152.05
Zone 2	Weymouth - Town Centre	£6.19	38.0%	£8.54	£44.03	33.9%	£58.95	£67.49
Zone 2	Weymouth - Abbotsbury Road, Westham (LC)	£2.32	3.8%	£2.41	£0.69	4.5%	£0.72	£3.12
Zone 2	Weymouth - Littlemoor Centre (LC)	£1.18	16.2%	£1.37	£15.80	10.2%	£17.42	£18.79
Zone 2	Weymouth - Lodmoor Hill (LC)	£1.87	11.8%	£2.10	£0.09	1.9%	£0.09	£2.18
Zone 2	Weymouth - Portland Road, Wyke Regis (LC)	£3.12	11.8%	£3.48	£2.38	16.6%	£2.77	£6.26
Zone 2	Weymouth - Southill Centre (LC)	£0.61	1.7%	£0.62	£1.18	12.3%	£1.32	£1.95
Zone 2	Weymouth - Gateway RP/Mercery Road	£61.92	8.3%	£67.08	£15.81	9.1%	£17.25	£84.33
Zone 2	Weymouth - Jubilee Close RP	£3.02	6.4%	£3.21	£22.04	9.8%	£24.21	£27.43
Zone 2	Portland - Easton Square, Easton (LC)	£16.36	6.8%	£17.47	£1.56	2.1%	£1.59	£19.07
Zone 2	Portland - Fortuneswell (LC)	£1.03	17.7%	£1.21	£0.01	0.0%	£0.01	£1.22
Zone 2	Portland - Elsewhere	£9.00	25.7%	£11.31	£1.17	54.0%	£1.80	£13.11
Zone 2	Other Zone 2 'Central'	£107.61	13.1%	£121.75	£47.42	15.0%	£54.53	£176.28
Zone 3	Bridport - Town centre	£17.90	19.2%	£21.33	£18.66	28.2%	£23.93	£45.26
Zone 3	Bridport - Elsewhere	£52.57	19.2%	£62.68	£23.50	16.9%	£27.46	£90.14
Zone 3	Lyme Regis - Town centre	£2.68	61.7%	£4.33	£2.30	81.1%	£4.17	£8.50
Zone 3	Lyme Regis - Elsewhere	£0.54	51.6%	£0.82	£1.13	77.5%	£2.00	£2.82
Zone 3	Beaminster (LC)	£4.28	15.4%	£4.94	£2.03	35.5%	£2.75	£7.69
Zone 3	West Bay (LC)	£0.07	67.0%	£0.11	£0.76	68.1%	£1.29	£1.40
Zone 3	Other Zone 3 'Western'	£4.29	46.9%	£6.31	£3.42	63.2%	£5.58	£11.88
Zone 4	Gillingham - Town centre	£29.51	29.6%	£38.24	£8.52	30.8%	£11.14	£49.38
Zone 4	Gillingham - Kingsmead Business Park	£9.32	25.5%	£11.71	£11.23	29.8%	£14.57	£26.28
Zone 4	Gillingham - Elsewhere	£2.47	13.6%	£2.81	£3.22	30.9%	£4.22	£7.03
Zone 4	Sherborne - Town centre	£12.49	37.7%	£17.19	£14.63	40.8%	£20.60	£37.79
Zone 4	Sherborne - Elsewhere	£25.51	25.4%	£31.99	£8.55	40.6%	£12.01	£44.01
Zone 4	Shaftesbury - Town centre	£34.91	30.3%	£45.48	£8.46	37.0%	£11.60	£57.08
Zone 4	Shaftesbury - Elsewhere	£5.27	32.8%	£7.00	£6.12	36.1%	£8.33	£15.33
Zone 4	Sturminster Newton - Town centre	£4.71	7.6%	£5.07	£2.91	8.4%	£3.16	£8.22
Zone 4	Sturminster Newton - Elsewhere	£0.02	1.4%	£0.02	£10.98	18.3%	£12.99	£13.01
Zone 4	Marnhull (LC)	£1.32	5.6%	£1.40	£0.04	66.0%	£0.07	£1.46
Zone 4	Stalbridge (DC)	£6.76	24.5%	£8.41	£0.56	36.0%	£0.76	£9.17
Zone 4	Other Zone 4 ' Northern'	£9.48	29.8%	£12.31	£25.68	60.3%	£41.16	£53.47

Beaminster (currently defined as a Larger Local Centre)

106. Beaminster is a larger Local Centre located in the north of the Western FA and serves both the resident population and visitors to the area. It is located within the Dorset National Landscape area and contains a number of historic buildings and has a designated Conservation Area.

107. It is one of the smaller centres in Dorset with 47 units of which 27.6% are in retail use. The offer is primarily provided by independent retailers but the convenience offer includes two national multiples which will be an important draw to the centre. The centre also has a strong service offer, including a good F&B offer which will be supported by visitors to the area and a low vacancy rate. It is well known for its annual music and art festival.

108. The 2025 Health Check report concludes:

"Beaminster is a thriving town centre which has a wide range of shops and services operating during the day, and restaurants/pubs open in the evening. The town centre mostly comprises of independent shops and has a wider reach than the typical local centre due to its tourist accommodation provision nearby. The prevalence of tourist accommodation beyond the boundary means it may be worth revising this town centre boundary".

Turnover and Trade Draw

109. Although more limited in the number of outlets, the convenience offer in Beaminster provides an important service for Dorset residents, which is supplemented by visitor business. The comparison turnover is lower and the offer is more orientated towards visitor requirements.

Policy Considerations for Beaminster

110. Beaminster has an important historic centre, with a dual role serving both local residents and visitors to the area.

111. Development potential in the centre is limited and no major changes would be expected. However a review of the town centre boundary may be appropriate given a number of existing commercial uses abutting the current boundary.

112. The town centre should also be supported by Dorset-wide policies that seek to support the unique offer of the centre, including its historic and cultural offer Developments or initiatives that increase footfall during the day and evening periods should be supported in appropriate locations.

Bere Regis (currently defined as a Local Centre)

113. Bere Regis is a designated Local Centre but is limited to two units, with the main retail offer, including a Nisa convenience store located outside the boundary.

114. The 2025 Health Check report concludes:

"The commercial offer in Bere Regis' local centre is minimal, comprising only of a hair salon and a guest room. This suggests residents cannot currently have their needs met by this centre. The nighttime economy is also non-existent within the town centre boundary. There is also unlikely to be any commercial development opportunity within the local centre boundary. Considering the additional provision adjacent to the boundary, the boundary should be reviewed."

Turnover and Trade Draw

115. Given the very limited retail offer in the village, it is not surprising that retail spend is low, with the majority spent on convenience goods. It is also noticeable that the spend comes primarily from Dorset residents, with very little trade inflow.

Policy Considerations for Bere Regis

116. Bere Regis provides a very limited retail and service offer for its local residents and, whilst this is likely to be important, particularly for those with limited choice of transport, it remains the case that most resident spend will be going elsewhere.

117. As would be expected trade inflow will not be significant and we consider that the current offer is 'of purely neighbourhood significance'. As such we consider that the designation of the centre should be reviewed.

118. However, ensuring appropriate retail and service provision is maintained and supported in smaller settlements should remain an important policy requirement and a Dorset-wide policy to ensure such provision is not adversely impacted by development proposals elsewhere should be considered.

Blandford Forum (currently defined as a Town Centre)

119. Blandford Forum is a Georgian market town in the Northern Functional Area and is currently defined as a 'Town Centre' in the adopted Local Plan.

120. It is one of the larger centres in Dorset with 218 units of which 30.3% are in retail use. The centre also has a strong service offer and a low vacancy rate.

121. The 2025 Health Check report concludes:

"Blandford Forum is a thriving town centre that has a wide range of shops and services operating during the day, and restaurants/pubs open in the evening. It attracts some nationally recognised retailers, and it has a larger presence of offices than a typical town centre. Further research into the use of car parks and how to improve road usage into and out of the town centre without negatively impacting existing business and the vibrancy of the town centre is required."

Footfall

122. The figure below illustrates the pedestrian flows for Blandford Forum in the form of a heat map showing total pedestrian movements for August 2024. Footfall is highest along West Street, Market Place and Salisbury Street but is relatively evenly distributed across the centre. The southern end of Salisbury Street experiences fewer footfall then the north.

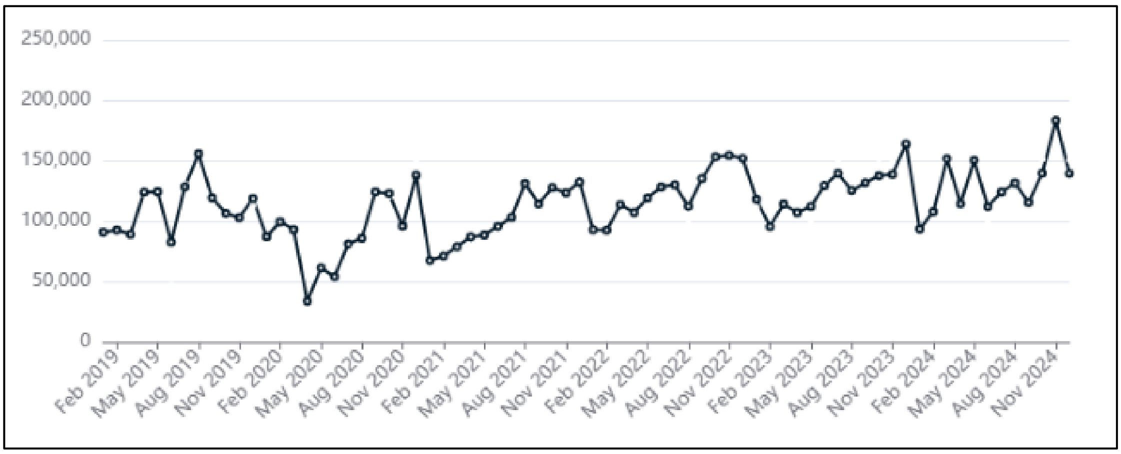
Figure 8: Blandford Forum Heat Map, August 2024

Source: MSCI Datscha

123. A central section of Blandford Town Centre on Market Place, was sampled to obtain information on how footfall levels have changed between January 2019 and December 2024.

124. As can be seen in the figure below, footfall has shown a steady increase from pre-COVID levels through to 2024. In 2019, footfall fluctuated between 82,000 and 155,700 monthly movements. By comparison, 2024 levels increased to be between 93,200 and 183,000 monthly movements. The highest footfall since 2019 occurred in November 2024, reaching 183,000 movements.

Figure 9: Monthly Footfall Graph, January 2019 – December 2024, Market Place



Source: MSCI Datscha

125. A strong evening and nighttime economy can often be a good indicator of a strong, vital and viable centre and can reflect the range and quality of the leisure offer within a centre.

126. The evening and night time economy is limited in Blandford Forum as there are no clubs or bars present. There are small number of pubs spread across the centre.

127. The figure below shows how footfall levels differ across different parts of the day. It relates to footfall in August 2024, at Greyhound Yard. As can be seen, footfall in the evening (5pm – 9pm) drops to a level below that of the morning, lunch and afternoon. Slightly more activity is seen on weekday evenings than at weekends but night activity is higher at weekends than during the week.

Figure 10: Footfall by Time of Day, Greyhound Yard, August 2024

Source: MSCI Datscha

Turnover and Trade Draw

128. Blandford Forum's retail offer is relatively limited and this is reflected in the centre's retail turnover. Shopping destinations outside the centre attract the main spend of Dorset residents and visitor inflows are modest.

Policy Considerations for Blandford Forum Town Centre

129. Blandford Forum is an attractive centre and popular centre with low vacancy rates. It offers a good diversity of uses and has a strong service offer. It has a good balance of independent and multiple retailers but is less reliant on its retail sector than many other centres, which should assist in ensuring its long term health and vitality.

130. In terms of future policy no specific site allocations or changes to town centre boundaries appear to be required. Instead the town centre should be supported by Dorset-wide policies that encourage investment/regeneration in the town centre including appropriate mixed use development. Developments that increase footfall during the day and evening periods should be supported in appropriate locations,

but activities with activity limited to the evening and night-time periods should be encouraged to locate away from the main retail and commercial areas.

Bridport (currently defined as a Town Centre)

131. Bridport is a large and important market town on the western edge of Dorset and has a large and successful town centre meeting the needs of the local, resident population and the significant numbers of tourists who visit.

132. It is one of the larger town centres in Dorset with 207 units of which 40.5% are in retail use, accounting for over 50% of the total floorspace. The centre also has a strong service offer and a very low vacancy rate.

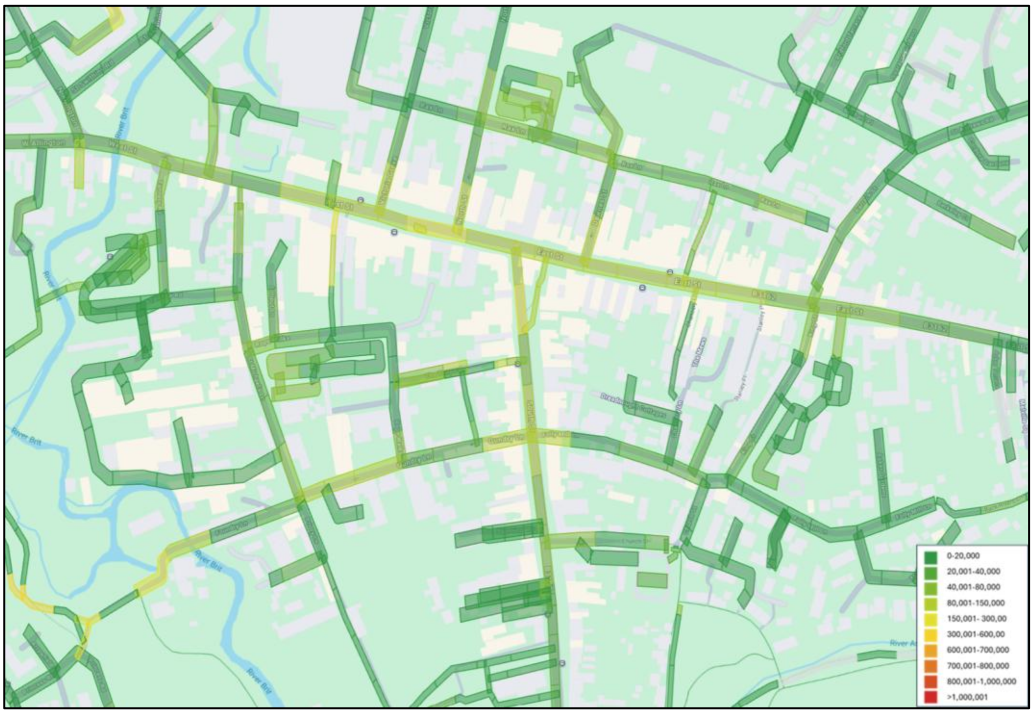
133. The 2025 Health Check report concludes:

"Bridport town centre has a wide range of shops, facilities and professional and financial services. The town's weekly markets include stalls selling fresh food and antiques. The town also has venues that host many cultural events. Bridport has a wider reach than a typical local centre of a similar size due to its variety of shops, services and facilities. The town has a range of public houses, bars, and restaurants that open at nighttime, which ensures visitors use the town centre beyond 6pm. Although the vacancy rate is lower, the vacant floorspace is quite large and the reoccupation for town centre type uses or residential use should be explored further."

Footfall

134. The figure below illustrates the pedestrian flows for Bridport the form of a heat map showing total pedestrian movements for August 2024. Footfall is concentrated along West Street, East Street and South Street.

Figure 11: Bridport Heat Map, August 2024

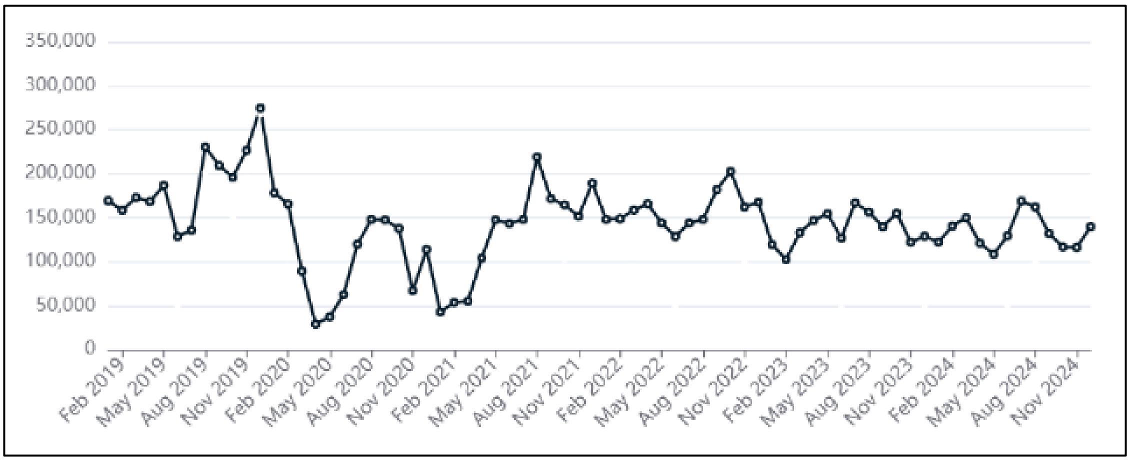


Source: MSCI Datscha

135. A central section of Bridport Town Centre on East Street, was sampled to obtain information on how footfall levels have changed between January 2019 and December 2024.

136. As can be seen in the figure below, footfall has not quite recovered to pre-Covid footfall levels. Footfall levels in 2019 ranged between 127,615 and 272,200, whilst 2024 figures fluctuated between 107,800 and 167,600. However, the highest levels seen in 2019 appear to be linked to the Literary Festival held in November. Summer peaks in 2019 and 2021 are similar but the centre has seen a decline in footfall since then.

Figure 12: Monthly Footfall Graph, January 2019 – December 2024, East Street



Source: MSCI Datscha

137. Evening and night time economy activity is moderate at Bridport as there are a number of bars and public houses spread across the centre.

138. The figure below shows how footfall levels differ across different parts of the day. It relates to footfall in August 2024 on East Street. As can be seen, footfall in the evening (5pm – 9pm) is not much lower than during the afternoon period, particularly at weekends. More nighttime activity is seen at weekends.

Figure 13: Footfall by Time of Day, East Street, August 2024

Source: MSCI Datscha

Turnover and Trade Draw

139. Convenience and comparison spend is similar within Bridport Town Centre, reflecting the importance of key multiple retailer anchors such as Waitrose and the strong and varied comparison sector including a specialist antiques offer.

140. Overall spend levels are some of the highest in Dorset, despite two-thirds of retail spend going to out-of-centre locations and comes from both local residents and visitors to the area, with 20% of convenience spend and nearly 30% of comparison spend coming from outside of Dorset.

Policy Considerations for Bridport

141. Bridport is clearly an important town centre in West Dorset and is currently performing well with high footfall, low vacancies and a strong retail sector.

142. The current Local and Neighbourhood Plans support the expansion of the Town Centre, with the Rope Walks and Coach Station Car Park site allocated for development. A Feasibility Study was prepared for the site in April 2022 and a variety of uses were proposed as part of a mixed use development, although with limited retail provision.

143. We agree that the appropriate redevelopment of this area would support Bridport Town Centre. However, it is considered unlikely that a significant retail element should be included.

Bridport – West Bay (currently defined as a Larger Local Centre)

144. West Bay is a larger Local Centre located approximately 1 mile south of Bridport Town Centre and serving the local population of West Bay and the considerable number of visitors and associated accommodation in the immediate area.

145. As a result, it offers an unusual diversity of uses, with just 23.2% of the 56 units in the centre in retail uses and 62.5% being in leisure, community or medical uses, although there is further convenience stores outside of the boundary.

146. The centre is dominated by independent businesses with just one national multiple represented in the centre and no current vacancies.

147. The 2025 Health Check report concludes:

> “West Bay has a limited variety of shops and services, and for a wider range, residents would need to travel to nearby town centres. However, as a tourist destination, it has plenty of restaurants and cafes, takeaways and leisure uses. Due to its location, with an attractive harbour and Jurassic Coast beach frontage, it attracts lots of tourists year-round. There are transport connections to nearby town centres, and as a seaside resort the local centre attracts visitors from outside the area due to its leisure offer and dramatic scenery. West Bay also has a range of public houses, bars, and restaurants that open at nighttime, which ensures visitors use the centre beyond 6pm.”

Turnover and Trade Draw

148. The limited retail offer in the Local Centre means turnover of the existing units is very small, with more than two-thirds of both convenience and comparison spend coming from visitors to the area.

149. This is not surprising given the nature of the retail offer and the proximity of Bridport which provides the main shopping offer for West Bay residents.

Policy Considerations for Bridport – West Bay

150. The health of West Bay Local Centre is inextricably linked to its role as a tourist destination and holiday resort. Retaining some convenience provision in West Bay to meet the day-to-day needs of local residents is desirable, but is likely to be beyond the scope of planning policy, given the variety of uses permitted under Use Class E.

151. In terms of future policy no specific site allocations or changes to town centre boundaries appear to be required.

Chickerell (currently defined as a larger Local Centre)

152. Chickerell is a residential area to the west of Weymouth and is served by a small group of shops currently designated as a ‘Larger Local Centre’. However, the centre comprises just 5 small units of which 2 are in retail use – a Morrisons Daily convenience store and a pharmacy.

153. The 2025 Health Check report concludes:

“Due to its size, limited range of shops and services, and proximity to Weymouth town centre, the status of this town centre should be reviewed as it is currently designated as a Local Centre”.

Turnover and Trade Draw

154. The retail spend for Chickerell has not been separately identified in the expenditure analysis, but it would be expected that overall turnover levels would be low due to the limited offer. The retailers and other businesses would also be expected to cater for the needs of local residents only. .

Policy Considerations for Chickerell

155. Chickerell provides a very limited retail and service offer for its local residents and, whilst this is likely to be important, particularly for those with limited choice of transport, it remains the case that most resident spend will be going elsewhere.

156. As would be expected trade inflow will not be significant and we consider that the current offer is ‘of purely neighbourhood significance’. As such we consider that the designation of the centre should be reviewed.

Corfe Castle (currently defined as a Local Centre)

157. Corfe Castle is a small historic town in the former Purbeck administrative area, with a strong tourist draw due to the Castle ruins that overlook the town.

158. The centre within it is small comprising just 11 units around The Square, but with a small number of additional retail units distributed along West Street and East Street.

159. The centre includes 7 retail units of which 3 are in convenience use, with a single national multiple, the National Trust gift shop.

160. The 2025 Health Check report concludes:

"Corfe Castle is a small centre but has pubs, enabling it to be open beyond 6pm. Due to Corfe Castle and additional tourist accommodation outside of the centre boundary, it attracts a lot of tourism and would have a wider reach than a typical local centre. However, for a local centre, Corfe Castle does not have many shops and services and residents would need to travel to nearby towns to access these."

Turnover and Trade Draw

161. The retail offer in Corfe Castle is very limited and this is reflected in the turnover which is very low and split evenly between convenience and comparison spend. This reflects both the type of retail offer provided and the reliance on tourist trade which contributes approximately half of total spend.

Policy Considerations for Corfe Castle

162. Corfe Castle does not provide a typical local centre offer, providing very limited facilities for local residents. However, it will be important in supporting tourism to the area and as such should be supported.

163. The status of the centre should therefore be reviewed and instead the retail and commercial facilities should be supported by Dorset-wide policies that support the retention of existing facilities where they support self-containment and/or the tourist industry.

Corfe Mullen (currently defined as a Local Centre)

164. Corfe Mullen is a residential area on the extreme eastern boundary of Dorset, immediately abutting Poole, with which there would be expected to be considerable interaction.

165. It is one of the smaller centres in Dorset with 31 units of which just 19.4% are in retail use. However this includes a number of key national multiples such as the Co-op and Boots. The centre also has a strong leisure, community & medical offer and a low vacancy rate.

166. The 2025 Health Check report concludes:

"Corfe Mullen is settlement that meets the day-to-day needs of its local residents with its existing offer of town centre uses. Although there is no town centre boundary, the main town centre type uses are located in a linear pattern on Wareham Road with two clusters located north and south. For the new Local Plan, consideration needs to be given to the type of centre – given its size, scale and catchment and the need for a town centre boundary – so that edge-of-centre and out-of-centre areas can be identified."

Turnover and Trade Draw

167. Corfe Mullen attracts a relatively high level of convenience spend, approximately half of which is generated by residents outside of Dorset, but which are local to the area. Comparison spend is lower and is reflects the type of offer provided, which caters for day-to-day needs rather than larger non-food purchases. These would be expected to be made in centres and retail locations in the adjoining conurbation.

Policy Considerations for Corfe Mullen

168. Corfe Mullen provides important local shops and facilities for the local residential area across two main areas, with the provision at the south end of Wareham Road the recommended focus for the local centre.

169. No further site allocations would be required in this area.

Dorchester (currently defined as a Town Centre)

170. Dorchester is the county town of Dorset and has the second largest centre in the administrative area, with 424 units and strong national multiple representation.

171. The diversity of uses is similar to the UK average but with a lower proportion of convenience retailing and an above average proportion of service retail, financial & professional businesses. The main retail offer is concentrated along South Street, with Waitrose located to the rear.

172. Vacancy levels are however higher than seen in many other parts of Dorset and include a number of larger units in prominent locations.

173. The 2025 Health Check report concludes:

"Dorchester town centre has a range of retail shops and services, restaurants and cafes, leisure and community uses and offices on the upper floors. It has strong rail connections to Weymouth, Poole, Bournemouth, Bristol and Southampton, and therefore would attract people outside of the area in other nearby towns and villages due to its leisure offer and good level of comparison shopping.

Dorchester does have a range of public houses and restaurants that open at nighttime, including the popular Brewery Square complex, which complements the town centre offer and ensures visitors use the town centre beyond 6pm. It is notable that this town centre has a higher than average vacancy rate with more than 10,000 sqm vacant.

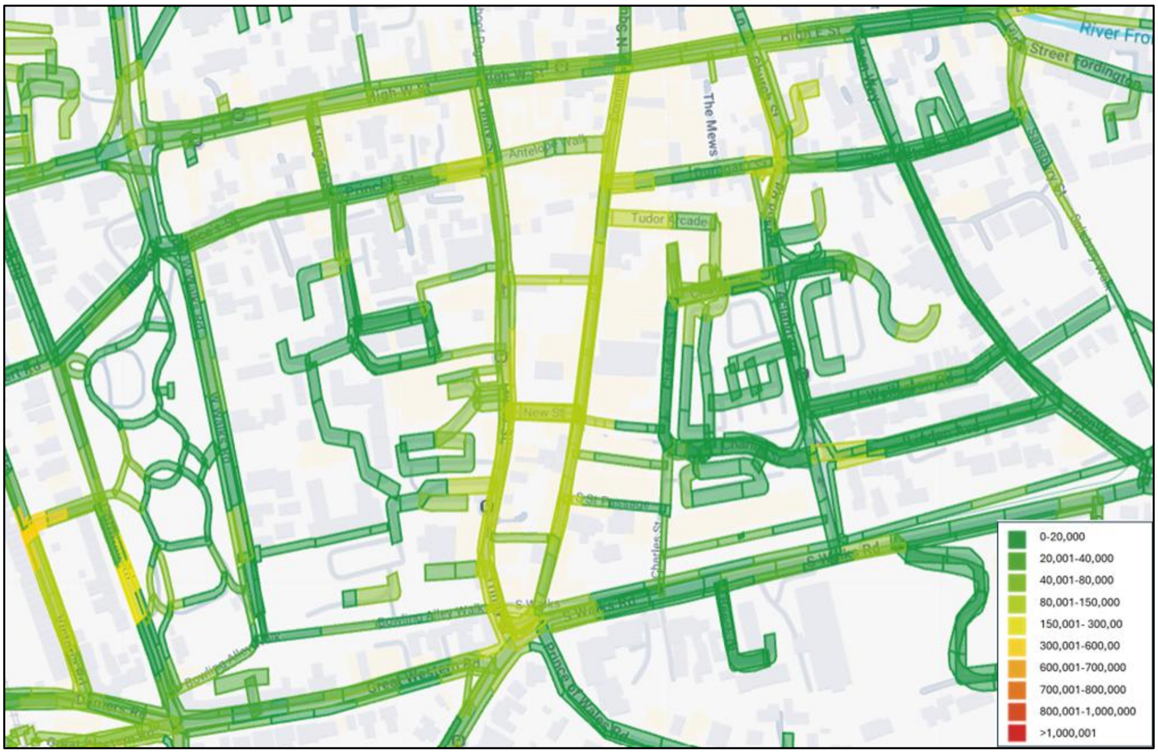
As a key town centre in the Dorset Council area, the reasons for vacancy rates need to be explored, with consideration of whether the town centre boundary needs to contract, along with other potential economic interventions. The proposed expansion of the primary shopping area at Charles Street and Trinity Street should also be reassessed."

Footfall

174. The figures below illustrate the pedestrian flows for Dorchester in the form of heat maps showing total pedestrian movements for August 2024. Footfall is concentrated along Trinity Street and South Street and the links between them.

There is also higher footfall around the Weymouth Avenue junction with Trinity Street and at Brewery Square, suggesting linkage is good between the historic centre and the newer development.

Figure 14: Dorchester (North) Heat Map, August 2024



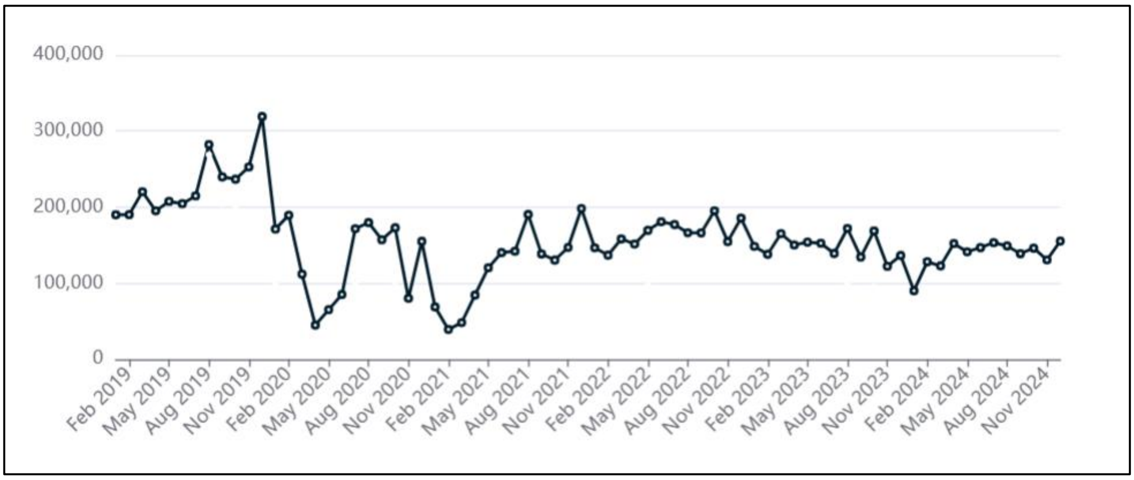
Source: MSCI Datscha

Figure 15: Dorchester (South) Heat Map, August 2024

175. A central section of Dorchester Town Centre on South Street was sampled to obtain information on how footfall levels have changed between January 2019 and December 2024.

176. As can be seen in the figure below, footfall has dramatically fallen since pre-COVID in 2019, in comparison to post-COVID levels. Footfall in 2019 ranged between 189,800 and 319,200 but decreased to a low of 89,900 and a high of 152,000 in 2024, approximately half of the footfall movements that were seen previously. However, there appears to have been very little change since 2022. Given the closure of the Marks & Spencer store coincided with the Covid-19 restrictions, it is not clear to what extent the former is a cause of the decline in footfall, but it is likely to be at least partially responsible, along with the increase in online shopping seen in the post pandemic period.

Figure 16: Monthly Footfall Graph, January 2019 – December 2024, South Street

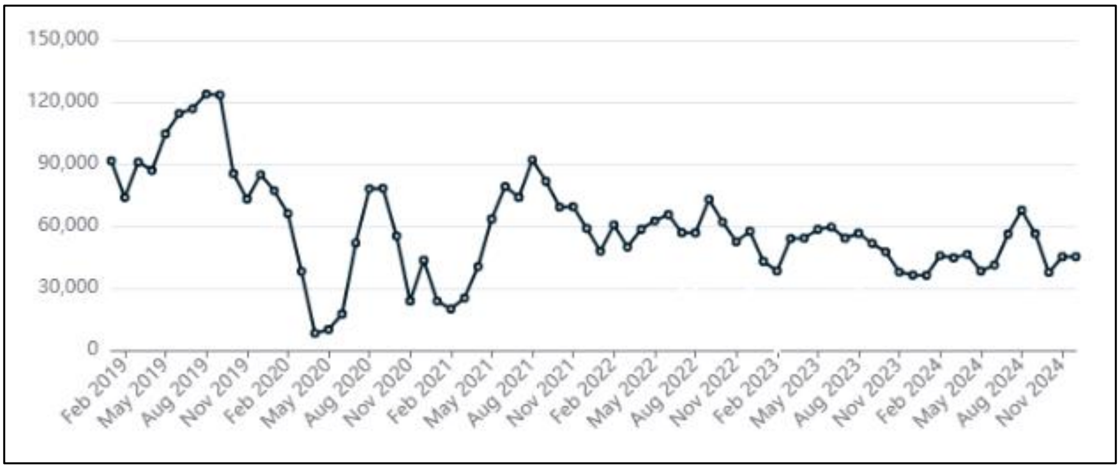


Source: MSCI Datscha

177. A central section of Dorchester Town Centre on Weymouth Avenue has also been sampled to obtain information on how footfall levels have changed between January 2019 and December 2024.

178. This shows a similar pattern, with footfall down in 2022 – 2024 compared with pre-Covid, although footfall levels are lower overall than South Street. Footfall in 2019 ranged between 73,900 and 123,400 but decreased to a low of 36,100 and a high of 67,700 in 2024.

Figure 17: Monthly Footfall Graph, January 2019 – December 2024, Weymouth Avenue

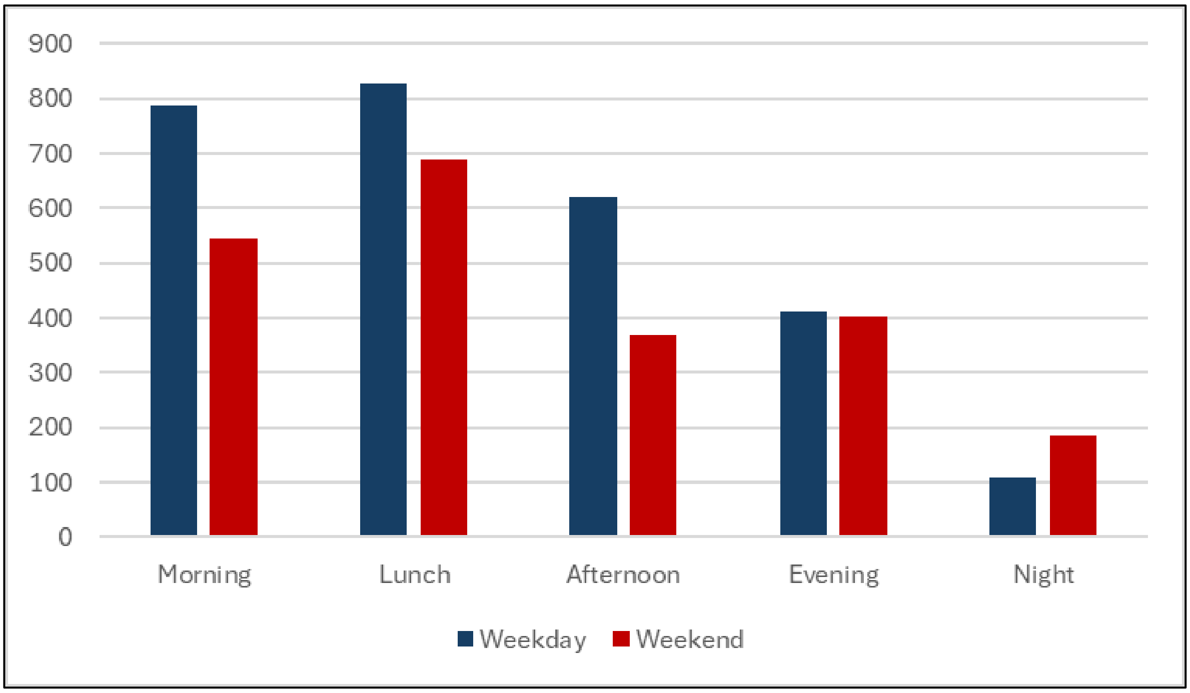


Source: MSCI Datscha

179. The evening and night time economy is moderate in Dorchester, there are no clubs but a range of public houses and bars present across the centre.

180. The figure below shows how footfall levels differ across the day. It relates to footfall in August 2024 on High West Street. As can be seen, footfall in the evening (5pm – 9pm) remains relatively high. Slightly more activity is seen on weekday evenings than weekend evenings, however there is more nighttime activity on weekend nights.

Figure 18: Footfall by Time of Day, High West Street, August 2024



Source: MSCI Datscha

Turnover and Trade Draw

181. Dorchester attracts the highest retail spend of all Dorset centres, with the majority of spend coming from comparison purchases. This is partly due to high visitor spend, with the convenience offer attracting considerably lower levels of inflow.

182. Shopping destinations outside the centre attract much higher levels of spend than those in the town centre for convenience goods, reflecting supermarket provision across Dorchester. For comparison goods however, spending is lower outside of the town centre. Out-of-centre destinations also see less inflow expenditure inflows.

Policy Considerations for Dorchester

183. Dorchester Town Centre is one of the largest in Dorset and has a good diversity of uses . The relatively recent development at The Brewery complements the offer in the historic centre, but like many similar sized centres, Dorchester is currently facing challenges as a result of store closures and increasing levels of vacancy.

184. There is no identifiable concentration of vacancies and therefore no obvious requirement to amend (reduce) the extent of the Town Centre boundary but there is also no requirement to extend the boundary further, or to allocate sites specifically for retail development. However sites previously identified for

development at Charles Street (LP Policy DOR4) and off Trinity Street (LP Policy DOR5) remain the preferred sites for any town centre mixed use development.

185. The town centre should also be supported by Dorset-wide policies that encourage general investment/regeneration in the town centre. Developments that increase footfall during the day and evening periods should be supported in appropriate locations, but activities with activity limited to the evening and night-time periods should be encouraged to locate away from the main retail and commercial areas.

Dorchester – Queen Mother Square, Poundbury (no current designation)

186. Queen Mother Square is the key commercial hub for the urban extension at Poundbury and acts as its town centre.

187. It comprises of 26 units in a purpose-built centre, and includes a range of uses, including 8 retail units, with Waitrose one of two national multiples represented. The centre has a strong service offer, whilst vacancies are relatively high in terms of floorspace.

188. The 2025 Health Check report concludes:

"Queen Mother Square has been previously proposed to be designated as a district centre, providing essential shops and services for local residents. However, residents would be dependent on accessing a wider range of shops and services in nearby Dorchester town centre. Interestingly, there is a larger representation of offices in this centre than typical. Due to its size and limited range of shops and services, and its proximity to Dorchester town centre, the designation of this centre should be reviewed. There is also an additional cluster of commercial premises around the Buttermarket, and it should be explored whether this area should also be designated."

Footfall

189. The figure below illustrates the pedestrian flows for Queen Mother Square, Poundbury in the form of a heat map showing total pedestrian movements for August 2024. Footfall is concentrated along Queen Mother Square and Peverell Avenue West.

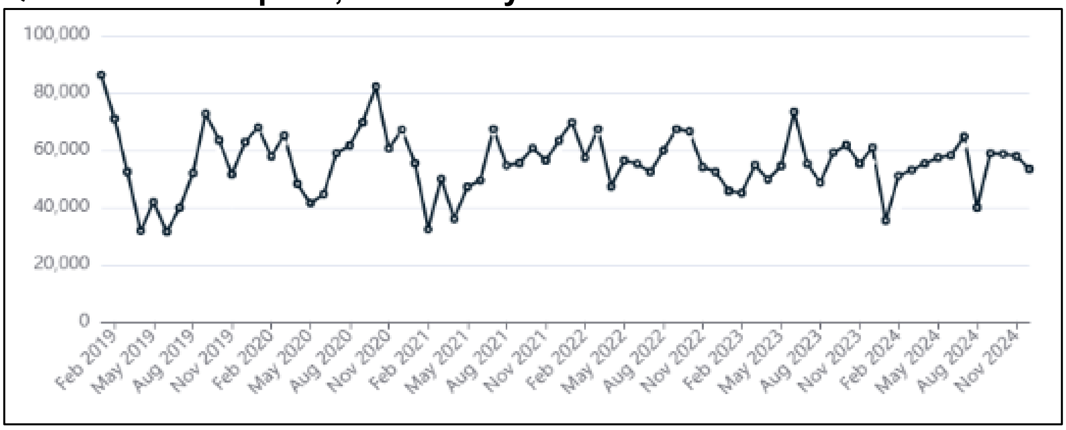
Figure 19: Queen Mother Square (Poundbury, Dorchester) Heat Map, August 2024

Source: MSCI Datscha

190. A central section of Queen Mother Square (Poundbury, Dorchester) was sampled to obtain information on how footfall levels have changed between January 2019 and December 2024.

191. As can be seen in the figure below, footfall has stayed consistent over the years. In 2019, monthly movement ranged between 31,500 and 86,200, in comparison to 35,400 and 64,600 in 2024.

Figure 20: Monthly Footfall Graph, January 2019 – December 2024, Queen Mother Square, Poundbury

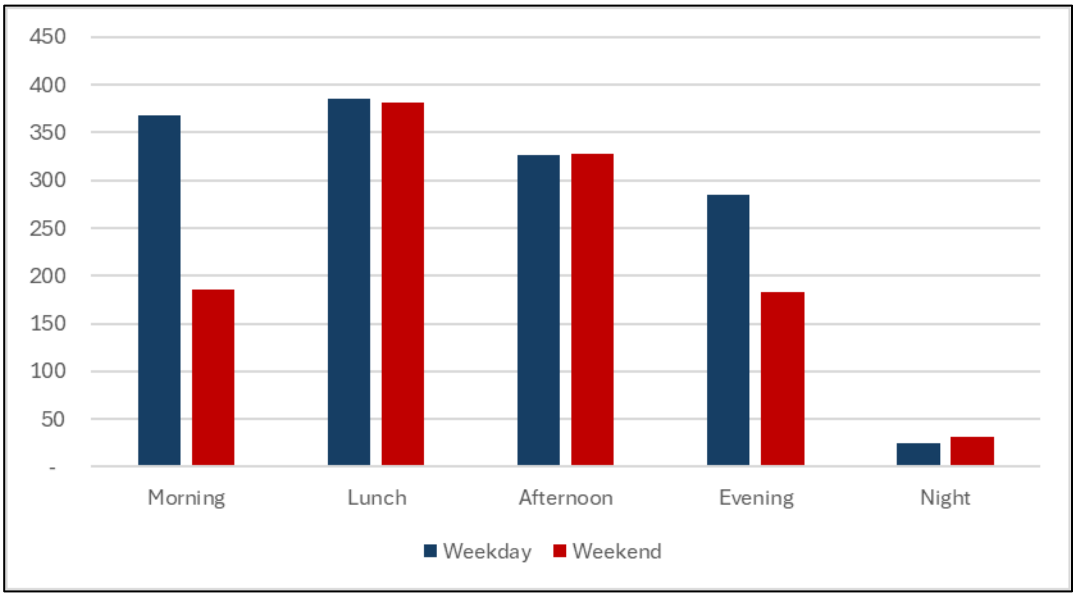


192. The evening and night time economy is very small in Queen Mother Square (Poundbury, Dorchester) as there are no clubs or bars and one public house in the centre.

193. The figure below shows how footfall levels differ across the day. Footfall is relatively consistent across the day and evening period, which is likely to reflect

the range of activities available in the centre. However, nighttime activity is considerably lower as would be expected for a lower order centre.

Figure 21: Footfall by Time of Day, Queen Mother Square (Poundbury, Dorchester), August 2024



Source: MSCI Datscha

Turnover and Trade Draw

194. Queen Mother Square, Poundbury attracted just over £20m of retail spend in 2025, just over half of it for convenience sales, reflecting the likely importance of Waitrose as the anchor to the centre. Inflows from outside of Dorset are modest at 10-15% of total sales.

Policy Considerations for Queen Mother Square, Poundbury

195. Queen Mother Square is a relatively small but important retail and commercial hub serving the urban extension of Poundbury. It’s size and offer will always be limited by its close proximity to the higher order Dorchester Town Centre and it should provide a complementary offer to the larger centre. However, it is an important location meeting the day-to-day needs of local residents and as such should be designated as a centre.

196. It should be supported by Dorset-wide policies that encourage investment/ regeneration in town centres, although future development prospects are likely to be limited by the size of the catchment and the need to encourage the occupation of existing vacant space in the centre. Development or uses that increase footfall during the day and evening periods should be supported.

Ferndown (currently defined as a Town Centre)

197. Ferndown is located immediately to the north of but separate to the Bournemouth/ Poole conurbation. It’s town centre is relatively modern and is anchored by a Tesco superstore.

198. Overall the centre contains 161 units of which just 22.9% are in retail use, although the proportion if floorspace is higher due to the Tesco. The centre has a

strong service retail, financial, professional and business offer and vacancies are below average at 8.7% of units.

199. The 2025 Health Check report concludes:

“Ferndown has retail shops and services which provide for the day-to-day needs of local people, with some shops located edge-of-centre and out-of-centre. The edge of town cluster by the A31 likely attracts passing visitors and residents from nearby towns due to the wide range of its convenience offer. The Barrington Arts Centre and a limited number of restaurants and pubs enable the town centre to open beyond 6pm.

Interventions could be explored to improve the comparison retail offer, nighttime economy and community space in the town centre which would encourage visitors to venture further into the town centre.”

Footfall

200. The figure below illustrates the pedestrian flows for Ferndown in the form of a heat map showing total pedestrian movements for August 2024. Footfall is concentrated along Victoria Road, Ringwood Road and roads surrounding Tesco Supermarket and Spinneys Lane.

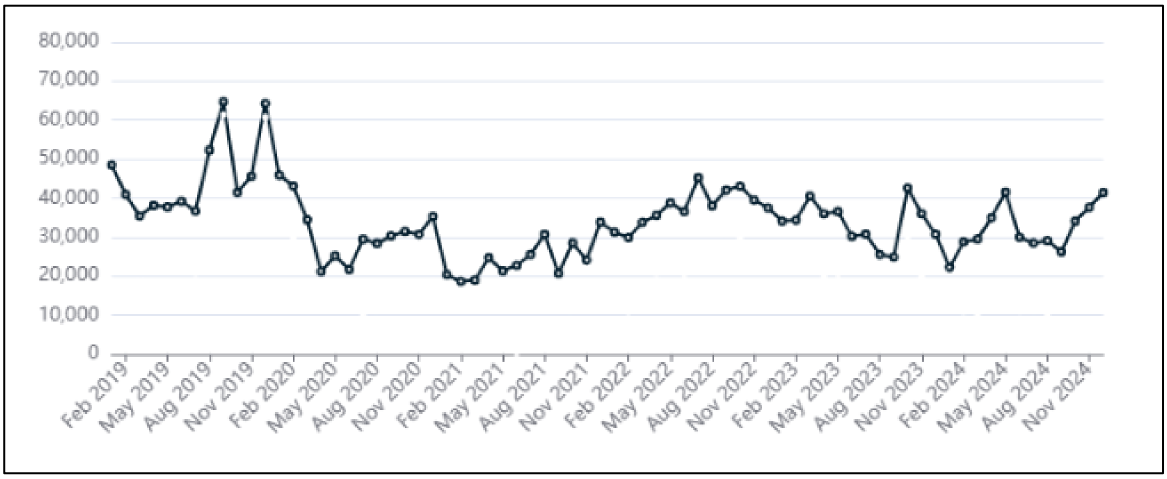
Figure 22: Ferndown Heat Map, August 2024

Source: MSCI Datscha

201. A central section of Ferndown Town Centre on Victoria Road was sampled to obtain information on how footfall levels have changed between January 2019 and December 2024.

202. As can be seen in the figure below, footfall has fallen from the levels seen pre-COVID. Footfall in 2019 ranged between 36,600 and 64,700, decreasing to a range of 22,241 and 41,500 in 2024. However, levels were higher in 2022 and more recently seem to have become quite variable month on month.

Figure 23: Monthly Footfall Graph, January 2019 – December 2024, Victoria Road

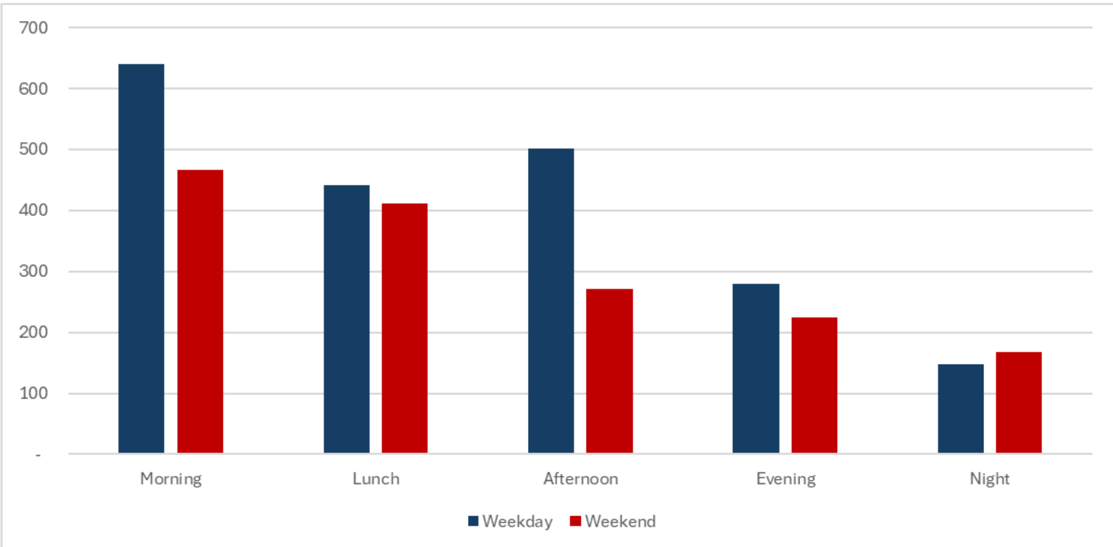


Source: MSCI Datscha

203. The evening and night time economy offer in Ferndown includes The Barrington Arts Centre and a limited number of restaurants and pubs.

204. The figure below shows how footfall levels differ across the day. It relates to footfall in August 2024 on Victoria Road. As can be seen, footfall in the evening (5pm – 9pm) is slightly lower than that seen during the day throughout the week. Nighttime activity is lower but relatively consistent across both weekdays and weekends.

Figure 24: Footfall by Time of Day, Victoria Road, August 2024



Source: MSCI Datscha

Turnover and Trade Draw

205. Ferndown is a medium sized town centre but with a relatively limited retail offer aside from the Tesco superstore. The majority of spend is on convenience goods,

whilst comparison sales are limited despite the larger number of units selling non-food goods. The same reliance on convenience spend can be seen for Ferndown's out-of-centre destinations and this is likely to reflect the proximity of Bournemouth and Poole and the significant in- and out-of-centre non-food retail offer located there.

206. Inflows from outside of the Dorset Council area are in the region of 15-18% with much of this expected to come from residents in the wider area, rather than tourists, although some 'pass by' trade is likely.

Policy Considerations for Ferndown

207. Ferndown is one of the larger centres in Dorset in terms of unit numbers but its retail offer is limited to a primarily convenience offer. This is likely to reflect its proximity to Bournemouth and Poole. However, it has a good diversity of uses, including an Arts Centre.

208. In terms of future policy no specific site allocations or changes to town centre boundaries appear to be required. Instead the town centre should be supported by Dorset-wide policies that encourage investment/regeneration in the town centre including appropriate mixed use development. Developments that increase footfall during the day and evening periods should be supported in appropriate locations, but activities with activity limited to the evening and night-time periods should be encouraged to locate away from the main retail and commercial areas.

Gillingham (currently defined as a Town Centre)

209. Gillingham Town Centre is relatively large in terms of the area covered, with a traditional High Street offer supplemented by a number of larger retail units located to the rear with direct access from the B3081 Le Neubourg Way. The centre therefore provides a range of both independent and national multiple retailers.

210. The convenience retail offer in the centre is strong with Asda, Lidl and Waitrose all represented in the town centre. Total convenience floorspace also accounts for nearly 30% of all floorspace, although the number of units is low. The comparison offer is more limited at 14.4% of the total of 153 units in the centre but there is a good range of other services. However vacancy rates are close to the UK average in terms of the number of units and include the former Co-op foodstore which has been vacant for a number of years. Planning permission for the redevelopment of the site for residential uses has now been granted.

211. The 2025 Health Check report concludes:

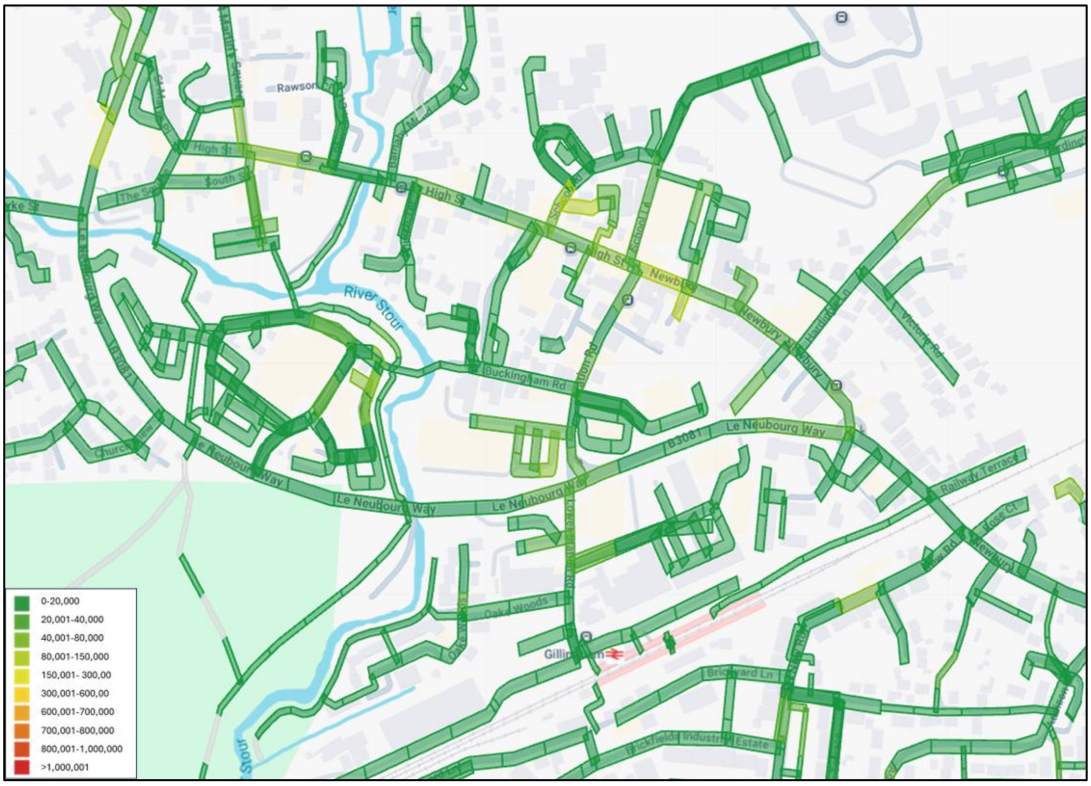
"Gillingham town centre offers a variation of traditional and modern retail, with a mix of convenience, comparison and service-based outlets. The night-time economy includes pubs, restaurants, and cultural venues. Accessibility is strong, with a mainline railway station and proximity to the A303, supported by plans for a transport hub. Key development opportunities include the regeneration of Station Road area and other brownfield opportunities."

Footfall

212. The figure below illustrates the pedestrian flows for Gillingham in the form of a heat map showing total pedestrian movements for August 2024. Footfall is

concentrated along High Street/Newbury near to Lidl and around the Waitrose and Asda supermarkets.

Figure 25: Gillingham Heat Map, August 2024

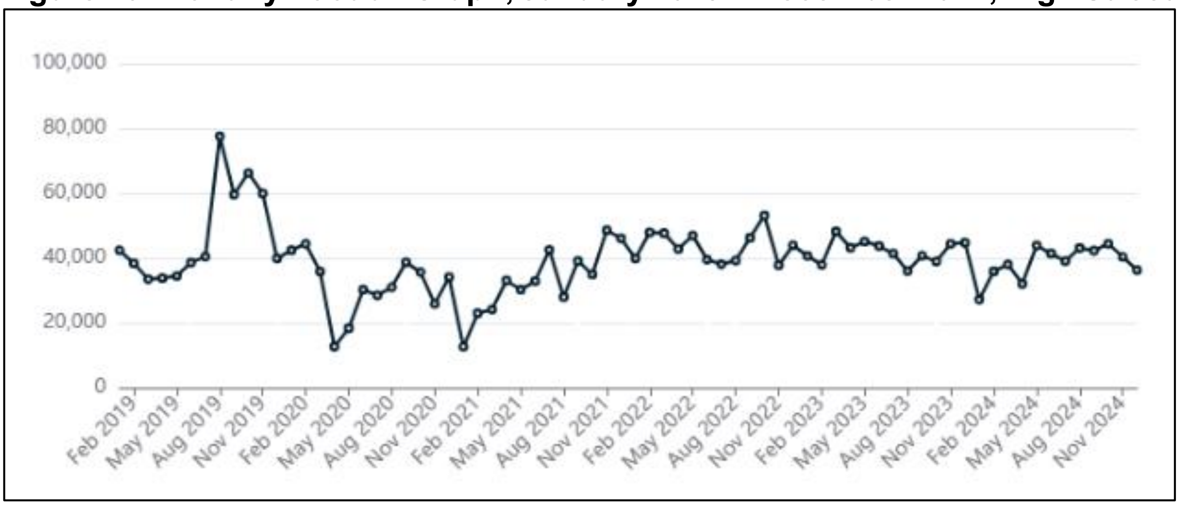


Source: MSCI Datscha

213. A central section of Gillingham Town Centre on High Street was sampled to obtain information on how footfall levels have changed between January 2019 and December 2024.

214. As can be seen in the figure below, monthly movements tend to average around 40,000, although this doubled in Summer 2019. Post Covid levels have been relatively stable.

Figure 26: Monthly Footfall Graph, January 2019 – December 2024, High Street

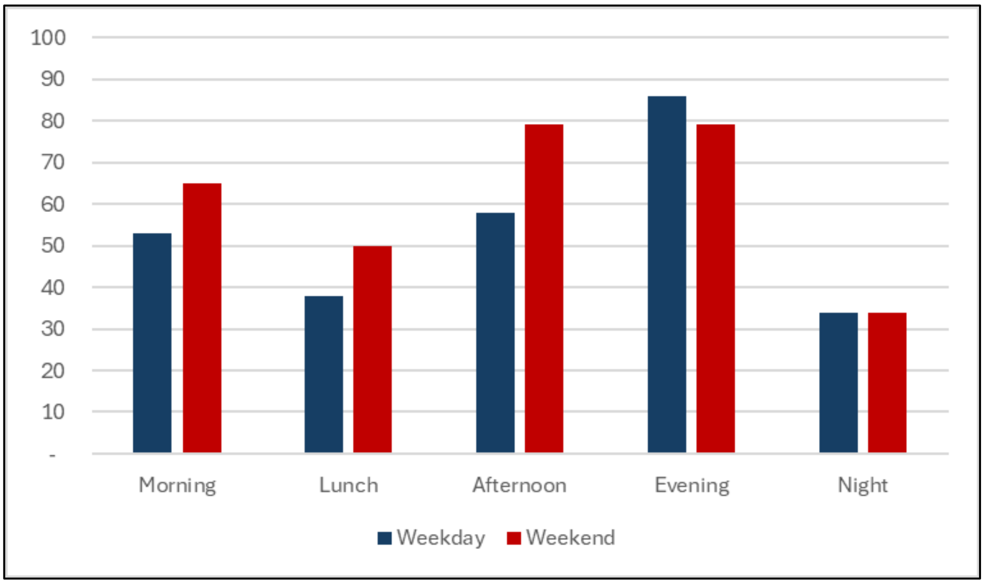


Source: MSCI Datscha

215. The evening and night time economy in Gillingham is limited to a small number of public houses but it is understood that it is growing.

216. The figure below shows how footfall levels differ across the day. It relates to footfall in August 2024 on High Street. Actual numbers are low, but footfall in the evening (5pm – 9pm) generally outperforms activity in the morning, lunch and afternoon periods. Nighttime levels are also reasonable and consistent across the week.

Figure 27: Footfall by Time of Day, High Street, August 2024



Source: MSCI Datscha

Turnover and Trade Draw

217. The strong convenience offer in the town centre is reflected in the turnover of the centre, with convenience spend accounting for over 75% of total spending. It is also high compared with the turnover of outlets outside the town centre. In contrast more comparison spending goes to out-of-centre outlets than to those in the Town Centre.

218. All locations and types of retail appear to benefit from relatively high levels of trade inflow (30%) from outside of the Dorset Council area. This is likely to reflect the location of the town close to the Somerset and Wiltshire borders.

Policy Considerations for Gillingham

219. Gillingham is a strong convenience-based Town Centre that benefits from both a historic High Street and modern retail units. However, the town centre as currently defined is relatively extensive and includes some noticeable long term vacancies.

220. Development proposals for the southern part of the town centre around Station Road have not been progressed to date and, whilst better connectivity and integration between the historic town centre area and the Station should be supported, the form of mixed use development promoted may need to see a reduction in the retail element.

221. The town centre should also be supported by Dorset-wide policies that encourage investment/regeneration in town centres including appropriate mixed use

development. Developments that increase footfall during the day and evening periods should be supported in appropriate locations.

Lyme Regis (currently defined as a Town Centre)

222. Lyme Regis is an important seaside town and fishing port located in the west of the Dorset Council area, close to the Devon border.

223. It has a strong town centre consisting of 142 units of which 37.4% are in retail use and account for over 60% of the total floorspace. Occupiers include a number of national multiples. The centre also has a strong leisure, community & medical offer reflecting its important role as a tourist centre and a very low vacancy rate.

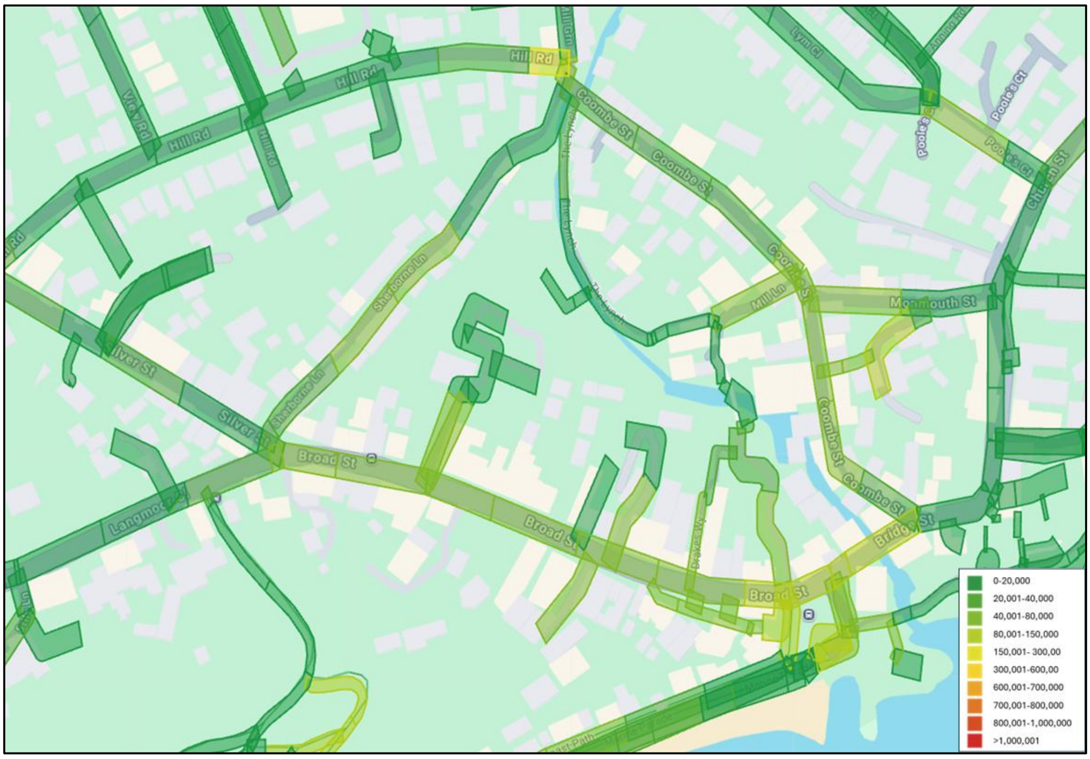
224. The 2025 Health Check report concludes:

> “This is a thriving town centre that has a wide range of shops and services operating during the day, and restaurants/pubs open in the evening, as well as hotels and holiday accommodation. The town centre mostly comprises independent shops and, due to the holiday accommodation, has a wider reach than a typical town centre.”

Footfall

225. The figure below illustrates the pedestrian flows for Lyme Regis in the form of a heat map showing total pedestrian movements for August 2024. Footfall is concentrated along Broad Street, Bridge Street and Coombe Street.

Figure 28: Lyme Regis Heat Map, August 2024

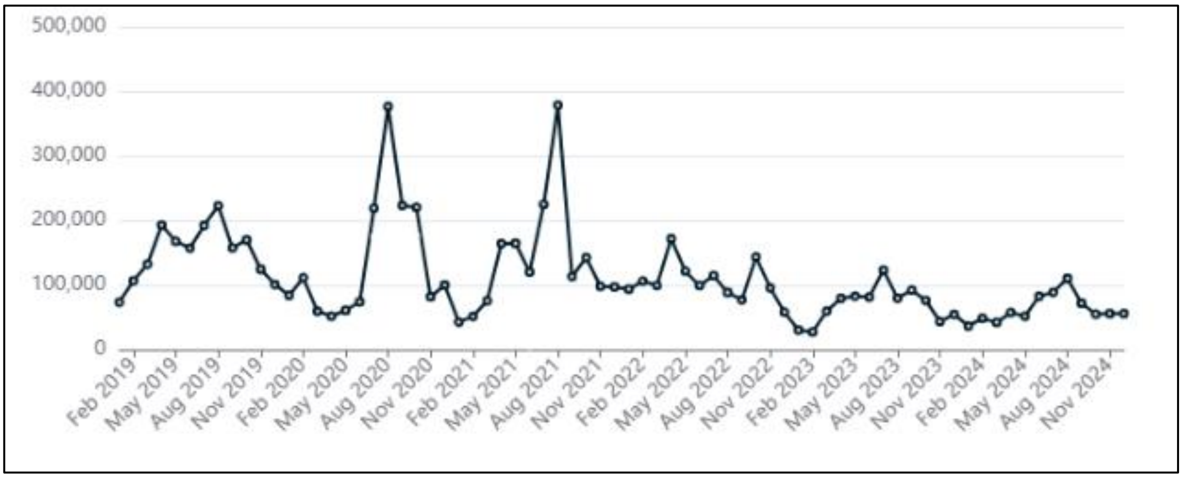


Source: MSCI Datscha

226. A central section of Lyme Regis Town Centre on Broad Street was sampled to obtain information on how footfall levels have changed between January 2019 and December 2024.

227. As can be seen in the figure below, footfall has decreased in 2024 in comparison to previous years and pre-COVID. Monthly movements ranged between 100,000 and 216,600 in 2019, reducing to between 73,800 and 159,000 in 2024. There were sharp increases during summer months of 2020 and 2021, reflecting domestic summer holidays during the pandemic but subsequent peak holiday periods have seen a decrease in footfall in the town centre.

Figure 29: Monthly Footfall Graph, January 2019 – December 2024, Broad Street

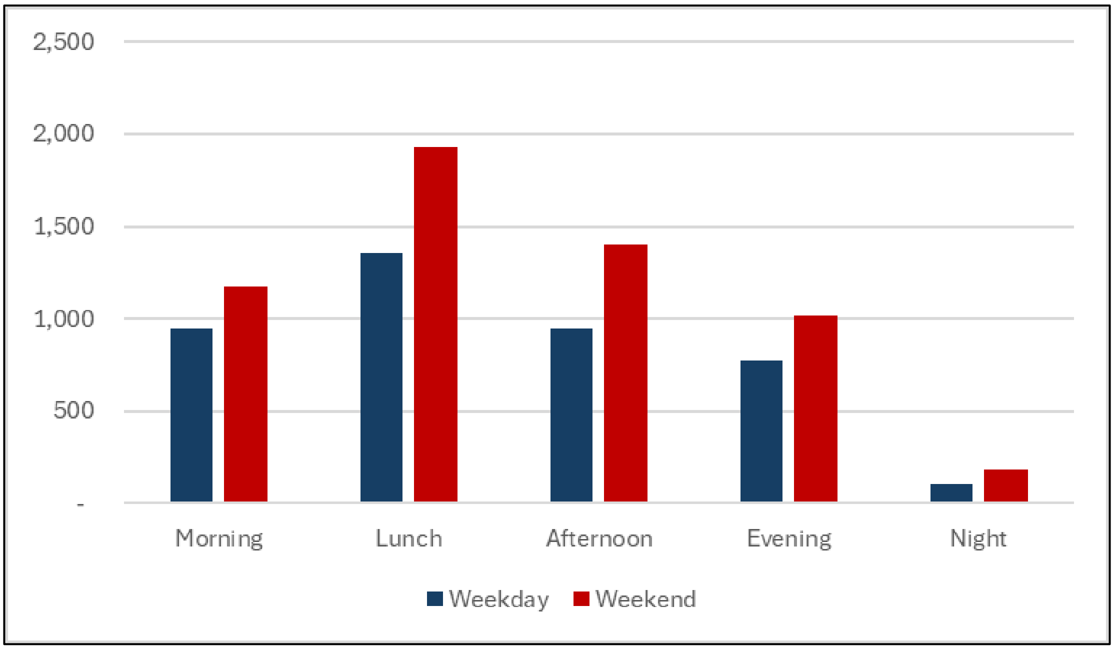


Source: MSCI Datscha

228. There are a good number of venues in Lyme Regis that support the evening/nighttime economy, although it is limited in terms of late night activity. Activity is spread across the centre with a notable hotspot near the southern shore along Bridge Street.

229. The figure below shows how footfall levels differ across the day. It relates to footfall in August 2024, on Bridge Street. As can be seen, footfall is highest over the lunchtime period both on weekdays and at weekends, but evening (5pm – 9pm) activity does not decline significantly compared with the rest of the day. As would be expected, more activity is seen on weekend evenings than weekday.

Figure 30: Footfall by Time of Day, Bridge Street, August 2024



Source: MSCI Datscha

Turnover and Trade Draw

230. Despite the relatively large number of retail outlets in Lyme Regis Town Centre, spend is relatively low and comes mainly from visitors to the area. Shopping destinations outside the centre also have a limited turnover, and mainly attract visitor spend.

Policy Considerations for Lyme Regis

231. Lyme Regis is a very successful town centre that plays an important role in supporting tourism in the area.

232. In terms of future policy no specific site allocations or changes to town centre boundaries appear to be required. Instead the town centre should be supported by Dorset-wide policies that encourage investment/regeneration in the town centre including appropriate mixed use development. Developments that increase footfall during the day and evening periods should be supported in appropriate locations, but activities with activity limited to the evening and night-time periods should be encouraged to locate away from the main retail and commercial areas.

Lytchett Matravers (currently defined as a Local Centre)

233. Lytchett Matravers Local Centre is a very small commercial centre serving its local population on the eastern side of the Dorset Council area, close to the border with Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole.

234. It consists of just 5 units of which 2 are occupied by convenience retailers, including a Tesco Express.

235. The 2025 Health Check report concludes:

"This is a small local centre that has a limited range of shops and services to meet residents' day to day needs. The status of this town centre may need to be reviewed."

Turnover and Trade Draw

236. Retail spend in Lytchett Matravers is very limited and is primarily linked to convenience purchases.

Policy Considerations for Lytchett Matravers

237. Lytchett Matravers provides a very limited retail and service offer for its residents and, whilst the Tesco Express provides an important local, it remains the case that most resident spend will be going elsewhere.

238. As would be expected trade inflow is also not significant and we consider that the current offer is 'of purely neighbourhood significance'. As such we consider that the designation of the centre should be reviewed.

Marnhull (no current designation)

239. Marnhull is a larger village in Dorset with a range of retail and service businesses dispersed throughout the built-up area, but with a current concentration at the northern end of Burton Street. The offer comprises 14 units of which 4 are in retail use.

240. The 2025 Health Check report concludes:

"Marnhull's retail scene is shaped by a strong presence of independent businesses, reflecting its rural character. The night-time economy is modest, centred around two pubs and a social club, offering limited evening activities. Accessibility is constrained by narrow lanes, limited pavements, and infrequent bus services, making car travel dominant. Significant development is underway, including a mixed-use scheme (Tess Square), which will introduce new housing, retail, and community facilities. Due to its size, limited range of shops and services the status of this proposed centre should be reviewed and if considered appropriate a town centre boundary should be defined."

Turnover and Trade Draw

241. The retail offer in Marnhull is currently very limited and this is reflected in the turnover of the existing businesses, with most expenditure on convenience goods. The proposed development of Tess Square is expected to increase the retail offer overall but may also result in some relocations of existing businesses and therefore the overall uplift in turnover is not known.

Policy Considerations for Marnhull

242. Marnhull provides a very limited and dispersed retail and service offer for its local residents and most resident spend will be going elsewhere.

243. As would be expected trade inflow will not be significant and we consider that the current offer is 'of purely neighbourhood significance' and this is unlikely to change following the development of Tess Square. As such we consider that there is currently no requirement to designate a Local Centre and instead local shops and

facilities should be supported by a Dorset-wide policy seeking to ensure existing facilities in smaller settlements are supported. However, this should be reviewed once the Tess Square development has been completed and occupied.

Portland - Fortuneswell (currently defined as a Larger Local Centre)

244. Fortuneswell is a defined Larger Local Centre on the Isle of Portland providing a total of 25 units of which 7 (28%) are in retail use.

245. The centre has a strong service retail, financial and business offer but the centre also contains a number of prominent vacant units.

246. The 2025 Health Check report concludes:

"Fortuneswell is one of two key centres on Portland providing a range of shops and services. However, residents would be dependent on accessing a wider range of shops and services in Weymouth. It is evident by the front of the buildings that lots of former commercial uses have been converted into residential uses, and there are still a large number of properties vacant. This centre needs to be retained so that residents have access to key shops and services. However, the number of vacancies need to be explored further to understand if initiatives could be used for their reoccupation for much needed town centre type uses."

Turnover and Trade Draw

247. The retail offer in Fortuneswell is limited and this is reflected in the centre's retail turnover. Shopping destinations on Portland but outside the centre attract the majority of locally spend convenience expenditure, while most comparison spend will be going to shops in the Weymouth area. Visitor inflows are also modest.

Policy Considerations for Portland - Fortuneswell

248. Fortuneswell is one of two centres on the Isle of Portland and provides a range of services for local residents. It lacks a strong anchor and appears to be struggling compared with other centres in the retail hierarchy.

249. Further consideration should be given to how the centre could be supported or whether it's designation should be reviewed given its relatively limited catchment area. The extent of the centre should also be reviewed.

Portland - Easton (currently defined as a Larger Local Centre)

250. Easton is centrally located on the Isle of Portland and is a defined Larger Local Centre providing a total of 64 units.

251. It is anchored by a large Tesco supermarket and therefore, whilst the centre only contains 3 convenience units, together they account for nearly 60% of total floorspace. The centre also has a diverse offer with good representation of comparison, service, financial, professional & business services and leisure, community & medical uses.

252. The centre has a small number of vacancies but this is primarily in small units and account for just 4% of total floorspace.

253. The 2025 Health Check report concludes:

"Easton is designated as a local centre, providing essential and weekly shops and services for local residents. However, should residents require choice, they would be dependent on accessing a wider range of shops and services in nearby Weymouth town centre. The number of vacancies in the centre are high, and this perhaps should be explored if they are likely to be reoccupied. This is the key centre on Portland and It should retain its current designation as a Local Centre."

Turnover and Trade Draw

254. Easton's strong convenience offer is reflected in the centre turnover and accounts for over 90% of total spend. Visitor inflows are modest indicating that the centre primarily serves the needs of local residents.

Policy Considerations for Portland - Easton

255. Easton is an important centre on the Isle of Portland with a strong convenience anchor. It currently appears to be healthy.

256. In terms of future policy no specific site allocations or changes to town centre boundaries appear to be required. Instead the town centre should be supported by Dorset-wide policies that encourage investment/regeneration in the town centre including appropriate mixed use development. Developments that increase footfall during the day and evening periods should be supported in appropriate locations.

Shaftesbury (currently defined as a Town Centre)

257. Shaftesbury is a historic market town with a successful town centre containing 144 units of which 41.6% are in retail use. The centre also has a strong service retail, financial, professional & business offer and a good diversity of other uses.

258. The centre includes a mix of national multiples and independents, including two major supermarkets (Lidl and Tesco). The number of vacant units is below average but these tend to be located on High Street and include some larger units.

259. The 2025 Health Check report concludes:

"This town centre has a range of retail and community shops and services, restaurants and cafes and offices on the upper floors. Shaftesbury provides shops and services to meet the day-to-day needs of its local residents but would also attract people outside of the area due to tourism and convenience shopping only. Shaftesbury does have a few public houses and restaurants that open at night time, which complements the town centre offerings and ensures that it used beyond 6pm."

Footfall

260. The figure below illustrates the pedestrian flows for Shaftesbury in the form of a heat map showing total pedestrian movements for August 2024. Footfall is concentrated along High Street and roads around the Tesco supermarket and Bell Street car park.

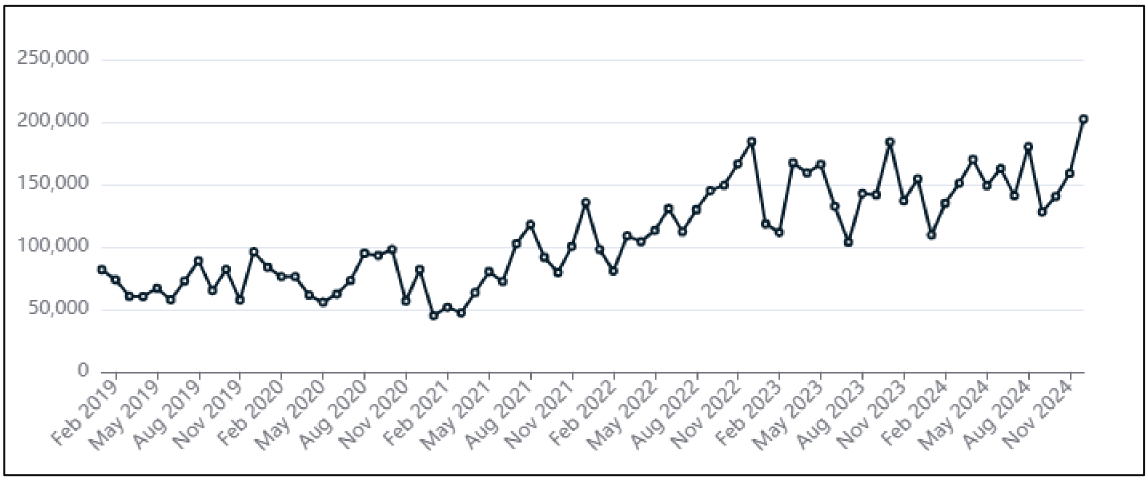
Figure 31: Shaftesbury Heat Map, August 2024

Source: MSCI Datscha

261. A central section of Shaftesbury Town Centre on High Street was sampled to obtain information on how footfall levels have changed between January 2019 and December 2024.

262. As can be seen in the figure below, footfall levels have been gradually increasing since 2019. Monthly movements ranged between 60,000 and 114,400 in 2019 but increased to between 101,800 and 198,600 in 2024.

Figure 32: Monthly Footfall Graph, January 2019 – December 2024, High Street

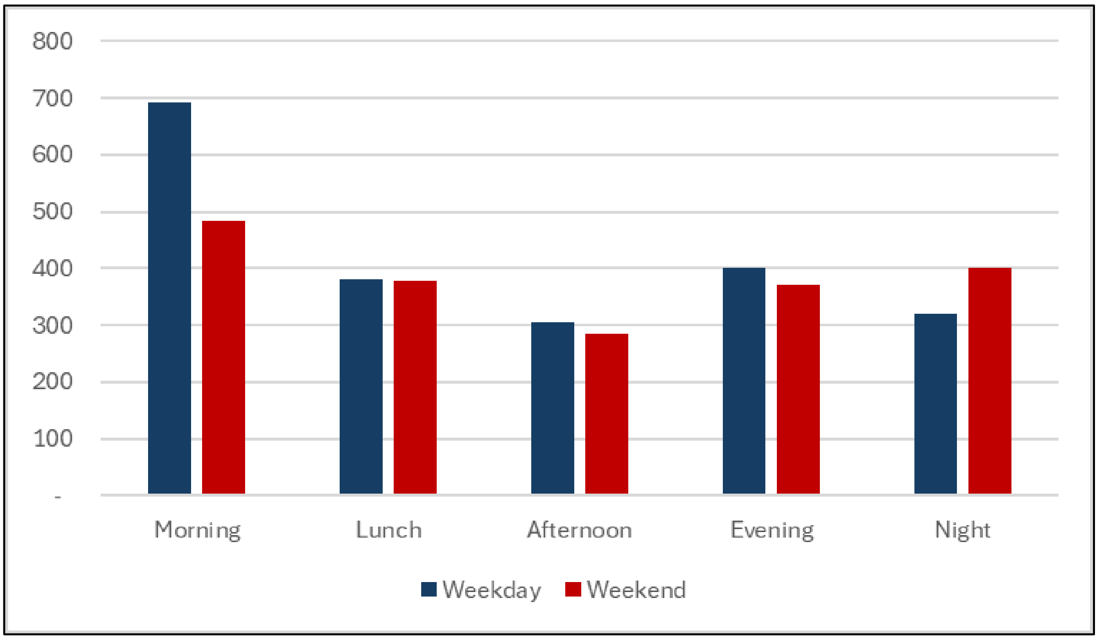


Source: MSCI Datscha

263. The evening and night time economy is limited in Shaftesbury, mainly represented by restaurants and public houses across the centre and the Shaftesbury Arts Centre.

264. The figure below shows how footfall levels differ across the day. It relates to footfall in August 2024 on Bleke Street. As can be seen, footfall is relatively consistent across the day after a slightly busier morning period. Weekday footfall is also generally higher than at weekends.

Figure 33: Footfall by Time of Day, Bleke Street, August 2024



Source: MSCI Datscha

Turnover and Trade Draw

265. Shaftesbury is clearly an important location for convenience shopping with turnover exceeding £50m per annum. Comparison spend is considerably lower but both benefit from high levels of inflow including tourists.

Policy Considerations for Shaftesbury

266. Shaftesbury is a successful town centre with a strong convenience offer but current vacancies and limited comparison spend suggests that there is limited potential or demand for the further expansion of the retail offer. As a result no specific site allocations or changes to town centre boundaries appear to be required. Instead the town centre should be supported by Dorset-wide policies that encourage investment/regeneration in the town centre including appropriate mixed use development. Developments that increase footfall during the day and evening periods should be supported in appropriate locations, but activities with activity limited to the evening and night-time periods should be encouraged to locate away from the main retail and commercial areas.

Sherborne (currently defined as a Town Centre)

267. Sherborne is an important historic town and has one of the largest town centres in Dorset with 175 units, of which nearly half (45.7%) are in retail use. When considered in terms of floorspace, retail uses are even higher with comparison uses occupying around 44% of all space and convenience a further 17%.

268. The service retail, financial, professional & business offer is also strong but the leisure, community & medical offer is below average, which is surprising given the town's draw. Vacancy rates are low both in terms of the number of units and floorspace, reflecting the appeal of the centre to both independents and national multiples.

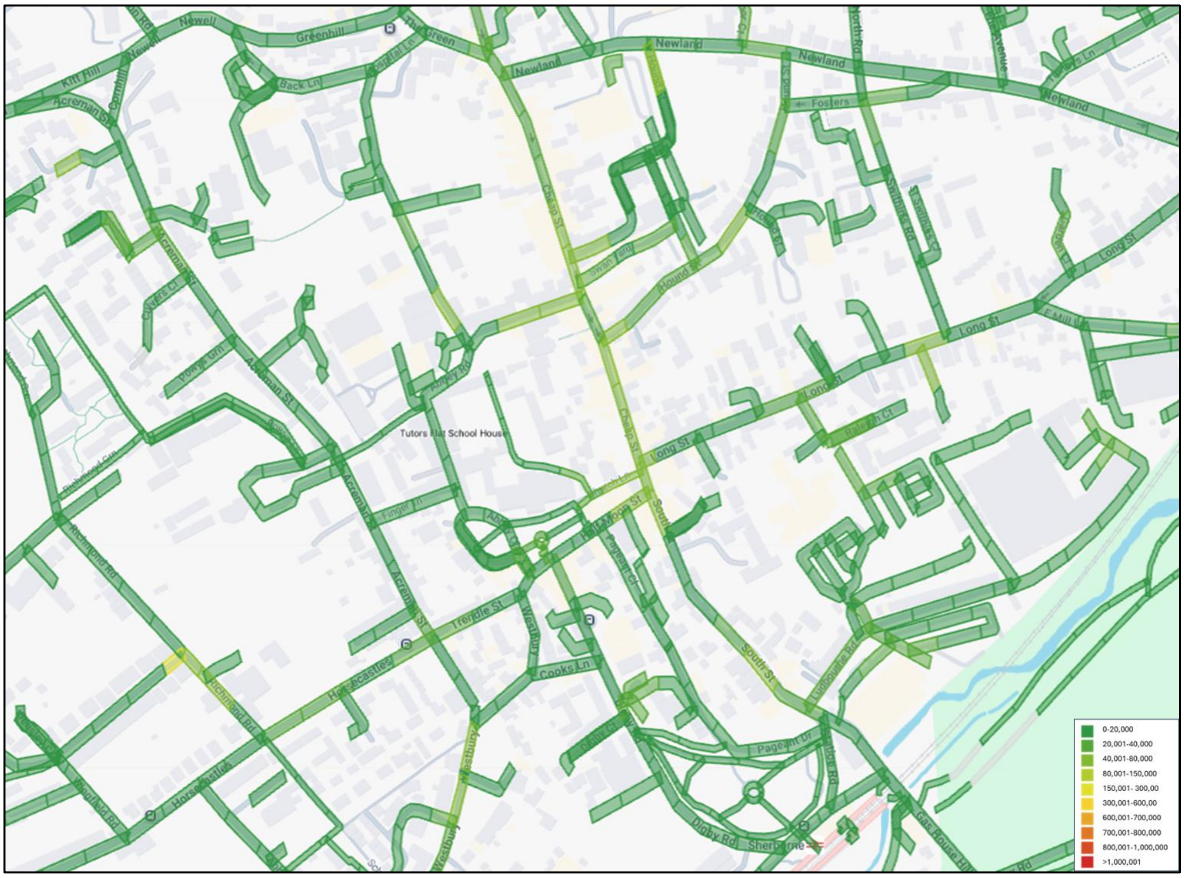
269. The 2025 Health Check report concludes:

"The town centre has a range of retail and community shops and services, restaurants and cafes, plus offices on the upper floors. Sherborne attracts higher end retailers, and it has a larger presence of offices than a typical local centre. Sherborne railway station is located on the Exeter to London Waterloo mainline, giving it good connectivity. Sherborne attracts people from outside the area due to tourism and its heritage and educational offer, comparison shopping and business. Sherborne has a small and vibrant evening offer which complements the town centre offer and ensures that it used beyond 6pm."

Footfall

270. The figure below illustrates the pedestrian flows for Sherborne in the form of a heat map showing total pedestrian movements for August 2024. Footfall is concentrated along Cheap Street and a small cluster near the entrance of Half Moon Street.

Figure 34: Sherborne Heat Map, August 2024

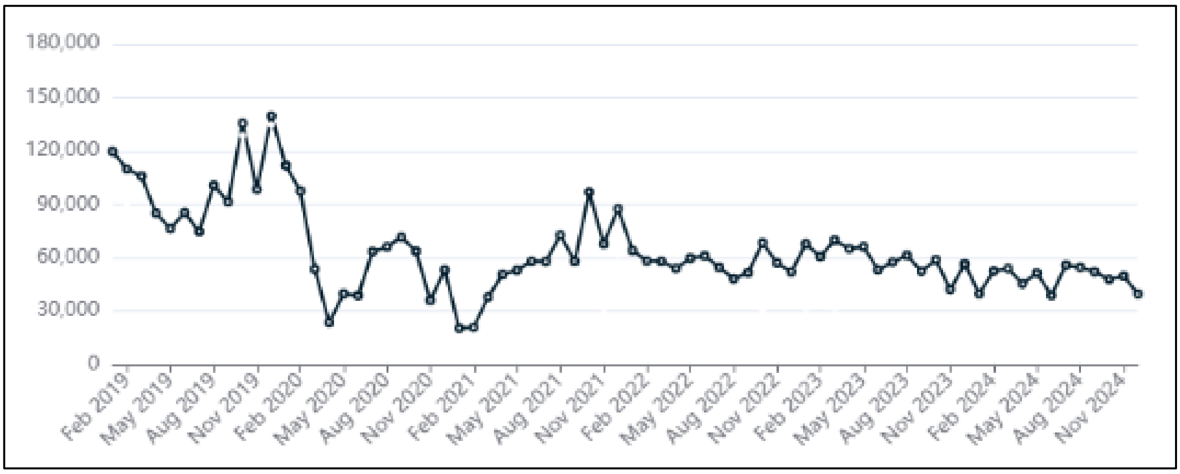


Source: MSCI Datscha

A central section of Sherborne Town Centre on Cheap Street was sampled to obtain information on how footfall levels have changed between January 2019 and December 2024.

271. As can be seen in the figure below, footfall has significantly decreased since pre-pandemic levels. In 2019 monthly movements ranged between 76,400 and 139,500 but decreased to around 60,000 per month during 2022 and 2023. However they declined further in 2024 to between 38,900 and 55,800 per month.

Figure 35: Monthly Footfall Graph, January 2019 – December 2024, Cheap Street

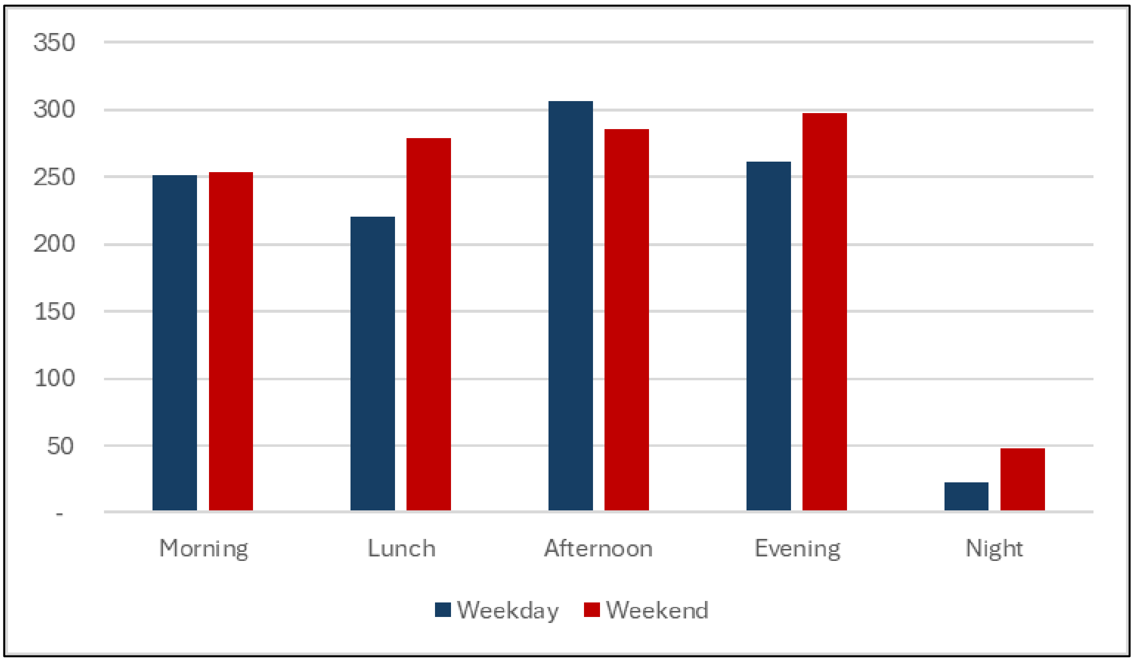


Source: MSCI Datscha

272. The evening economy in Sherborne is limited primarily to restaurants and public houses across the centre, but as the figure below shows, footfall levels are strong during the evening period.

273. The data relates to footfall in August 2024 on East Street and shows levels of footfall in the evening (5pm – 9pm) is similar to, or higher than the levels seen during the rest of the day. However, there is very little nighttime activity.

Figure 36: Footfall by Time of Day, Half Moon Street, August 2024



Source: MSCI Datscha

Turnover and Trade Draw

274. Sherborne town centre attracts similar levels of spend on convenience and comparison goods. This represents the majority of comparison spend in the town, but only a third of convenience spend, reflecting the out of centre offer. All retailers

in the town centre rely on tourist and inflow trade, with this accounting for around 40% of all sales.

Policy Considerations for Sherborne

275. Sherborne is a healthy and successful town centre with a good diversity of uses and a low vacancy rate. Current levels of retail provision are high but the leisure offer is more limited, which is unusual for a centre popular with visitors and tourists.

276. In terms of future policy no specific site allocations or changes to town centre boundaries appear to be required but a positive approach, encouraging a greater diversity of uses may assist in developing the leisure offer. The town centre should also be supported by Dorset-wide policies that encourage investment/regeneration in the town centre including appropriate mixed use development. Developments that increase footfall during the day and evening periods should be supported in appropriate locations, but activities with activity limited to the evening and night-time periods should be encouraged to locate away from the main retail and commercial areas.

Stalbridge (no current designation)

277. Stalbridge is the smallest town in Dorset and provides a limited retail and commercial offer comprising of just 15 units. This includes the independent Dike & Sons supermarket and 2 other convenience outlets and 3 comparison stores. The Dike & Sons supermarket occupies the largest unit in the centre.

278. The centre also has a relatively high vacancy rate with 4 units currently vacant, although most are relatively small.

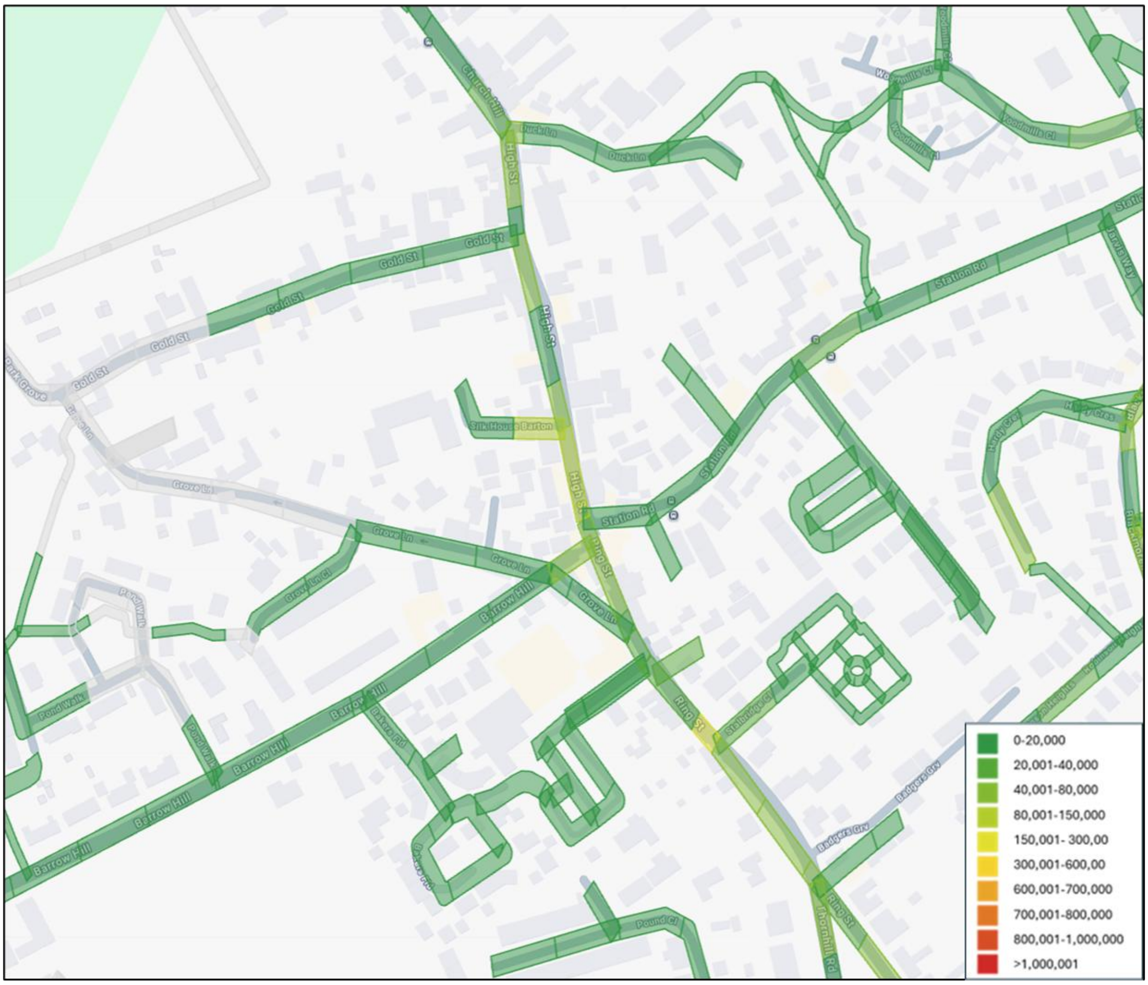
279. The 2025 Health Check report concludes:

> "Stalbridge has limited retail shops and services, including an independent supermarket, that provide for the day-to-day needs of local people. There is one pub, which shows that the town centre is opened beyond 6pm but in limited capacity. Stalbridge is a proposed District Centre, and its status should be reviewed."

Footfall

280. The figure below illustrates the pedestrian flows for Stalbridge in the form of a heat map showing total pedestrian movements for August 2024. Footfall is concentrated along High Street and Ring Street.

Figure 37: Stalbridge Heat Map, August 2024

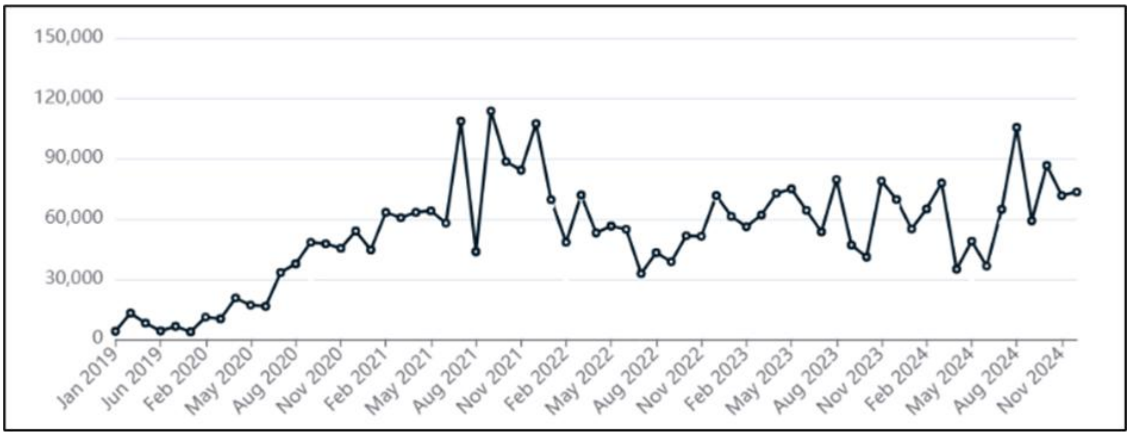


Source: MSCI Datscha

281. A central section of High Street was sampled to obtain information on how footfall levels have changed between January 2019 and December 2024.

282. As can be seen in the figure below, footfall has increased since 2019, from where there was very little footfall. Monthly movements in 2019 ranged from 4,000 to 13,000, but by 2024 had increased to around 60,000.

Figure 38: Monthly Footfall Graph January 2019 - December 2024 High Street, Stalbridge

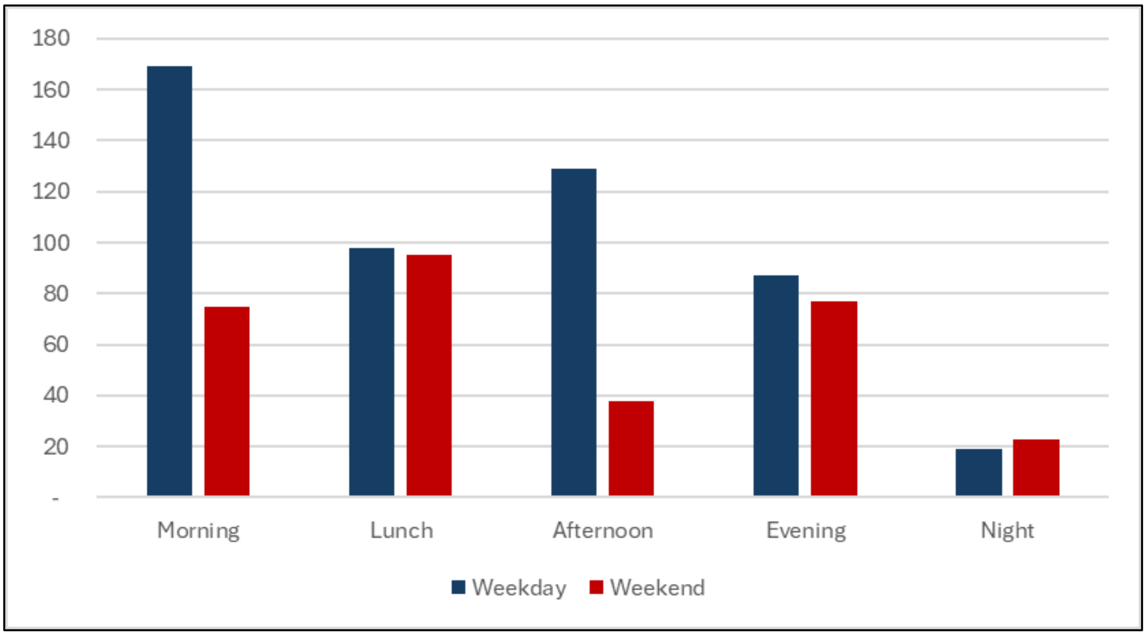


Source: MSCI Datscha

283. Facilities to support an evening economy in Stalbridge are limited to a single public house and two takeaways.

The figure below shows how footfall levels differ across the day. It relates to footfall in August 2024 on High Street. As can be seen, footfall throughout the day is relatively low and decreases further during weekday evenings (5pm – 9pm). Footfall during the evenings at weekends is similar to during the week, although daytime footfall is noticeably lower.

Figure 39: Footfall by Time of Day, High Street, August 2024



Source: MSCI Datscha

Turnover and Trade Draw

284. Stalbridge has a relatively high convenience turnover for a small centre reflecting the unique and popular offer of the Dike & Sons supermarket. This attracts trade from a wider area with around a quarter of spend coming from outside the Dorset Council area. Comparison turnover however is very low.

Policy Considerations for Stalbridge

285. The Dike & Sons supermarket is a popular destination for many residents and visitors reflecting its unique offer and history. However, the rest of the town centre offer is extremely limited.

286. Given the size of Stalbridge it is considered that the centre should benefit from a town centre designation but the limited range of offer would suggest this should probably be as a Local Centre rather than a District Centre.

287. In terms of future policy no specific site allocations appear to be required but a town centre boundary should be defined. Future policies should also consider how the offer could be improved, given the expected population growth in the area.

Sturminster Newton (currently defined as a Town Centre)

288. Sturminster Newton is a historic centre in the Blackmore Vale with the historic part of the town centre centred around Market Cross and Market Place and newer, larger unit located to the north. There is also an independent department store a short distance outside the town centre.

289. The centre as defined contains a total of 90 units of which 30% are in retail use. Other uses are relatively diverse and close to the UK average. Vacancy rates are slightly below average.

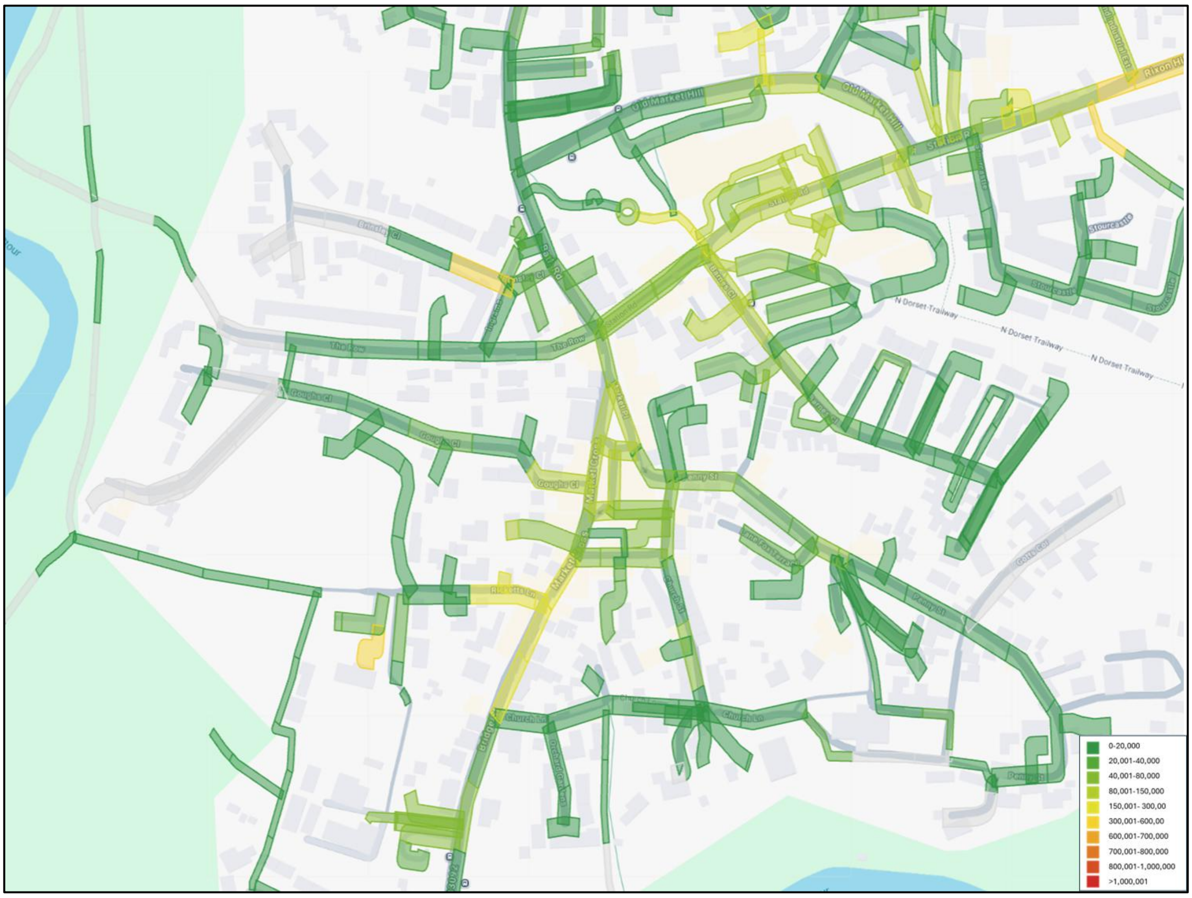
290. The 2025 Health Check report concludes:

"Sturminster Newton is a small town with a good cultural offering from the Exchange. The town centre has a range of retail shops and services, restaurants and cafes and offices on the upper floors. Sturminster Newton would attract people outside of the area due to its tourism, business and entertainment offer. It has a larger presence of offices than a typically sized centre. The town's public houses, restaurants and The Exchange open at nighttime which complements the town centre offering and ensures that it is used beyond 6pm."

Footfall

291. The figure below illustrates the pedestrian flows for Sturminster Newton in the form of a heat map showing total pedestrian movements for August 2024. Footfall is concentrated along Bridge Street, Market Cross, Market Place and Station Road.

Figure 40: Sturminster Newton Heat Map, August 2024

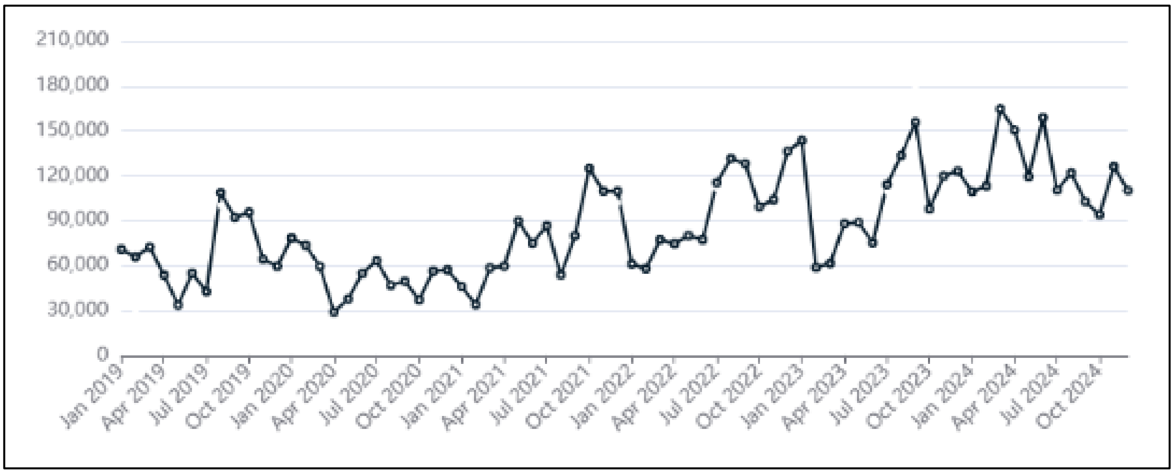


Source: MSCI Datscha

292. A central section of Sturminster Newton Town Centre on Station Road was sampled to obtain information on how footfall levels have changed between January 2019 and December 2024.

293. As can be seen in the figure below, footfall has gradually increased since 2019. Monthly movements ranged between 33,900 and 108,700 in 2019, compared to between 94,100 and 164,600 in 2024.

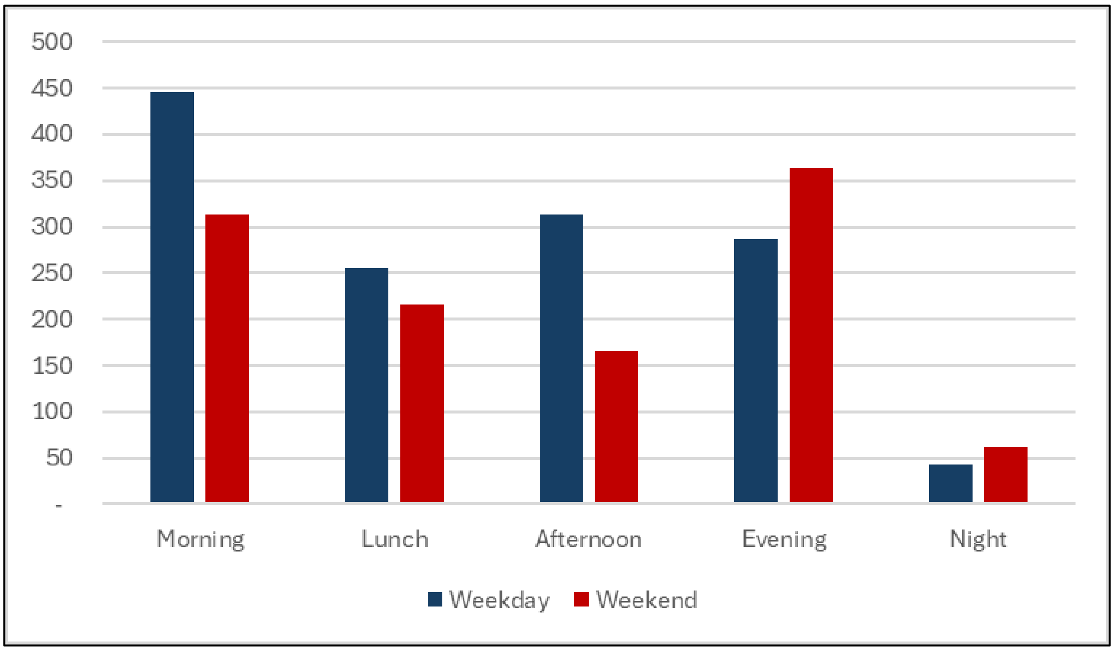
Figure 41: Monthly Footfall Graph, January 2019 – December 2024, Station Road



Source: MSCI Datscha

294. The figure below shows how footfall levels differ across the day. It relates to footfall in August 2024 on Market Cross. Footfall in the evening (5pm – 9pm) is generally good and exceeds that seen during the rest of the day at weekends. During the week footfall is higher in the mornings but are maintained at a good level for the rest of the day. Nighttime activity is low.

Figure 42: Footfall by Time of Day, Market Cross, August 2024



Source: MSCI Datscha

Turnover and Trade Draw

295. The turnover of Sturminster Newton Town Centre is relatively limited, particularly in terms of comparison spend, with significantly more spend going to locations outside the town centre. There is also limited inflows from visitors.

Policy Considerations for Sturminster Newton

296. Sturminster Newton is an important Town Centre for the local population but its offer and draw is limited. This is partly due to the way the town centre boundary is currently drawn and this should be reviewed, given the Harts of Stur department store is likely to be a major draw.

297. The Station Road area has previously been identified for redevelopment and investment in the town centre remains an important policy aim. However, no specific allocation for additional retail or town centre use floorspace is required. More generally the town centre should be supported by Dorset-wide policies that encourage investment/regeneration in the town centre including appropriate mixed use development. Developments that increase footfall during the day and evening periods should be supported in appropriate locations, but activities with activity limited to the evening and night-time periods should be encouraged to locate away from the main retail and commercial areas.

Swanage (currently defined as a Town Centre)

298. Swanage is a seaside town on the isle of Purbeck and is geographically remote from much of the rest of Dorset. It is also an important holiday destination with many annual events that boost footfall.

299. The town centre consists of 234 units of which 35.3% are in retail use. Other uses are well represented with leisure, community & medical facilities particularly high. In contrast vacancies are very low.

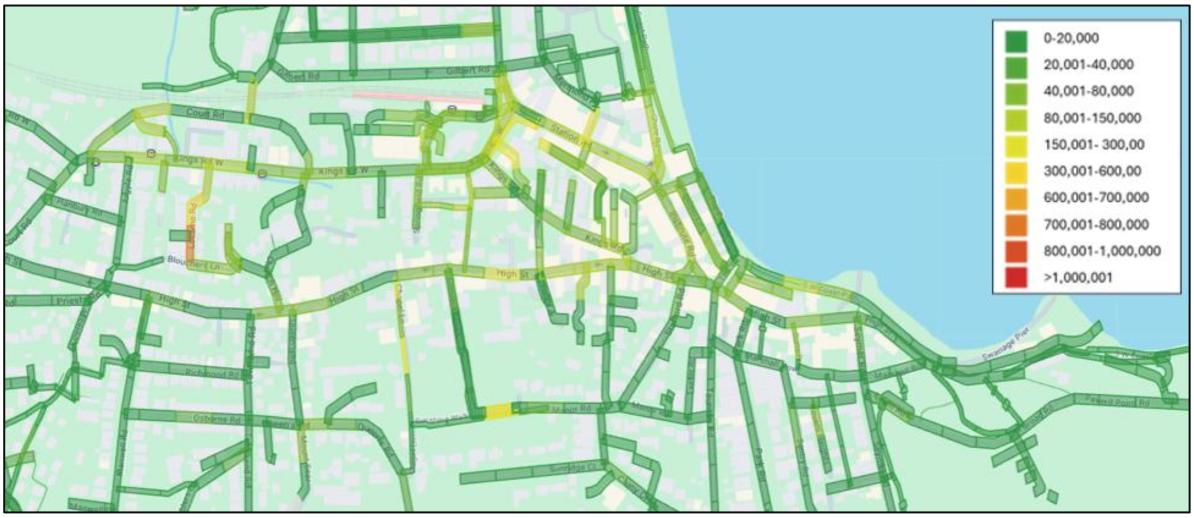
300. The 2025 Health Check report concludes:

> "Swanage town centre has retail shops and services, restaurants and cafes and leisure and community uses, as well as offices and tourist accommodation on the upper floors. Swanage also has its own theatre/cinema, nightclub, museum and shops dedicated to water sports. As a historic seaside town opening up onto the beach and with a good tourism and cultural offering, Swanage is a tourist destination which attracts people from outside the area. The range of public houses and restaurants ensure that the town centre is used beyond 6pm.
>
> Swanage has two main supermarkets: Co-op (Kings Road West) and Budgens (Station Road). These stores provide essentials and some local produce, but they are not large-format supermarkets. For bigger weekly shops or discount options, residents often travel to Wareham or Poole. Due to Swanage's relative geographic isolation, any need for a large-format supermarket should be explored further."

Footfall

301. The figure below illustrates the pedestrian flows for Swanage in the form of a heat map showing total pedestrian movements for August 2024. Footfall is concentrated along High Street, Institute Road and Station Road.

Figure 43: Swanage Heat Map, August 2024

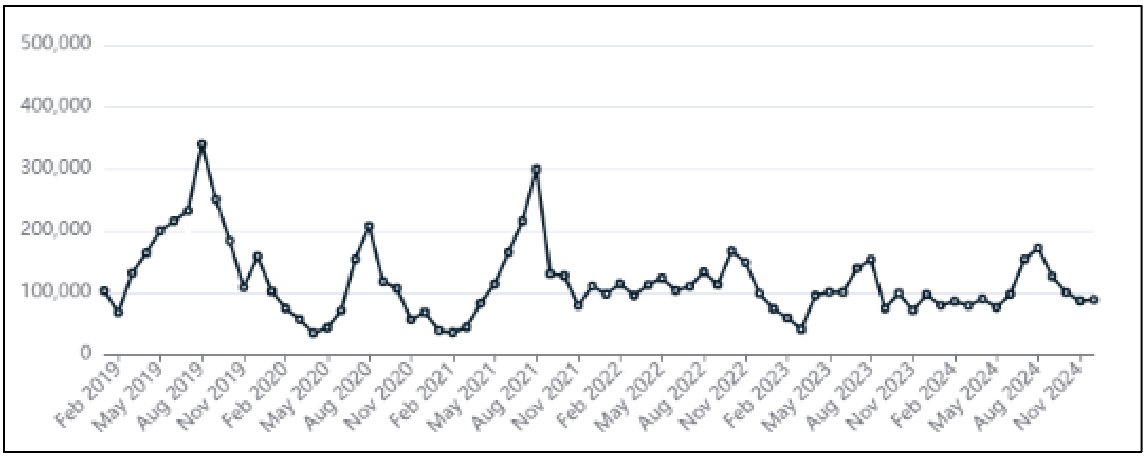


Source: MSCI Datscha

302. A central section of Swanage Town Centre on Station Road, was sampled to obtain information on how footfall levels have changed between January 2019 and December 2024.

303. As can be seen in the figure below, footfall levels are generally good and now seem to average around 100,000 per month. This represents a decrease from the peak numbers seen in 2019 and in summer 2021 following Covid-19 restrictions. The peaks seen during the summer holiday season also appear to be lower. However, levels in 2024 seem to be similar to 2023 at 75,600 and 171,300 movements a month. For comparison the 2019 levels were between 67,300 and 340,500 per month.

Figure 44: Monthly Footfall Graph, January 2019 – December 2024, Station Road



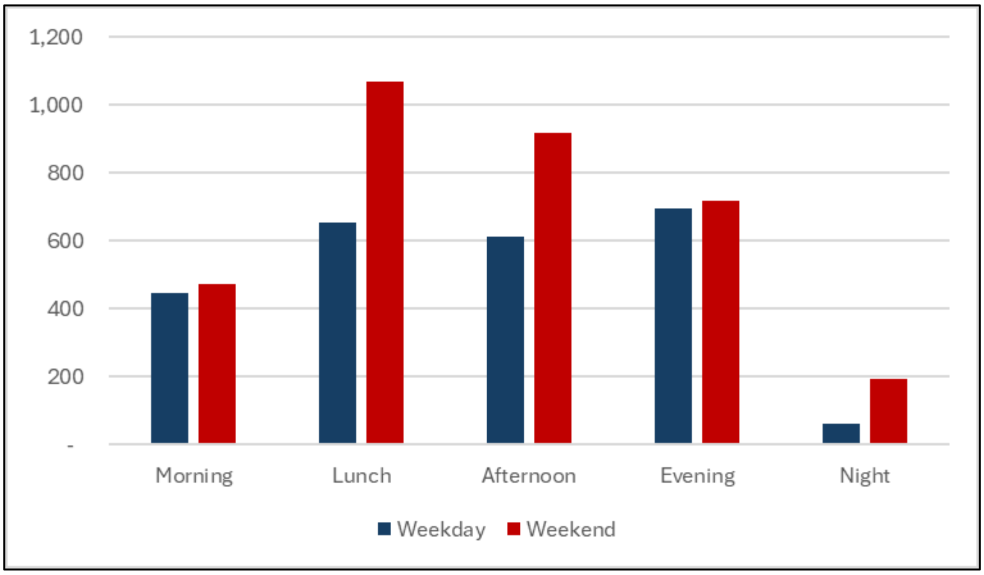
Source: MSCI Datscha

304. The evening and night time economy in Swanage is vibrant with multiple public houses and bars across the centre, with a concentration along the High Street. The centre also has a theatre and many events are held in the town centre during the year that would boost footfall.

305. The figure below shows how footfall levels vary across the day. It relates to footfall in August 2024, on High Street. Footfall in the weekday evening (5pm – 9pm) is

higher than during the rest of the daytime demonstrating the strength of the town centre offer. Evening footfall at weekends is surpassed by lunchtime and afternoon activity, suggesting the summer period sees a lot of day trippers at weekends but weekends also see higher levels of nighttime activity.

Figure 45: Footfall by Time of Day, High Street, August 2024



Source: MSCI Datscha

Turnover and Trade Draw

306. Swanage Town Centre attracts most of the spend in the town reflecting the limited out of centre provision, but actual spend is relatively low and around a third of convenience spend and nearly two-thirds of comparison spend comes from visitors to the area. This reflects the limited appeal of the current retail offer to local residents for larger food and non-food shopping purchases.

Policy Considerations for Swanage

307. There is an identified need to improve the retail offer in Swanage, as it is known that there is expenditure leakage from the area. However, site availability is an issue and therefore no specific site allocation is suggested, nor is any change to the town centre boundary required. Instead the town centre should be supported by Dorset-wide policies that encourage investment/regeneration in the town centre including appropriate mixed use development. Developments that increase footfall during the day and evening periods should be supported in appropriate locations, but activities with activity limited to the evening and night-time periods should be encouraged to locate away from the main retail and commercial areas.

Upton (currently defined as a Town Centre)

308. Upton is located close to the border with Poole in east Dorset and its defined town centre is split across two sites. Together these provide a total of 25 units with just 4 in retail use. However it has a strong service retail, financial, professional & business and leisure, community & medical offer. Vacancies currently consist of a single small unit.

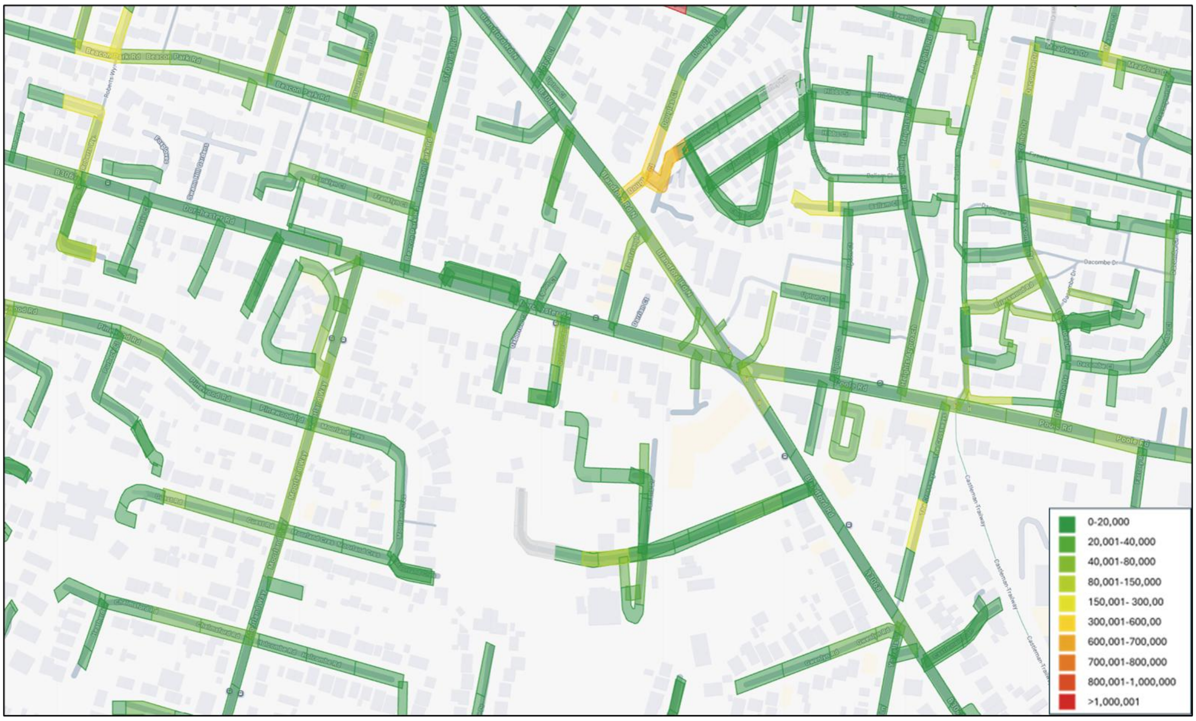
309. The 2025 Health Check report concludes:

"Upton town centre provides limited range of retail shops and services, leisure facilities and community uses to serve the day-to-day needs of its local residents. There is minimal evidence that this town centre operates beyond 6pm. There is one key focal point for commercial uses on Factory Road, but most shops and services are spread along the key thoroughfares. It has strong transport connections to Poole via Hamworthy railway station, which also connects to Wareham, Dorchester, Bournemouth and beyond, possibly attracting people outside of the area. Therefore, it has the possible potential to grow due to its sustainable location, subject to other land designations. The status of this town centre needs to be reviewed."

Footfall

310. The figure below illustrates the pedestrian flows for Upton in the form of a heat map showing total pedestrian movements for August 2024. Footfall is slightly higher within the defined centre areas.

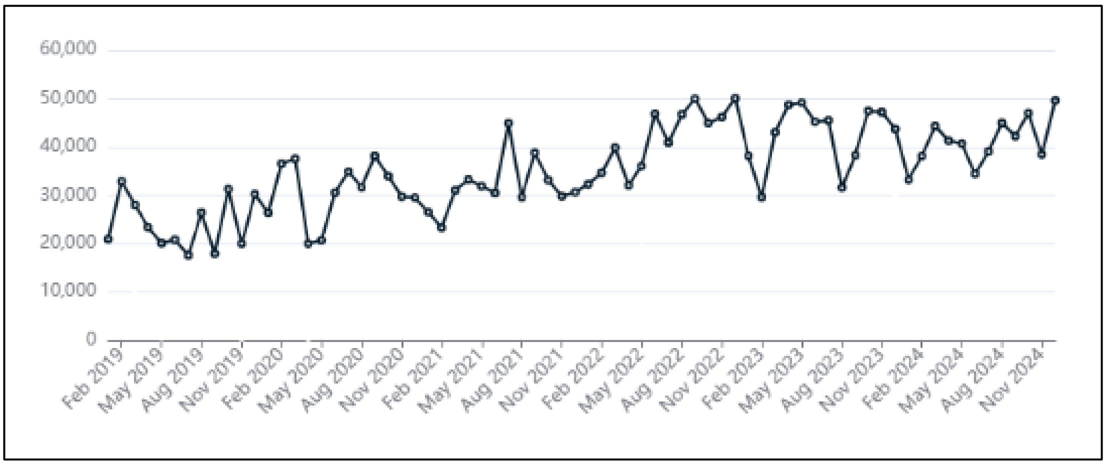
Figure 46: Upton Heat Map, August 2024



Source: MSCI Datscha

311. A central section of Upton District Centre on Blandford Road was sampled to obtain information on how footfall levels have changed between January 2019 and December 2024. This shows that footfall has increased since 2019 and looks to be continuing to rise. Monthly movements ranged between 17,600 and 32,800 in 2019 but have increased to between 33,200 and 47,400 per month in 2024.

Figure 47: Monthly Footfall Graph, January 2019 - December 2024, Blandford Road

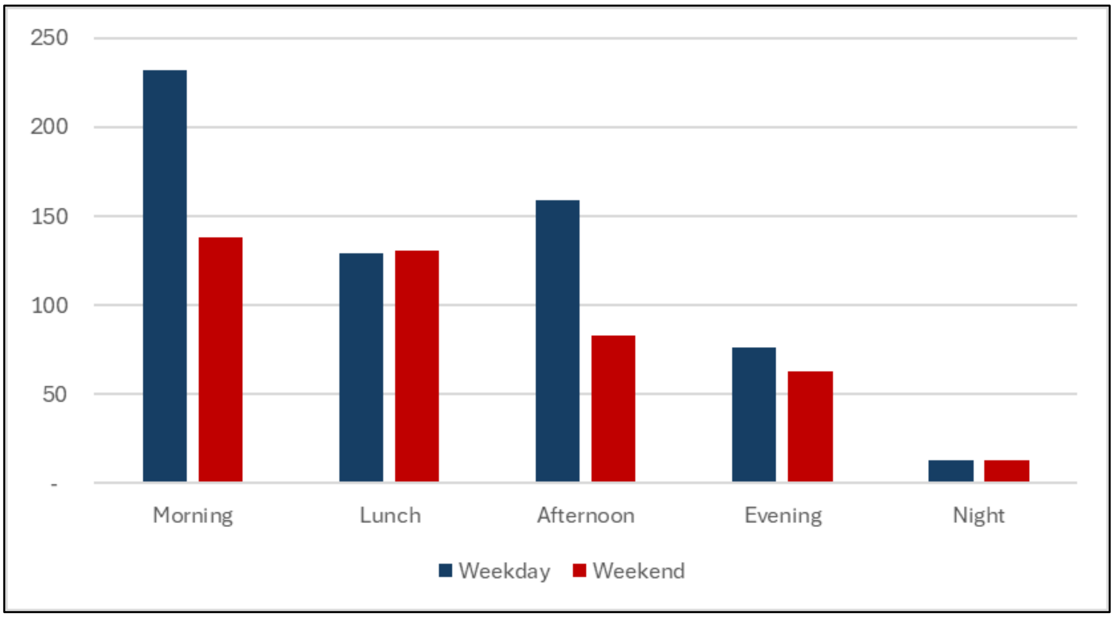


Source: MSCI Datscha

312. The evening and night time economy is limited in Upton as there are no public houses, bars or nightclubs present in the centre.

The figure below shows how footfall levels differ across the day. It relates to footfall in August 2024 on Dorchester Road. Footfall is highest during daytime hours during the week and declines during the evening (5pm – 9pm).

Figure 48: Footfall by Time of Day, Dorchester Road, August 2024



Source: MSCI Datscha

Turnover and Trade Draw

313. The main convenience offer is located outside of the defined centre and comprises an Aldi store to the north of the town and a Co-op on Poole Road. The main convenience store in the centre is a Spar on The Triangle.

314. The combined convenience spend for these stores is good and there is a good draw from outside of the Dorset Council area, with around 28% of trade inflow. However, comparison spend is very low.

Policy Considerations for Upton

315. The defined town centre for Upton includes a high proportion of leisure and service uses but the retail provision is limited, with the key convenience stores located out-of-centre. As a result the role of the centre is limited and the status of the centre needs to be reviewed. This may also mean reviewing the town centre boundary as well.

316. In terms of future policy no specific site allocations appear to be required. Instead the town centre should be supported by Dorset-wide policies that encourage investment/regeneration in the town centre including appropriate mixed use development.

Verwood (currently defined as a Town Centre)

317. Verwood is an historic town with a relatively large but dispersed town centre. It provides a total of 80 units of which only 21.2% are in retail use. The convenience offer is particularly limited, although the town benefits from out-of-centre provision in the form of a Lidl and a Morrisons.

318. The retail service, financial, professional & business offer in the centre is particularly high and vacancies are low. The centre also benefits from a good range of leisure facilities at The Hub.

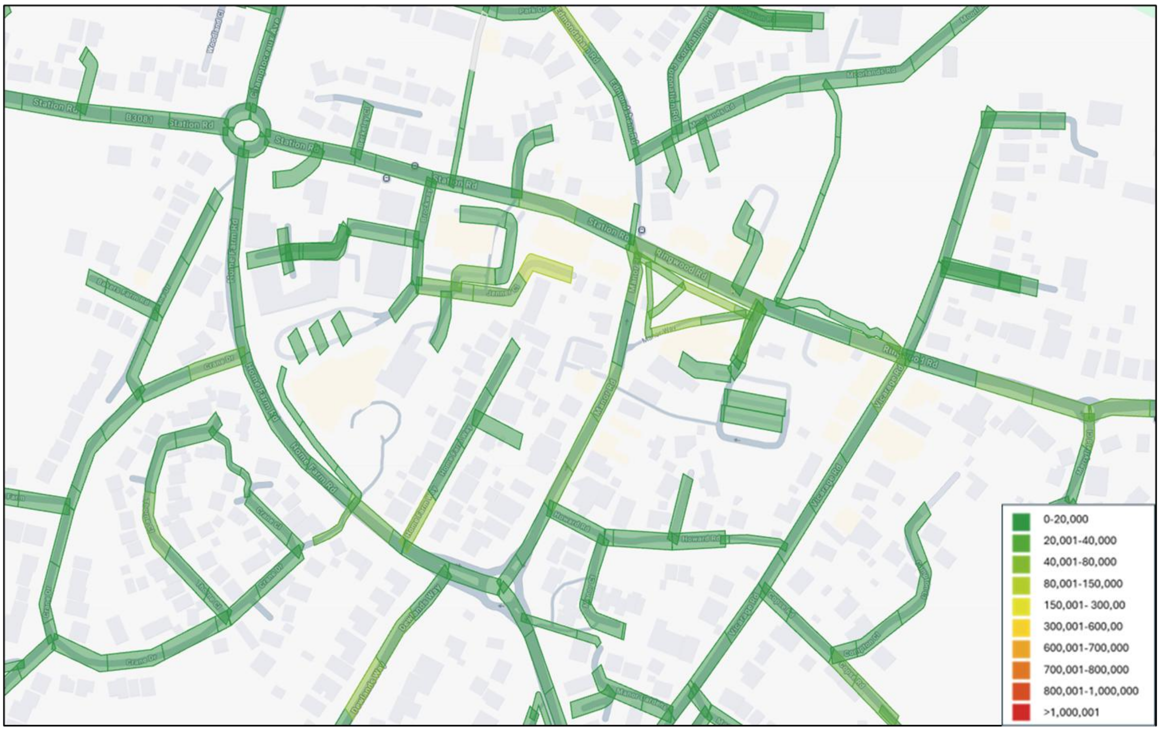
319. The 2025 Health Check report concludes:

"Verwood town centre has a range of retail shops and services but a limited number of restaurants, cafes, public houses and offices. Town centre uses beyond 6pm may be limited and are focussed around public houses, Verwood Hub and activities at the Memorial Hall. Despite its transport connections (to Ferndown, Bournemouth and Ringwood), Verwood is a Town Centre and would only attract people from nearby villages for its convenience shops and service retail offer. Some of the convenience offer is located outside of the town centre boundary. Therefore, the boundary needs to be explored further."

Footfall

The figure below illustrates the pedestrian flows for Verwood in the form of a heat map showing total pedestrian movements for August 2024. This shows the importance of the central car parks in bringing trade to the centre.

Figure 49: Verwood Heat Map, August 2024

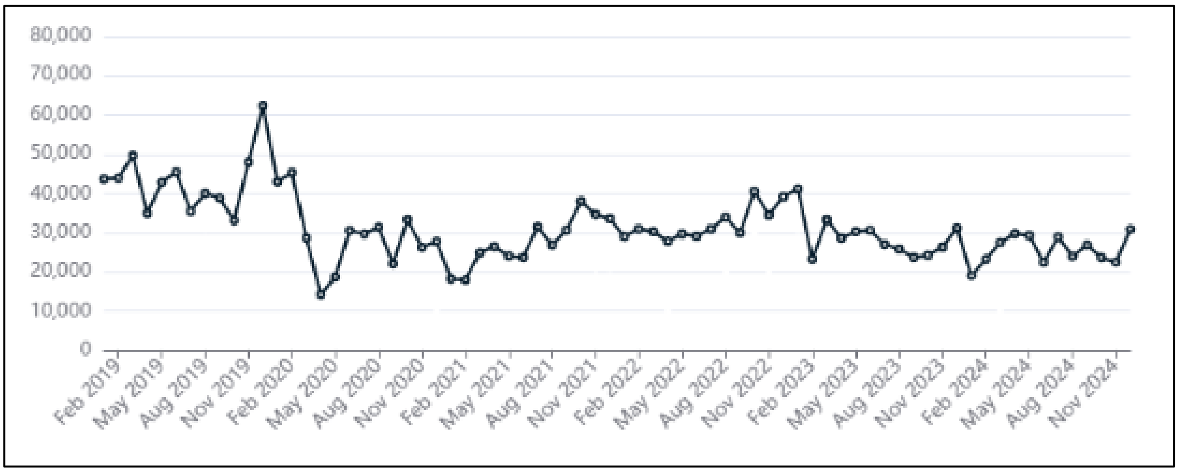


Source: MSCI Datscha

320. A central section of Verwood Town Centre on Ringwood Road, was sampled to obtain information on how footfall levels have changed between January 2019 and December 2024.

321. This shows that the centre was well used during the Covid-19 restrictions in early 2020 but fell as the restrictions were lifted. Footfall then recovered slightly but appears to have declined again since early 2023. Footfall movement in 2019 ranged between 33,100 and to 62,400 compared to between 19,100 and 30,900 per month in 2024.

Figure 50: Monthly Footfall Graph, January 2019 – December 2024, Ringwood Road

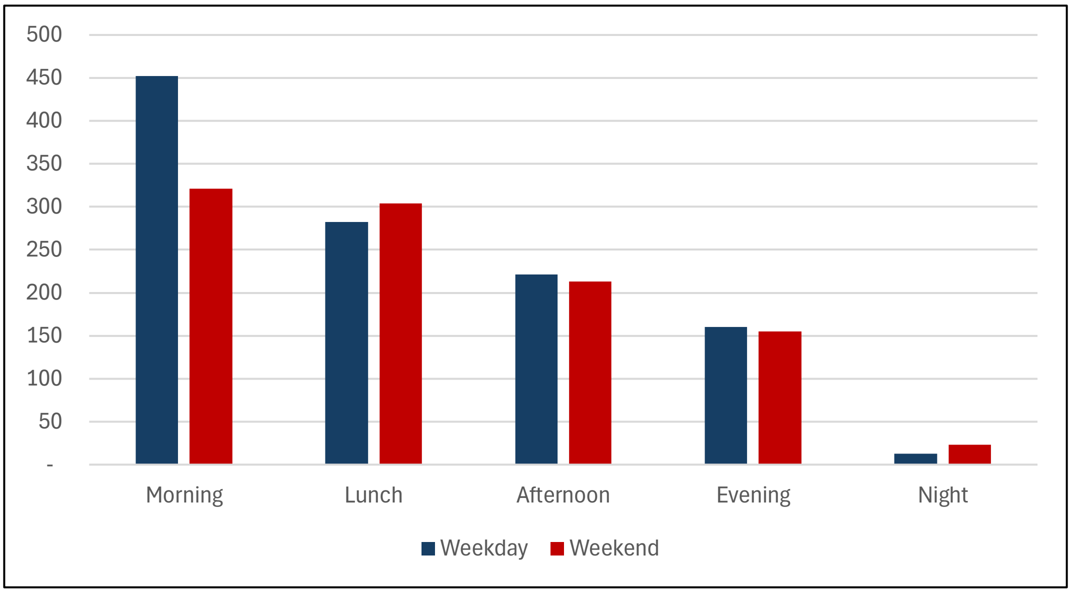


Source: MSCI Datscha

322. The evening and night time economy is insignificant in Verwood, as there are no public houses or bars.

323. The figure below shows how footfall levels differ across the day. It relates to footfall in August 2024 on Ringwood Road. As can be seen, footfall declines across the course of the day, with highest footfall seen on weekday mornings. Weekend footfall is similar to weekday but with slightly more visits during the lunch period. Nighttime activity is low.

Figure 51: Footfall by Time of Day, Ringwood Road, August 2024



Source: MSCI Datscha

Turnover and Trade Draw

324. The convenience turnover of Verwood Town Centre is very limited, as is the comparison trade. In contrast out-of-centre convenience stores appear to be trading very well and are attracting around 15.9% of trade inflow.

Policy Considerations for Verwood

325. Verwood is a successful centre but with a limited retail offer. It has the potential to diversify its offer further, and this should be supported by Dorset-wide policies that encourage investment/regeneration in the town centre including appropriate mixed use development. Developments that increase footfall during the day and evening periods should be supported in appropriate locations.

326. No changes to the town centre boundary are proposed.

Wareham (currently defined as a Town Centre)

327. Wareham is a historic town dating from Saxon times, with centre focused on the intersection of East, West, North and South Streets. It provides a total of 118 units of which 32.9% are in retail use, although retail accounts for around half of all floorspace.

328. The retail offer includes a large Sainsbury's supermarket to the rear of South Street, a smaller Co-op and a number of other national multiples as well as a large number of independents. The retail service, financial, professional & business offer is strong and vacancies are below average.

329. The centre also contains the Rex community cinema and hosts a number of events during the year.

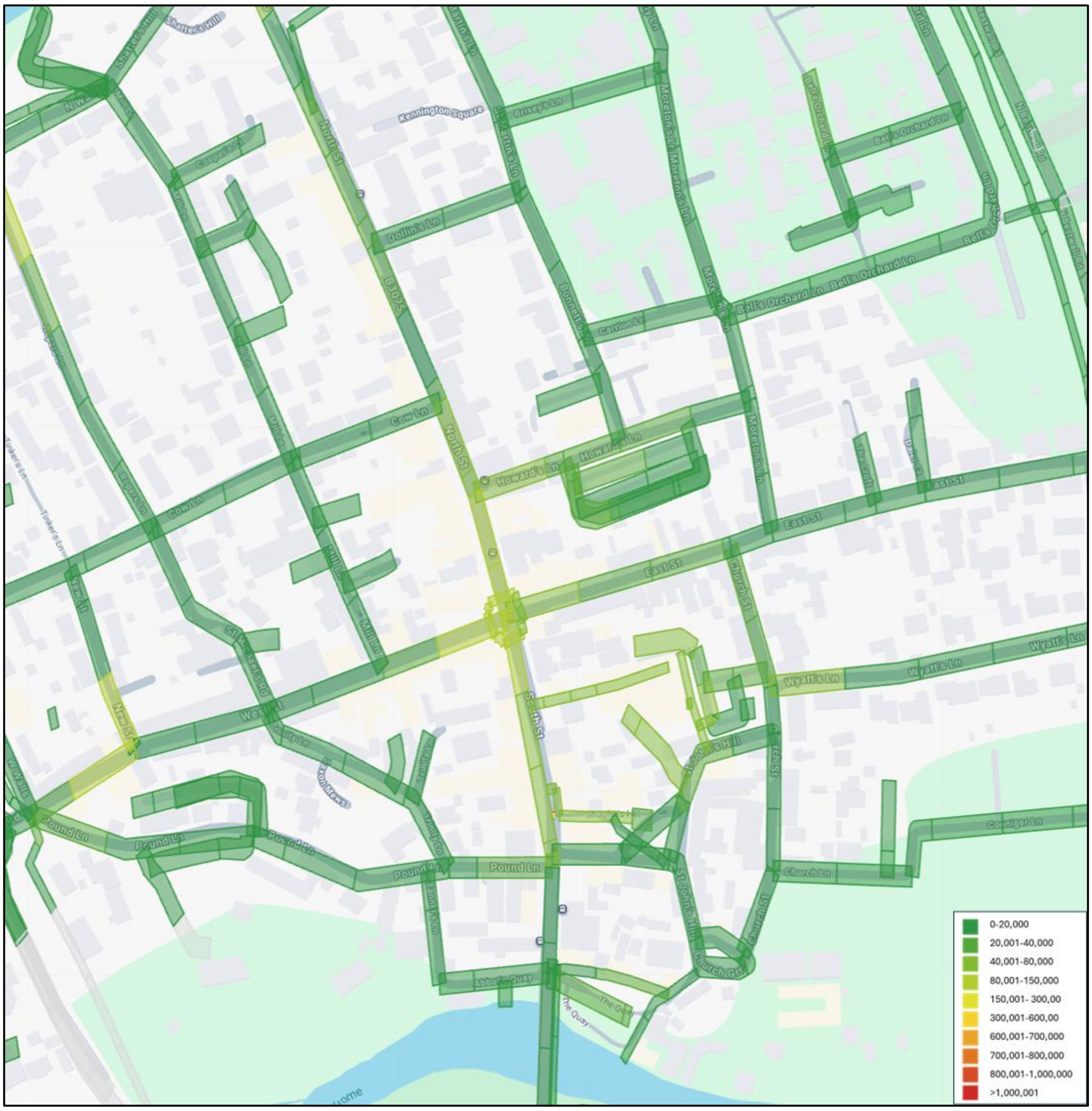
330. The 2025 Health Check report concludes:

"Wareham Town Centre supports a range of multiple and independent retailers, services, cafes and take-aways. As a service centre, it attracts people primarily from the Purbeck area, but it has a wider reach as a visitor destination. Wareham's public houses and restaurants add to the town centre offer, contributing to its use beyond 6pm."

Footfall

331. The figure below illustrates the pedestrian flows for Wareham in the form of a heat map showing total pedestrian movements for August 2024. Footfall is highest around the intersection of North, South, East and West Streets and the Sainsbury's supermarket and car park.

Figure 52: Wareham Heat Map, August 2024

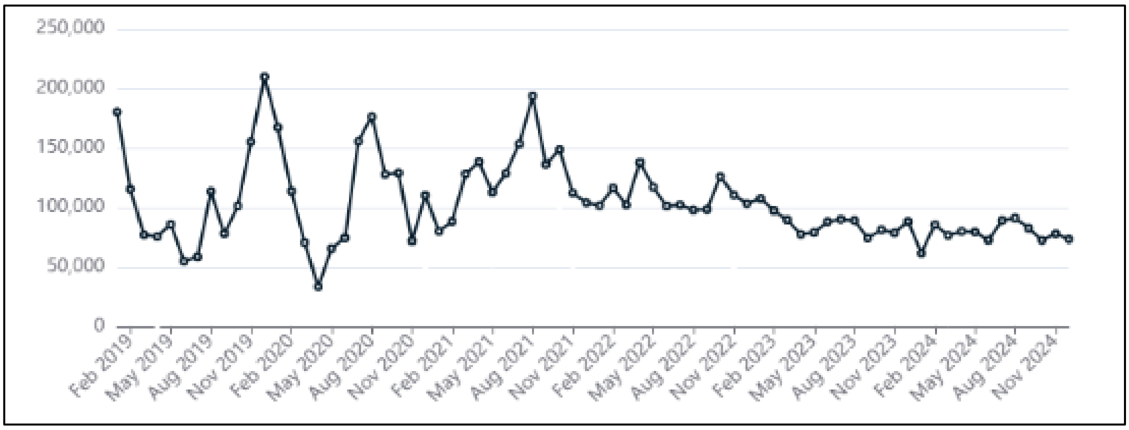


Source: MSCI Datscha

332. A central section of Wareham Town Centre on North Street was sampled to obtain information on how footfall levels have changed between January 2019 and December 2024.

333. As can be seen in the figure below, footfall varied considerably on a month by month basis prior to the Covid-19 pandemic with monthly movements ranging from 54,800 to 209,700. During 2020 and 2021 footfall appeared to be increasing but levels now appear to be in decline, with the monthly range in 2024 being between 61,600 and 91,200.

Figure 53: Monthly Footfall Graph, January 2019 – December 2024, North Street

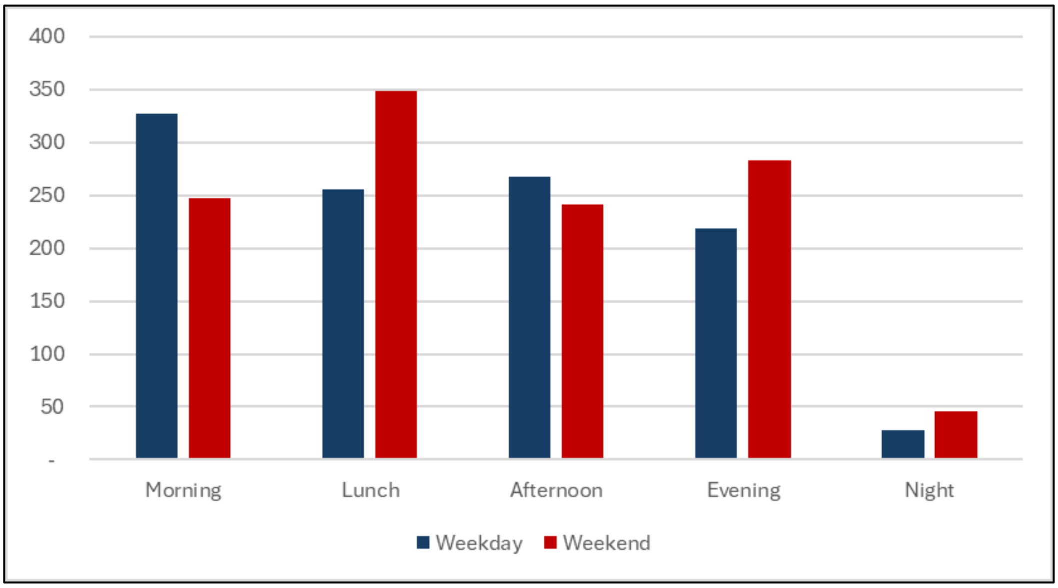


Source: MSCI Datscha

334. The evening and night time economy is moderate in Wareham with a few public houses spread across the centre. The centre will also benefit from the presence of the community cinema.

335. The figure below shows how footfall levels differ across the day. It relates to footfall in August 2024, on East Street. Unusually footfall is relative constant throughout the day and evening (5pm – 9pm) on weekdays but weekend activity is concentrated around the lunchtime and evening periods.

Figure 54: Footfall by Time of Day, East Street, August 2024



Source: MSCI Datscha

Turnover and Trade Draw

336. Wareham Town Centre's main draw is its convenience offer which is more than double that of comparison spend, despite the latter attracting a higher proportion of visitor spend. Spend outside the centre is currently limited.

Policy Considerations for Wareham

337. Wareham is a healthy centre offering a good diversity of uses and has low vacancy rates. It is anchored by a strong convenience offer and has a leisure and historic interest offer that attracts residents and visitors alike.

338. In terms of future policy no specific site allocations are proposed and the town centre boundary is reasonable. However, the potential for minor changes should be examined. The town centre should be supported by Dorset-wide policies that encourage investment/regeneration in the town centre including appropriate mixed use development. Developments that increase footfall during the day and evening periods should be supported in appropriate locations.

West Moors (currently defined as a District Centre)

339. West Moors District Centre serves the residential area to the north of Ferndown and comprises two modern parades of shops on either side of Station Road. The offer is split between the main group of units to the south and a slightly separated grouping to the north, near Riverside Road.

340. The centre contains 48 units of which 31.0% are in retail use. Occupiers are primarily independents but there is also a Tesco Express and Spar, providing the anchor convenience offer. Both the service retail, financial, professional & business offer and the leisure, community & medical offer are above average and vacancies are limited to a single unit.

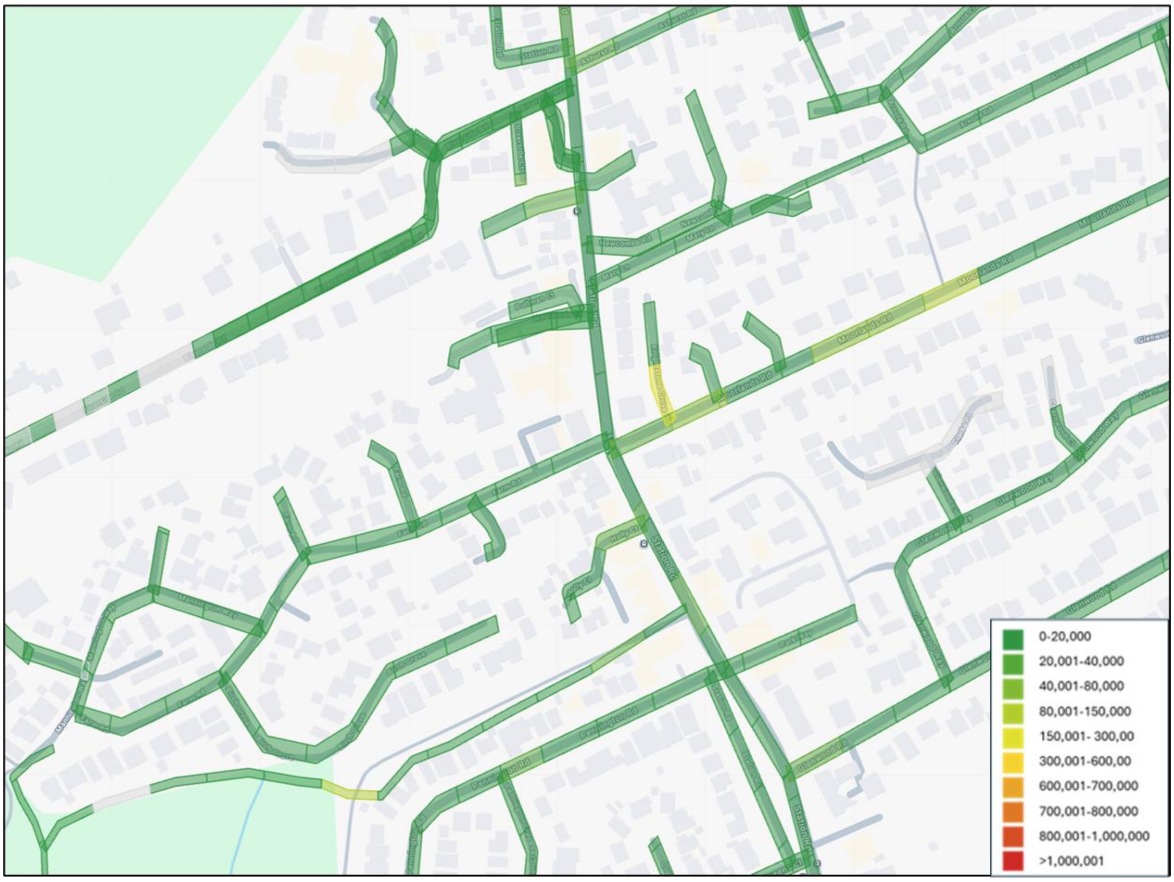
341. The 2025 Health Check report concludes:

"This town centre is small in size and has a limited range of shops and services that meet the day-to-day needs of local residents. Due its proximity to the country parks, this centre would have a wider reach than a typical centre. However, it would only benefit from passing trade, as there is no tourism accommodation nearby. There are two pubs, showing the centre is open beyond 6pm. Due to its size and the type of shops and services, the status of this town centre should be reviewed as it is currently designated as a district centre."

Footfall

342. The figure below illustrates the pedestrian flows for West Moors in the form of a heat map showing total pedestrian movements for August 2024. Footfall is relatively consistent across the centre .

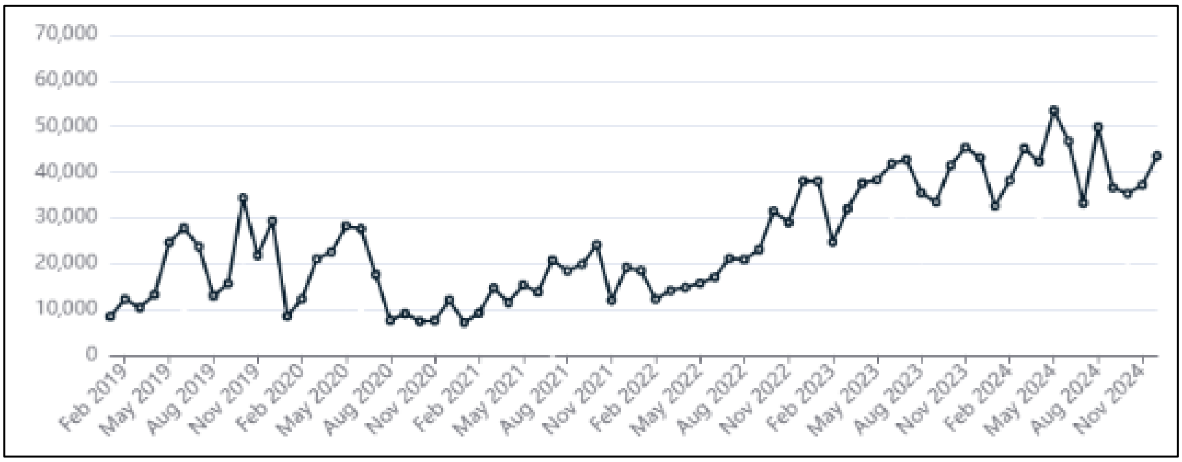
Figure 55: West Moors Heat Map August 2024



343. A central section of West Moors District Centre on Station Road was sampled to obtain information on how footfall levels have changed between January 2019 and December 2024.

344. As can be seen in the figure below, footfall was quite variable up to August 2020, with monthly movement in 2019 ranging between 8,500 and 34,400. Since then the centre has seen a consistent increase in footfall, with 2024 movements ranging from 32,600 to 53,500 per month.

Figure 56: Monthly Footfall Graph, January 2019 – December 2024, Station Road

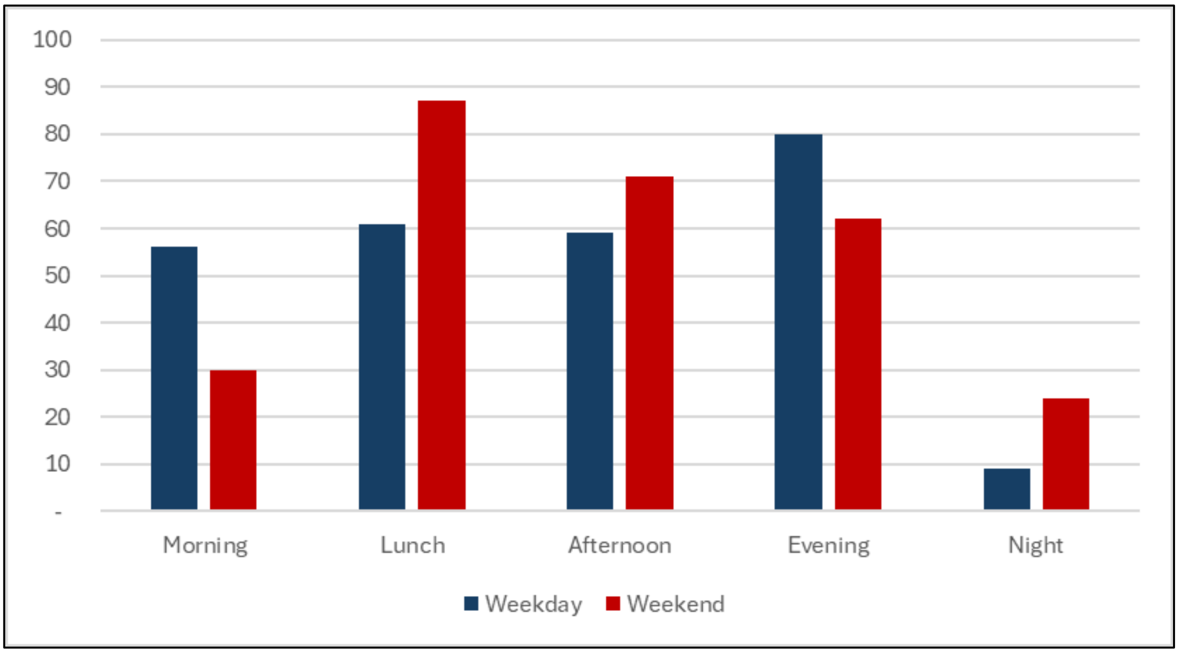


Source: MSCI Datscha

345. The evening and night time economy is limited in West Moors as there are no clubs or bars present and only a few pubs spread across the centre.

346. The figure below shows how footfall levels differ across the day. It relates to footfall in August 2024 on Station Road, which is relatively similar during the lunch, afternoon and evening (5pm – 9pm) periods on both weekdays and at weekends. Mornings tend to be quieter and the limited nighttime seen mainly occurs at weekends.

Figure 57: Footfall by Time of Day, Station Road, August 2024



Source: MSCI Datscha

Turnover and Trade Draw

347. West Moors has a limited retail spend, with a focus on convenience sales reflecting its current offer. Inflows account for 27.7% of convenience spend and 18.1% of comparison spend which will reflect the centre's proximity to the Dorset border with Hampshire.

Policy Considerations for West Moors

348. West Moors is currently defined as a District Centre and provides a range of main town centre uses. However, the convenience offer and total spend in the centre are limited.

349. In terms of future policy no specific site allocations or changes to town centre boundaries appear to be required. Instead the town centre should be supported by Dorset-wide policies that encourage investment/regeneration in the town centre including appropriate mixed use development.

West Parley (currently defined as a Local Centre)

350. West Parley is located between Ferndown and the Bournemouth/Poole conurbation to the south and is served by a small centre focused on New Road to the south of its junction with Christchurch Road at Parley Cross.

351. The centre has no defined boundary but there are a total of 27 units in the area, including 25.9% in retail use. This includes 2 national multiples, namely Tesco Express in the main parade of shops and a recently opened Lidl to the east. All other businesses are independents. The centre has a strong retail service, financial, professional & business offer and 2 vacancies.

352. The 2025 Health Check report concludes:

"West Parley is a centre that is spread along the main route between Wimborne and Ferndown, which are larger town centres with a bigger trade draw. West Parley provides a limited range of retail shops and services, and leisure uses to serve the day-to-day needs of its local residents. It is currently classed as a local centre. There is potentially a need to review this centre's retail status and if considered appropriate a town centre boundary should be defined."

Turnover and Trade Draw

353. The turnover of West Parley exceeds £10m with most spent at the two convenience stores. Over half of the convenience spend and just under half of comparison spend comes from outside of the Dorset Council area, reflecting the proximity of the centre to the Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole border.

Policy Considerations for West Parley

354. The recent opening of Lidl will have strengthened the retail offer in West Parley and a town centre boundary including the new unit should be defined.

355. No further site allocations are required and instead the town centre should be supported by Dorset-wide policies that encourage investment/regeneration in the town centre including appropriate mixed use development.

Weymouth – Abbotsbury Road (no current designation)

356. Abbotsbury Road is located within the suburb of Westham to the west of Weymouth Town Centre. The area includes a group of 20 commercial uses which have previously been proposed for designation as a Local Centre.

357. The units include 6 (30%) in retail use and an above average leisure, community & medical uses. Occupiers are primarily independents but include a Premier convenience store. There are currently 3 vacant units.

358. The 2025 Health Check report concludes:

"Abbotsbury Road is a proposed local centre, providing essential shops and services for local residents. However, residents would be dependent on accessing a wider range of shops and services in nearby Weymouth town centre. Due to its size, limited range of shops and services and proximity to Weymouth town centre, the status of this town centre should be reviewed and if considered appropriate a town centre boundary should be defined."

Turnover and Trade Draw

359. The retail turnover of the proposed centre is low, with most spend coming from convenience. There is also very little spending coming from outside the Dorset area.

Policy Considerations for Weymouth – Abbotsbury Road

360. Abbotsbury Road is a small group of commercial units that provide an important convenience and leisure offer for the residential population to the west of Weymouth Town Centre but has no wider draw. Given the lack of alternative provision in the immediate area it is recommended that a Local Centre designation is promoted and a town centre boundary defined.

Weymouth - Littlemoor (currently defined as a Local Centre)

361. Littlemoor is a residential suburb to the north of Weymouth with a purpose-built retail centre consisting of 13 units. The main offer comprises leisure, community & medical uses but it also includes 1 convenience and 3 comparison outlets. Operators are mainly independents but there are 3 national multiples represented including Morrisons Daily and Home Bargains who occupy the two largest units. There is just 1 small vacant unit.

362. The 2025 Health Check report concludes:

“Littlemoor Centre is designated as a local centre, providing essential shops and services for local residents. However, residents would be dependent on accessing a wider range of shops and services in nearby Weymouth town centre. Due to its size, limited range of shops and services and proximity to Weymouth town centre, the status of this town centre should be reviewed as it is currently designated as a local centre.”

Turnover and Trade Draw

363. Weymouth – Littlemoor has a relatively high comparison turnover for a local centre, which is likely to reflect the draw of the Home Bargains. The centre also attracts 16.2% of its convenience spend and 10.2% of comparison spend from outside the Dorset Council area.

Policy Considerations for Weymouth - Littlemoor

364. Although Littlemoor only contains a small number of units, it has a strong anchor in the form of Home Bargains and a relatively wide draw, suggesting its status as a Local Centre is appropriate and a town centre boundary should be defined.

365. In terms of future policy no specific site allocations are proposed. Instead the centre should be supported by Dorset-wide policies that encourage investment/regeneration in the town centre including appropriate mixed use development. Developments that increase footfall during the day and evening periods should be supported.

Weymouth – Lodmoor Hill (no current designation)

366. Lodmoor Hill is a suburb of Weymouth to the north of the town centre. There is a small group of shops and commercial uses located on either side of the B3159 Dorchester Road. These total 14 units with 35.7% in retail use, including a Tesco Express. The centre also has a strong leisure, community & medical offer and retail service, financial, professional & business provision. There are currently no vacant units.

367. The 2025 Health Check report concludes:

"This is a proposed local centre spread along a large road. It has a limited range of shops and services to meet residents' day to day needs. The status of this centre may need to be reviewed."

Turnover and Trade Draw

368. The main draw of Lodmoor Hill is its convenience retail offer which attracts 11.8% of spend from outside of Dorset, reflecting its location on the main approaches to Weymouth Town centre. Comparison spend is very limited.

Policy Considerations for Weymouth – Lodmoor Hill

369. Lodmoor Hill comprises a small number of commercial units on the B3159, and these provide day-to-day facilities and services for the local residential population and some passing trade. Given the latter, designation as a Local Centre would seem to be appropriate and a town centre boundary should be defined.

370. In terms of future policy no specific site allocations appear to be required. Instead the centre should be supported by Dorset-wide policies that encourage investment/regeneration in the town centre including appropriate mixed use development. Developments that increase footfall during the day and evening periods should be supported in appropriate locations.

Weymouth – Southill (no current designation)

371. Southill is a residential suburb to the north of Weymouth with a purpose-built retail centre consisting of 11 units. These include 1 convenience store operated by the Co-op and 2 comparison units, with the majority of units (54.5%) in leisure, community & medical uses, There are currently no vacancies in the centre.

372. The 2025 Health Check report concludes:

"Due to its size, limited range of shops and services and proximity to Weymouth town centre, the status of this proposed centre should be reviewed."

Turnover and Trade Draw

373. The turnover of the shops in Southill is limited (£1.95m), although some inflow of comparison spend is identified.

Policy Considerations for Weymouth - Southill

374. Southill is a purpose-built centre serving a distinct residential area. It has a limited retail turnover but provides important day-to-day facilities for the local population and as such designation as a Local Centre would seem to be appropriate and a town centre boundary should be defined.

375. In terms of future policy no specific site allocations appear to be required. Instead the centre should be supported by Dorset-wide policies that encourage investment/regeneration in the town centre including appropriate mixed use development. Developments that increase footfall during the day and evening periods should be supported in appropriate locations.

Weymouth – Wyke Regis (no current designation)

376. Wyke Regis is a residential area to the south of Weymouth and provides the main approach to the Isle of Portland.

377. There are 20 commercial units located on either side of Portland Road, including 2 convenience stores and 6 comparison units and these include 2 national multiples (Tesco Express and Boots). The units provide a strong leisure, community & medical offer, with a single unit currently vacant.

378. The 2025 Health Check report concludes:

"This proposed local centre is spread out along a large road, which has a limited range of shops and services to meet residents' day to day needs. The status of this proposed centre may need to be reviewed."

Turnover and Trade Draw

379. Wyke Regis attracts both convenience and comparison spend and its location on the main road network also means it sees between 11.8% and 16.6% inflows from outside the Dorset Council area.

Policy Considerations for Weymouth – Wyke Regis

380. Wyke Regis comprises a small number of commercial units on the A354 Portland Road, and these provide day-to-day facilities and services for the local residential population and some passing trade. Given the latter, designation as a Local Centre would seem to be appropriate and a town centre boundary should be defined.

381. In terms of future policy no specific site allocations appear to be required. Instead the centre should be supported by Dorset-wide policies that encourage investment/regeneration in the town centre including appropriate mixed use development. Developments that increase footfall during the day and evening periods should be supported in appropriate locations.

Weymouth (currently defined as a Town Centre)

382. Weymouth town centre is the largest in the Dorset Council area and serves a wide residential catchment as well as visitors to the area.

383. It contains a total of 573 units of which 28.4% are in retail use. Convenience provision is limited, but the comparison offer is high when considered in terms of floorspace. The centre also has good representation in the retail service, financial, professional & business and leisure, community & medical sectors. Vacancies are slightly below the UK average in terms of unit numbers but includes a number of larger units.

384. The number of national multiples in the centre is good, but it is known that the existing Marks & Spencer store is to close in 2027 and a new, larger store is to be developed at the out-of-centre Gateway Retail Park.

385. The 2025 Health Check report concludes:

“Weymouth town centre has a range of shops and services, restaurants and cafes, leisure and community uses, and offices on the upper floors. Outside of retail, a predominate space in Weymouth is for leisure use, catering for tourists. Due to its location opening onto a variety of beaches, Jurassic coastline and historic harbour, it attracts lots of tourists year-round.

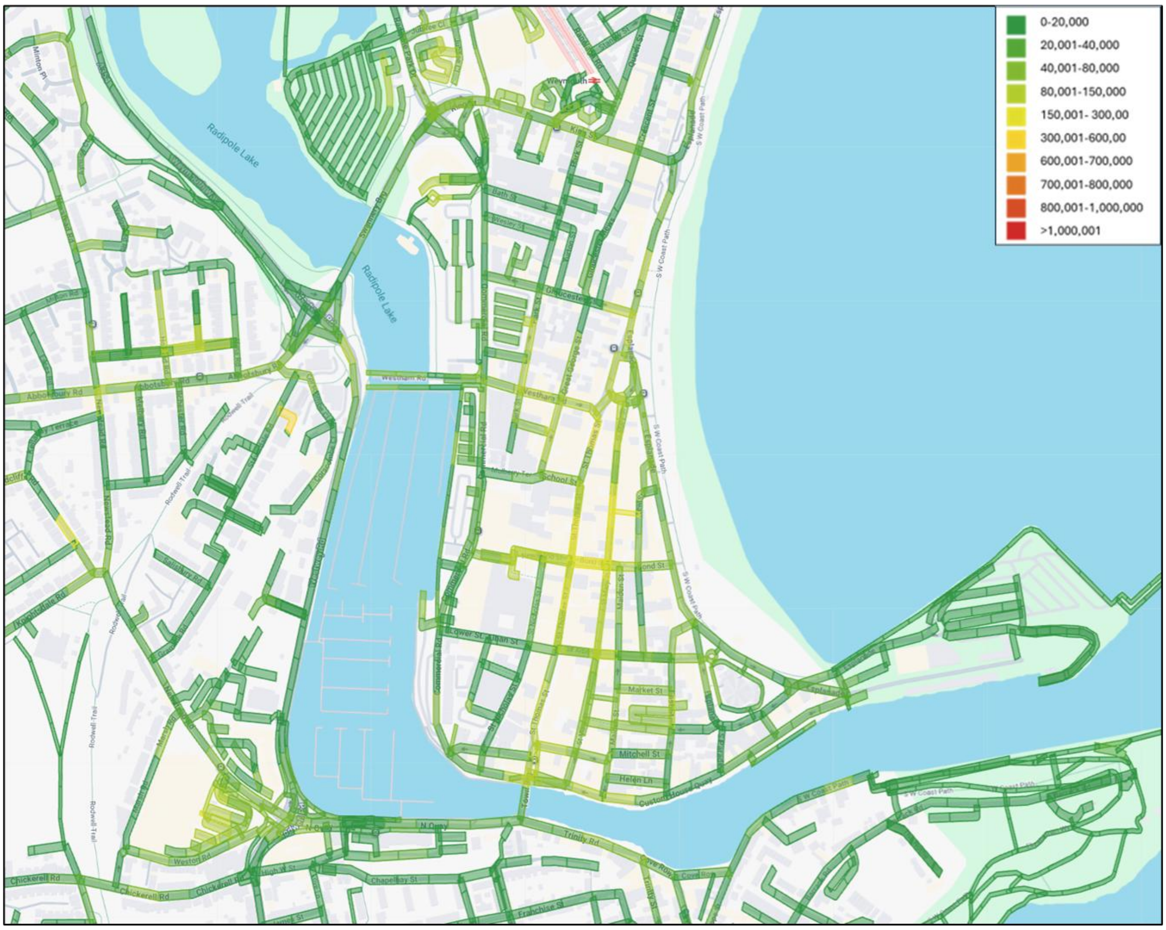
It has strong transport connections to Dorchester, Poole, Bournemouth, Bristol, and Southampton, and therefore would attract people outside of the area due to its leisure offer and good level of comparison shopping. Weymouth does have a range of public houses, bars, and restaurants that open at nighttime, which complements the town centre offer and ensures visitors use the town centre beyond 6pm.

It is notable that this town centre has lots of floorspace that is vacant, but there are lots of sites earmarked for development or being redeveloped.”

Footfall

386. The figure below illustrates the pedestrian flows for Weymouth in the form of a heat map showing total pedestrian movements for August 2024. Footfall is highest along St Thomas Street and St Mary Street, north of Bond Street but is also good extending south to Custom House Quay.

Figure 58: Weymouth Heat Map, August 2024

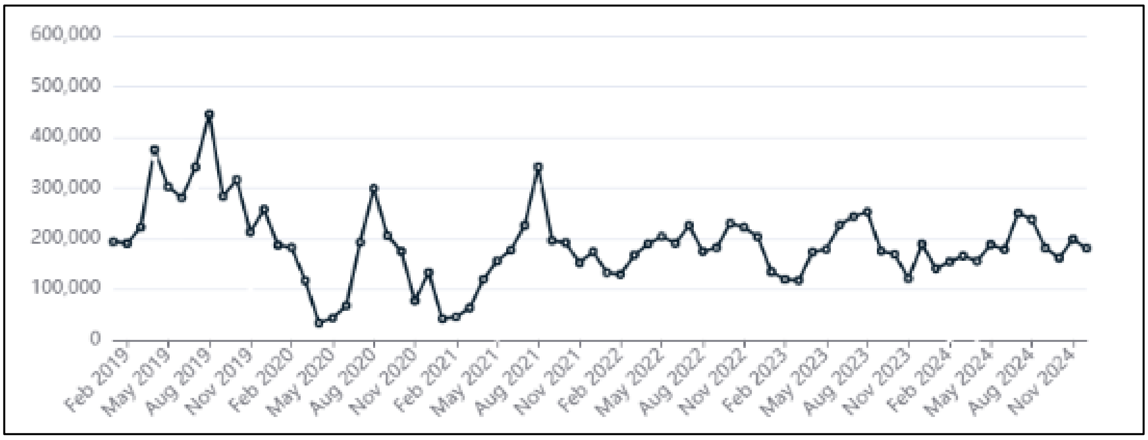


Source: MSCI Datscha

387. A central section of Weymouth Town Centre on St Thomas Street was sampled to obtain information on how footfall levels have changed between January 2019 and December 2024.

388. As can be seen in the figure below, footfall has decreased since 2019. Monthly movement in 2019 ranged between 190,500 and 445,100 in comparison to 140,600 and 250,000 in 2024. However, although the summer 2024 peak seems to be lower than in 2023 footfall appears to have improved during the course of the year.

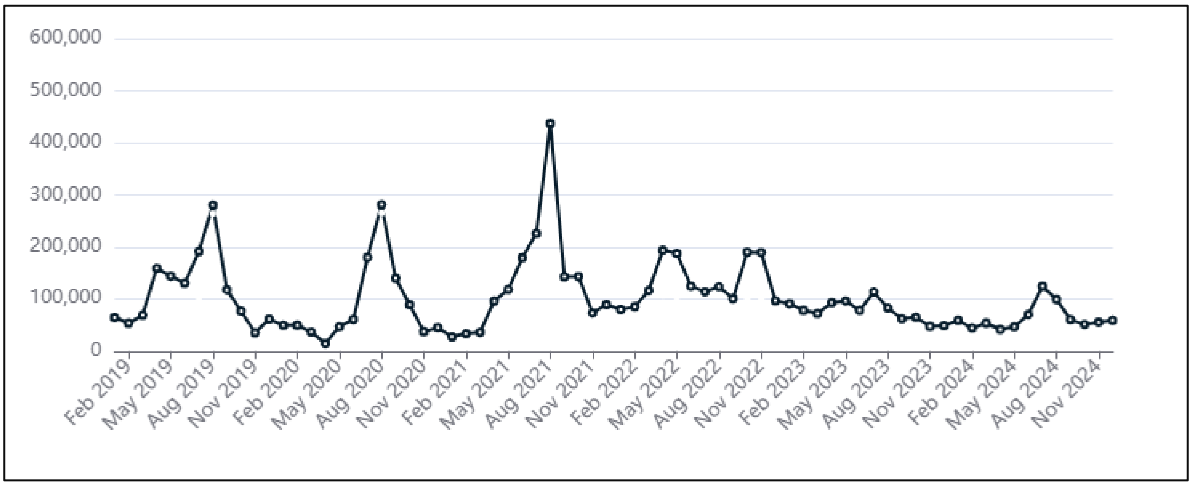
Figure 59: Monthly Footfall Graph, January 2019 – December 2024, St Thomas Street



Source: MSCI Datscha

389. Footfall data was also obtained for the Esplanade for the same period. This shows the post-pandemic boosts to tourism in both 2020 and 2021, which equalled or exceeded the 2019 levels. However, since then visitor numbers appear to have declined and footfall is lower than in the retail centre.

Figure 60: Monthly Footfall Graph, January 2019 – December 2024, Esplanade



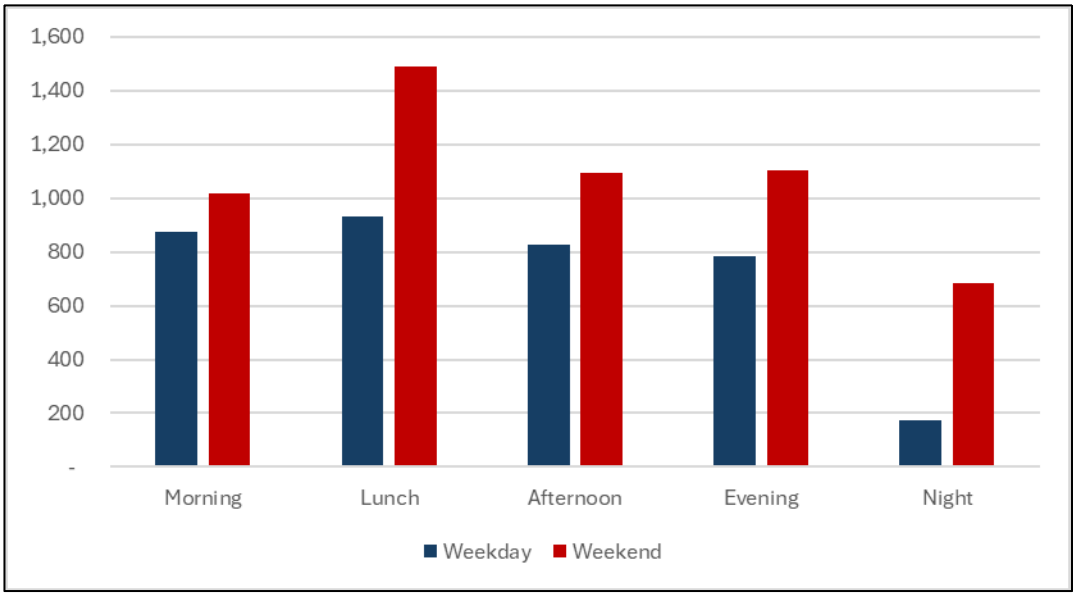
Source: MSCI Datscha

390. The evening and night time economy is vibrant in Weymouth as there a range of public houses and bars across the centre, with nightclubs focused to the south.

391. The figure below shows how footfall levels differ across the day. It relates to footfall in August 2024, on St Edmund Street. As can be seen, on weekdays,

footfall is relatively similar across the day and into the evening (5pm – 9pm). At weekends footfall is also good throughout the day but the area is busiest at lunchtime and also sees good levels of footfall into the nighttime.

Figure 61: Footfall by Time of Day, St Edmund Street, August 2024



Source: MSCI Datscha

Turnover and Trade Draw

392. Weymouth is the second largest centre in terms of spending in the Dorset area, with the majority of spend on comparison goods. Trade inflows from visitors represents an important part of the trade, with 33% of comparison spend and 38% of convenience spend coming from visitors.

Policy Considerations for Weymouth

393. Weymouth is a large and important town centre in Dorset serving a large residential catchment and meeting the needs of visitors to the area. It is generally considered to be healthy but the centre continues to need investment to ensure its successful regeneration.

394. Given the national trends that are seeing a decline in the demand for retail floorspace, it will be important to encourage a diverse mix of uses in the Town Centre in the future. This is likely to be secured through the redevelopment of key sites and more detailed plans and proposal will be brought forward through the emerging Weymouth Town Centre Masterplan which can consider both resident and tourist requirements and site specific opportunities.

395. The town centre boundary should be reviewed in the light of the Masterplan objectives and vision.

Wimborne Minster (currently defined as a Town Centre)

396. Wimborne Minster is a historic market town with the town centre offer focused around the Minster. The centre consists of 277 units with 28.1% in retail use. The centre also has a high proportion of service retail, financial, professional & business uses and a very low vacancy rate. The majority of occupiers are

independent businesses but the national multiple representation is good and includes a number of brands with ‘upmarket/ quality’ appeal.

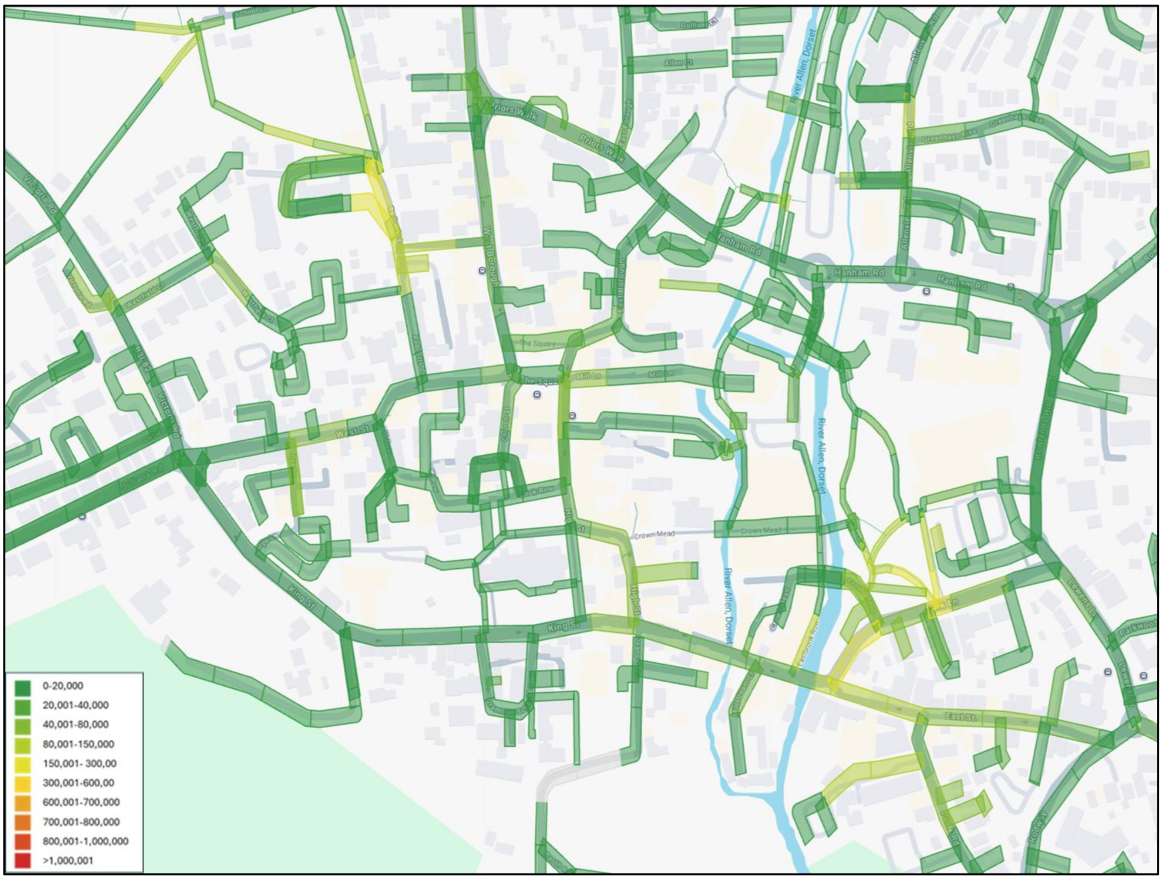
397. The 2025 Health Check report concludes:

“This is a vibrant town centre, that has a wide range of shops and services operating throughout the day and into the evening. It attracts higher end retailers, and it has a large presence of offices than a typical local centre. Further research is required into the use of car parks and how to improve road usage into and out of the town centre without negatively impacting existing business, and the vibrancy of the town centre.”

Footfall

398. The figure below illustrates the pedestrian flows for Wimborne in the form of a heat map showing total pedestrian movements for August 2024. Footfall is similar across the Town Centre, with local concentrations that may reflect the location of car parking.

Figure 62: Wimborne Minster Heat Map, August 2024

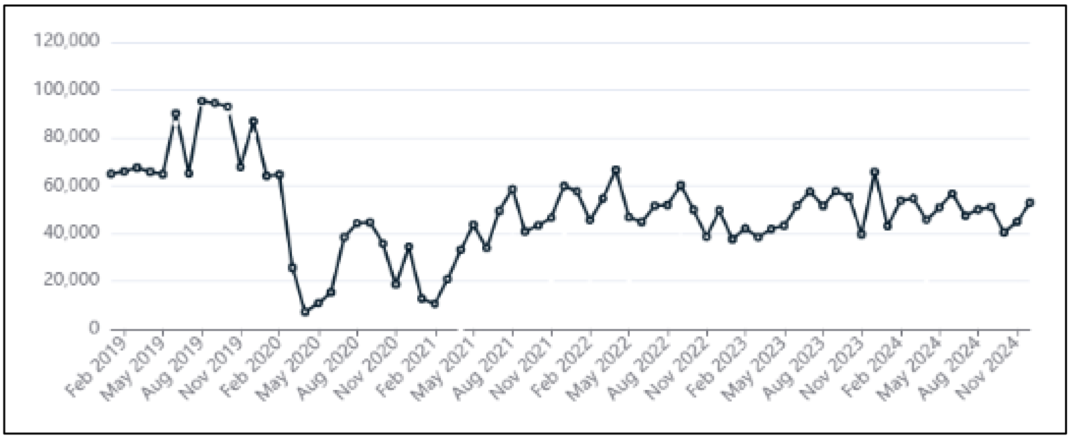


Source: MSCI Datscha

399. A central section of Wimborne Minster Town Centre on High Street was sampled to obtain information on how footfall levels have changed between January 2019 and December 2024.

400. As can be seen in the figure below, footfall has fallen since 2019 and not been able to recover to post-COVID 19 levels. Footfall ranged between 64,800 and 85,300 in 2019. Monthly movements have remained relatively since late 2021, and footfall ranged between 40,300 and 56,600 throughout 2024.

Figure 63: Monthly Footfall Graph, January 2019 – December 2024, High Street

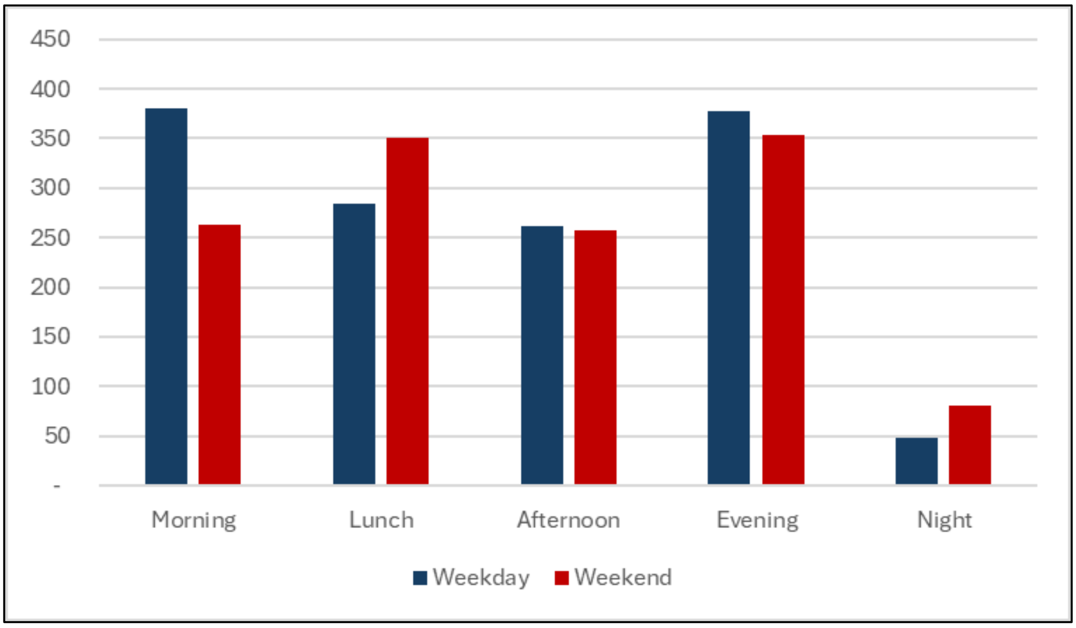


Source: MSCI Datscha

401. The evening and night time economy is moderate in Wimborne Minster with a few bars and public houses across the centre and the Tivoli Theatre located on West Borough.

402. The figure below shows how footfall levels differ across the day. It relates to footfall in August 2024 on West Borough. As can be seen, footfall across the day is relatively consistent, peaking in the morning and evening periods on weekdays. At weekends footfall is highest over lunch and in the evenings. Nighttime activity is generally low but is slightly higher at weekends.

Figure 64: Footfall by Time of Day, West Borough, August 2024



Source: MSCI Datscha

Turnover and Trade Draw

403. Wimborne Minster Town Centre is an important destination for comparison purchases for both residents and visitors and accounts for three-quarters of all comparison spend in the town. In contrast the convenience turnover is relatively limited with most spend going to out-of-centre locations. The convenience offer attract slightly less trade from visitors.

Policy Considerations for Wimborne Minster

404. Wimborne Minster is a successful town centre with a varied and 'upmarket' offer that provides for local residents and visitors. The town centre is relatively extensive but vacancies are low.

405. In terms of future policy no specific site allocations or changes to town centre boundaries appear to be required. Instead the town centre should be supported by Dorset-wide policies that encourage investment/regeneration in the town centre including appropriate mixed use development. Developments that increase footfall during the day and evening periods should be supported in appropriate locations, but activities with activity limited to the evening and night-time periods should be encouraged to locate away from the main retail and commercial areas

Wool (no current designation)

406. Wool is a historic village with a commercial offer of 17 units split between the historic High Stret to the east and more modern provision on Dorchester Road to the west.

407. There is a strong retail offer across the two locations with 52.9% of units in retail use. The offer also includes a good representation of retail service, financial, professional & business uses and there is a good representation of national multiples despite the small size of the centre. There are no current vacancies.

408. The 2025 Health Check report concludes:

"Wool town centre is a picturesque village that provides a limited range of retail shops and services, leisure and community use to serve the day-to-day needs of its local residents. The old and new parts of the village are located at a distance from each other. Residents would need to travel to other nearby larger town centres to access a wider range of shops and services. It has strong transport connections to Weymouth, Poole, Bournemouth, Bristol, Southampton and London, and therefore could attract people outside of the area in other nearby towns and villages and beyond. Therefore, it has the possible potential to grow due to its sustainable location subject to other land designations."

Turnover and Trade Draw

409. Wool's retail offer is relatively limited and primarily serves local residents. The majority of spend is on convenience goods.

Policy Considerations for Wool

410. The location of Wool, approximately 8kms from Wareham to the east means that ensuring day-to-day shopping needs are met locally is an important policy consideration. Designation of the commercial areas as a local centre is therefore recommended.

6. RETAIL AND LEISURE CAPACITY ASSESSMENTS

411. The retail and leisure capacity assessments are provided in Appendix B to this report, which also includes information on market share and expenditure flows both into and out of the Dorset area and the four Functional Areas. The assessments conclude that:

- There is no capacity (quantitative need) for additional convenience floorspace in Dorset during the period to 2035, nor does there appear to be capacity during the latter part of the plan period to 2043, although the figures for dates beyond 10 years need to be treated with a considerable degree of caution;
- There is no capacity (quantitative need) for additional comparison floorspace in Dorset during the period to 2035, nor does there appear to be capacity during the latter part of the plan period to 2043, although the figures for dates beyond 10 years need to be treated with a considerable degree of caution;
- The area is likely to see some increase in residents' spend on leisure activities, but the diverse nature of the offer and disparate nature of provision means it is unlikely that any emerging need could be met in a single planned location.

412. As a result it is not considered necessary for the Council to allocate new sites for the development of retail or leisure facilities during the plan period.

413. However, it is of note that the assessments of need (or lack of it) make no allowance for existing commitments. This would suggest that there is no quantitative need for the approved schemes, although this is not a consideration when planning permission is being sought.

414. In practice however, the quantitative need for additional retail floorspace has to be considered alongside qualitative needs and other policy considerations. For retail provision this will mean considering the location of future housing growth and population increases. There is also likely to be a continuing demand for new provision either as a result of identified gaps in retail provision, or commercial operator requirements. This includes needs arising from existing floorspace being unsuitable for current occupier requirements. There will therefore remain qualitative or localised requirements for additional retail provision, although this may not always be associated with an increase in total retail floorspace.

415. The implications for existing retail commitments and allocations is that in many cases they will continue to be required, either because they are already linked to specific operator requirements or because of wider redevelopment/regeneration or new floorspace provision requirements. Given the nature of the retail market however, allocations or permissions which previously envisaged the inclusion of retail floorspace are likely to come forward with a different mix of uses or units sizes – consistent with the potential for change permitted by the introduction of Use Class E.

416. There is also expected to be some requirements for new leisure facilities across Dorset but with the greatest interest being in the larger towns of Weymouth and Dorchester and those with high levels of visitor numbers. This would be expected to assist in the reoccupation/re-use of building no longer suitable or required for their original use and will support mixed-use regeneration proposals.

417. With the main leisure spend being on F&B, the demand from new occupiers and potentially new business offers is likely to be greatest in this area. However, with uses falling under Class E it is unlikely that policies specific to F&B uses would be appropriate. However, the Council may wish to consider whether related Sui Generis uses including hot food takeaways should be the subject of a specific planning policy (if not introduced in the next revision of the NPPF).

418. Other leisure uses are likely to occupier-led and reflect new market opportunities. As such it is unlikely that planning policies to allocate sites for such uses would be appropriate but policies could encourage such development on town centre or allocated development sites.

419. The Council should therefore ensure that planning policies support such proposals within town centres and seek to maintain and enhance the vitality of centres both during the day and, where appropriate into the evening.

7. TOWN CENTRE POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

420. This final section provides advice and recommendations to help Dorset Council ensure that the policy requirements set out in the NPPF are met in the emerging Local Plan and that appropriate town centre policies are included to ensure that the growth, management and adaptation of Dorset's town centres is effectively planned for and managed.

421. The advice focuses on the next five to ten year period in accordance with the advice set out in the current NPPF and the Planning Practice Guidance (PPG), although we would note that national planning policy requirements may change in the near future. In particular, the draft NPPF sets out slightly different requirements for planning policy and is proposing that policies set out in the new NPPF will not need to be repeated at local level.

422. The current NPPF states that planning policies and decisions should support the role that town centres play "…at the heart of local communities" and should promote the long term vitality and viability of centres, "…by allowing them to grow and diversify in a way that can respond to rapid changes in the retail and leisure industries, allows a suitable mix of uses (including housing) and reflects their distinctive characters" (paragraph 90a).

423. Our policy and strategy advice is based on assessments of the quantitative and qualitative need for new retail (comparison and convenience goods) floorspace and commercial leisure uses over the forecast period. These assessments of need have shown that a significant quantum of new floorspace is not required but qualitative needs and regeneration requirements will mean some new provision will be required during the lifetime of the new Local Plan. As a general principle these needs should be met in town centres where possible, in accordance with the sequential test. However, policies also need to consider the appropriateness of a centre in terms of its role and function in the retail hierarchy, local needs and commercial reality.

424. It is against this background that we provide the Council with our recommendations first looking at the policy requirements set out in the NPPF including the policies and strategies likely to be required for specific centres.

425. The following key policy themes are therefore considered:

- Network and Hierarchy of centres (NPPF, para 90(a))
- Meeting needs and site allocations (NPPF, para 90(d)
- Extent of town centres and primary shopping areas (NPPF, para 90(b))
- Strategies for the future of each centre (NPPF, para 90(b)
- Markets (NPPF, para 90(c))
- Retail and leisure impact thresholds (NPPF, para 94).

Network And Hierarchy Of Town Centres

426. The current adopted local plans for Dorset include a number where the retail hierarchy for the former administrative areas has been defined, but this is not the case for all areas (see Section 2 above). A key requirement of the new Local Plan therefore will be to define a new retail hierarchy (separate from the settlement

hierarchy) based on their current role, function and individual characters, whilst ensuring the network is appropriate for future needs.

427. A proposed retail hierarchy was set out in the 2021 draft Local Plan, but this has been reviewed in the context of the latest information on the health of the centres and their current market shares and trade draw. Information on the size of existing and proposed centres and their convenience and comparison turnover is summarised below, sorted by total retail sales.

Figure 65: Dorset Centres - Size (in Units) and 2025 Retail Sales

Retail Location	Number of Units			Turnover 2025		
	All	Convenience	Comparison	Convenience	Comparison	All
Dorchester - Town Centre	424	16	107	£29.26	£77.72	£106.98
Weymouth - Town Centre	573	31	132	£8.54	£58.95	£67.49
Gillingham - Town centre	153	7	22	£38.24	£11.14	£49.38
Bridport - Town centre	207	15	69	£21.33	£23.93	£45.26
Ferndown - Town Centre	161	7	30	£29.58	£8.45	£38.03
Sherborne - Town centre	175	10	70	£17.19	£20.60	£37.79
Wimborne Minster - Town Centre	277	17	61	£7.41	£27.13	£34.54
Blandford Forum - Town Centre	218	12	54	£14.15	£12.94	£27.09
Upton	25	2	2	£23.22	£2.80	£26.02
Wareham - Town Centre	118	6	33	£17.31	£8.04	£25.35
Swanage - Town Centre	234	11	74	£13.29	£8.55	£21.84
Dorchester - Queen Mother Square, Poundbury	26	2	6	£12.73	£8.86	£21.59
Corfe Mullen	31	3	3	£14.93	£4.93	£19.86
Portland - Easton Square, Easton	64	3	17	£17.47	£1.59	£19.07
Weymouth - Littlemoor Centre	13	1	3	£1.37	£17.42	£18.79
Shaftesbury - Town centre	144	13	47	£1.45	£11.60	£13.05
West Parley	27	2	5	£9.85	£1.07	£10.92
Stalbridge	15	3	3	£8.41	£0.76	£9.17
Lyme Regis - Town centre	142	11	42	£4.33	£4.17	£8.50
Sturminster Newton - Town centre	90	9	18	£5.07	£3.16	£8.22
Beaminster	47	5	8	£4.94	£2.75	£7.69
Verwood - Town Centre	80	4	13	£3.06	£4.14	£7.20
West Moors	48	5	10	£4.70	£1.73	£6.44
Wool	17	4	5	£5.23	£1.16	£6.39
Weymouth - Portland Road, Wyke Regis	20	2	6	£3.48	£2.77	£6.26
Weymouth - Abbotsbury Road, Westham	20	3	3	£2.41	£0.72	£3.12
Bere Regis	2	0	0	£1.96	£0.64	£2.60
Lytchett Matravers	5	2	0	£2.21	£0.09	£2.30
Weymouth - Lodmoor Hill	14	3	2	£2.10	£0.09	£2.18
Weymouth - Southill Centre	11	1	2	£0.62	£1.32	£1.95
Marnhull	14	2	2	£1.40	£0.07	£1.46
West Bay	56	2	11	£0.11	£1.29	£1.40
Portland - Fortuneswell	25	1	6	£1.21	£0.01	£1.22
Corfe Castle	11	3	4	£0.46	£0.43	£0.89
Chickerell	5	1	1	N/A	N/A	N/A

428. Based on the size of the centres, their mix of uses, turnover, resident and visitor draw and the geographic distribution of the centres, it is our professional opinion that the following hierarchy of centres would be appropriate. This may however need to be reviewed if major residential development is proposed within the catchment of a particular centre:

- Tier 1 (Major Town Centres) – Dorchester, Weymouth
- Tier 2 (Town Centres) – Beaminster, Blandford Forum, Bridport, Ferndown, Gillingham, Lyme Regis, Shaftesbury, Sherborne, Sturminster Newton, Swanage, Verwood, Wareham, Wimborne
- Tier 3 (District Centre) – Corfe Mullen, Dorchester - Poundbury, Portland – Easton, Upton, West Moors, West Parley
- Tier 4 (Local Centre) – Bridport – West Bay, Portland – Fortuneswell, Stalbridge, Weymouth – Abbotsbury Road, Weymouth – Littlemoor,

Weymouth – Lodmoor Hill, Weymouth – Southill, Weymouth – Wyke Regis, Wool.

429. We consider that in most cases the reason for the suggested hierarchy is obvious but the justification for some of the decisions is provided below:

- Tier 1 (Major Town Centres) and Tier 2 (Town Centres) – whether there is a requirement to distinguish between Dorchester and Weymouth and the other town centres is likely to depend on the wording of proposed planning policies in the emerging Local Plan. However, it is considered that it may be helpful to recognise the particular role and function of the two largest town centres in Dorset, either in terms of the retail hierarchy or specific town centre policies for each given these would be expected to be the focus for a greater range and diversity of uses and mixed-use regeneration. It is also considered that Primary Shopping Areas (or equivalent) are likely to be required for the two Major Centres;
- Beaminster (Tier 2) – Beaminster is a smaller town centre but its geographical position means that it serves a separate catchment to other centres in Dorset and as such this should be supported. Defining the centre as a Tier 2 centre would assist with this, especially if the town centre boundary were to be reviewed/expanded as well;
- Stalbridge (Tier 4) – The retail and town centre offer in Stalbridge with the exception of the Dike & Sons supermarket is very limited and as such provides an offer more like that of a local centre than a district centre;
- Wool (Tier 4) – Whilst the offer in Wool is limited, the location of the village means that residents need access to day-to-day shopping facilities locally and designating a local centre will assist this;

430. This proposed retail hierarchy would leave the following locations with no designated town centre, i.e. it is considered that the offer provided is limited and serves a local catchment only. As such the centres equate to 'small parades of shops of purely neighbourhood significance' (NPPF, Glossary):

- Bere Regis
- Chickerell
- Corfe Castle
- Lytchett Matravers
- Marnhull (to be reviewed if Tess Square proceeds)

431. Notwithstanding this, it is clearly important from accessibility and sustainability perspectives that existing retail and service provision in these and similar smaller settlements within Dorset are protected from the impact of inappropriate out-of-centre retail and leisure developments. It is therefore suggested that the emerging Local Plan should include a policy linked to the settlement hierarchy, that looks to require consideration of the impact of retail and leisure proposals on such facilities and how that may affect self-containment, accessibility and sustainability should impacts have the potential to result in store/business closures in these smaller settlements.

432. This could be linked to how lower order settlements are identified, with current retail and service provision being one of the factors likely to contribute to a

settlement being seen as ‘sustainable’. This would be a similar approach to that adopted in the Plymouth & South West Devon Joint Local Plan, when considering settlements in the more rural areas.

433. In summary the proposed changes to the retail hierarchy in Dorset would be as follows.

Figure 66: Proposed Changes to Dorset's Retail Hierarchy

Centre	Current Local Plan Designation	Proposed Designation
Beaminster	Larger Local Centre	Town Centre
Bere Regis	Local Centre	None
Bridport – West Bay	Larger Local Centre	Local Centre
Chickerell	Larger Local Centre	None
Corfe Castle	Local Centre	None
Corfe Mullen	Local Centre	District Centre
Dorchester – Poundbury	None	District Centre
Lytchett Matravers	Local Centre	None
Marnhull	None	None (to be reviewed if Tess Square is developed)
Portland – Easton	Larger Local Centre	District Centre
Portland – Fortuneswell	Larger Local Centre	Local Centre
Stalbridge	None	Local Centre
Upton	Town Centre	District Centre
West Parley	Local Centre	District Centre
Weymouth – Abbotsbury Road	None	Local Centre
Weymouth – Lodmoor Hill	None	Local Centre
Weymouth – Southill	None	Local Centre
Weymouth – Wyke Regis	None	Local Centre
Wool	None	Local Centre

Meeting Needs And Site Allocations

434. The quantitative and qualitative needs assessments have confirmed that there is limited quantitative need for additional floorspace in Dorset during the plan period, although this excludes any consideration of requirements that may arise as a result of major new housing developments. This will need to be considered separately when the location and scale of residential development is known. Advice can then be provided of the appropriate provision of local shopping facilities within any major new housing areas.

435. However, in addition to new provision to serve new communities and a number of schemes that are already commitments, it would be expected that there will continue to be a need for some new development as a result of identified qualitative needs. These may be linked to the need to reconfigure/refurbish existing outdated space, or to meet the new space requirements of future occupiers. Therefore, whilst there is no requirements for policies to identify new sites for development, policies should encourage appropriate development/redevelopment in town centres that would support their growth and adaptation in accordance with the NPPF.

Town Centre and Primary Shopping Area Boundaries

436. Under the NPPF, the town centre is an area defined on the local authority's policies map, and includes the Primary Shopping Area (PSA) where retail development is concentrated and areas predominantly occupied by main town centre uses within or adjacent to the PSA.

437. Both areas are important in terms of applying the sequential and impact tests set out in the NPPF.

438. However, the introduction of Class E and changes to the NPPF which have removed the requirements to define retail frontages, means that the control of shopping and service uses within central areas is now legally less enforceable given that a change of use within Class E does not constitute development and will therefore not require planning permission.

439. As a result, the relevance of a PSA is also reduced and it is noted that the draft NPPF currently the subject of consultation proposes its removal. As a result it is not recommended that PSAs will need to be defined for Dorset centres, other than Dorchester and Weymouth. However, even in these two centres the designation may be more appropriate as a Central Activity or Commercial Area, rather than referencing 'shopping'.

440. Town centre boundaries will be required and will need to be directly related to the policies contained in the plan or other policy initiatives such as Town Centre Masterplans, Strategies or Regeneration Frameworks. Existing boundaries should therefore be reviewed once draft policy wording has been agreed.

441. Based on the boundaries shown in the Council's Town Centre Health Checks 2023/24 (published December 2025), consideration should be given to possible amendments as indicated below:

Figure 67: Town Centre Boundaries and Proposed Changes

Centre	Town Centre Boundary Status	Potential Amendments to Health Check Plan Boundaries
Beaminster	Proposed	Town Centre Boundary required - Consider inclusion of adjacent commercial units
Bere Regis	Defined in LP	Not required if no longer designated as a Local Centre
Blandford Forum	Defined in NP	
Bridport	Defined in LP	
Bridport – West Bay	Proposed	Town Centre Boundary required
Chickerell	Defined in NP	Not required if no longer designated as a Local Centre
Corfe Castle	Defined in LP	Not required if no longer designated as a Local Centre
Corfe Mullen	None	Town Centre Boundary required
Dorchester	Defined in LP	
Dorchester – Poundbury	None	Town Centre Boundary required
Ferndown	Defined in LP	
Gillingham	Defined in NP	Review boundary and consider exclusion of Station Road area
Lyme Regis	Defined in LP	
Lytchett Matravers	Defined in NP	Not required if not designated as a Local Centre
Marnhull	None	Not required if not designated as a Local Centre
Portland – Easton	Defined in NP	
Portland – Fortuneswell	Defined in NP	Review boundary and consider exclusion of non-commercial uses to the south
Shaftesbury	Defined in NP	
Sherborne	Proposed	
Stalbridge	None	Town Centre Boundary required

Sturminster Newton	Defined in NP	Review boundary and consider inclusion of Harts of Stur
Swanage	Defined in LP	
Upton	Defined in LP	Review Town Centre Boundary
Verwood	Defined in LP	
Wareham	Defined in LP	
West Moors	Defined in LP	
West Parley	None	Town Centre Boundary required
Weymouth	Defined in LP	Review boundary once policies drafted and in the light of Masterplan proposals
Weymouth – Abbotsbury Road	None	Town Centre Boundary required
Weymouth - Littlemoor	Proposed	Town Centre Boundary required
Weymouth – Lodmoor Hill	Proposed	Town Centre Boundary required
Weymouth – Southill	Proposed	Town Centre Boundary required
Weymouth – Wyke Regis	Proposed	Town Centre Boundary required
Wimborne Minster	Defined in LP	
Wool	Defined in LP	

Town Centre Strategies

442. As the future demand for retail and other main town centre uses has the possibility of being the subject of considerable change during the plan period, and there is a limit on the extent to which planning policy can control end uses, it is important that the Council's ambitions for a centre and the long term objectives are clearly communicated to ensure that development proposals can be co-ordinated in a way that contributes to the long-term goals. This is best done through the development of town centre strategies that can consider the wider development opportunities and policy aims for a town centre.

443. The preparation of town centre strategies, masterplans or similar is one way this can be achieved. Such plans can assist in identifying the areas where new investment is most likely to be required or accommodated and provide broad guidance on end uses in particular areas, having regard to existing land uses and

compatibility. Strategies can also consider phasing and priorities, whilst avoiding too detailed site allocations that may not be appropriate for the whole life of the plan period or changing commercial and customer demands.

444. In the case of Dorset we would suggest that the priority for preparing such strategies would be the town centres (Tiers 1 and 2), although we note that work on some centres such as Weymouth is on-going. Some Neighbourhood Plans have also looked at the vision for their town centres. The intention to prepare such strategies should be included within the emerging plan, although the exact format for their subsequent delivery is likely to vary depending on local circumstances.

Site Allocations

445. Site allocations in the current local plans comprise two main types:

- Allocations relating to specific sites, including those in town centres; and
- Allocations for new neighbourhood provision linked to new housing developments.

446. The latter will need to be reviewed in the light of recent development, existing commitments and future residential allocations, but we would recommend that policies for major new housing areas continue to require the inclusion of appropriate retail and service provision.

447. For specific site allocations including those being brought forward from existing plans, policy wording will need to be reviewed to ensure it reflects the current visions and objectives of the Council and provides an appropriate degree of flexibility. This is likely to mean encouraging a range and mix of uses on sites.

448. However, given the need to ensure commercially viable schemes can be brought forward throughout the plan period, detailed specifications on the use and floorspace targets are unlikely to be appropriate. It will also be necessary to consider whether there is sufficient certainty now as to how allocated sites should be brought forward. If there is then this can be reflected in the emerging Local Plan. Where timescales, objectives or other matters may be less certain, the Local plan may instead need to identify the site or area as one to be considered further in a future town centre strategy document.

Markets

449. Markets play an important role in many town centres, adding to their variety and providing economic and social benefits as outlined above. This is especially true for Dorset given many of the town centres have evolved from market towns.

450. At the present time, only the North Dorset LP includes a policy relating specifically to markets and the Council may wish to extend this support to markets across the Council area. However, it should be noted that the current NPPF policy support for such activities is being proposed for removal in the draft NPPF. The reason for this is given in the accompanying Consultation document as *“The specific reference to markets in the current Framework has been omitted as their existence is not controlled directly by planning, but we would expect opportunities to create or strengthen markets to be a consideration in the wider strategies for town centres*

mentioned above" (draft NPPF Policy TC1, page 55). This limitation may need to be reflected in any Dorset-wide policy.

Retail And Leisure Impact Thresholds

451. The NPPF requires an impact assessment to be undertaken for "*retail and leisure development outside town centres, which are not in accordance with an up-to-date Local Plan*" (paragraph 94). Local planning authorities should require an impact assessment if the development is over a proportionate, locally set floorspace threshold, but if there is no local threshold, then the NPPF default threshold (2,500 sqm gross) should be applied. To help inform the setting of an appropriate impact threshold, the PPG (Paragraph: 015. Reference ID: 2b-015-20190722) also states that it will be important to consider the following:

- scale of proposals relative to town centres;
- the existing viability and vitality of town centres;
- cumulative effects of recent developments;
- whether local town centres are vulnerable;
- likely effects of development on any town centre strategy; and
- impact on any other planned investment.

452. At present the adopted Local Plans covering Dorset apply different thresholds across the former local administrative areas, with some varying within a former authority area. We consider that this approach can be confusing where the location of a retail or leisure development is not closely linked to a specific settlement and therefore advise that a uniform impact threshold would be preferable in the emerging Local Plan.

453. We also consider that, given the size of many of Dorset's town centres, a threshold at the lower end of the scale would be appropriate and suggest that this should be set at 280 sqm net (or 330 sqm gross) which consistent with the Sunday Trading Act's definition of a 'large shop'. It is the Government's intention through this Act to protect smaller, independent stores which are perceived to be financially weaker and therefore require protection from unfair competition from the major supermarket operators. In general terms therefore it follows that proposals for retail or leisure floorspace over 280 sqm net may not be a purely local facility and may have the ability to draw trade from outside of their immediate local catchment with potential consequent impacts on existing stores and centres.

454. This uniform threshold will provide the Council with greater flexibility to robustly assess the individual ('solus') and cumulative impacts of any smaller commercial floorspace (including convenience stores) proposed outside of existing centres that could compete 'like-against-like' with existing, planned and proposed investment in the Town, District or Local Centres. However, it should be noted that all impact assessments should be undertaken in a proportionate and locally appropriate way (PPG, para 017 Reference ID: 2b-017-20190722) and therefore a smaller scale proposal within the catchment of one of the higher tier centres, would not require the same level of detail as a larger retail or leisure proposal that has the potential to impact on a wider area. As a result the Council may wish to encourage engagement to scope out details of the required assessment within the policy wording.

Other Policy Considerations

455. In addition to the above, we would suggest that, unless covered in the new NPPF when published, the Council should consider the inclusion of policies relating to the following:

- Protect important retail outlets and services in lower order settlements (see above). Such outlets invariably will meet a neighbourhood need and as such do not meet the definition for a town centre as set out in the NPPF. However, the loss of such provision as a result of out-of-centre developments elsewhere could have a significant detrimental effect on the self-containment and sustainability of a settlement;

- Seek to encourage mixed uses in town centres that support the town centre by generating footfall during daytime hours. In higher order centres activities that support the evening or nighttime economy should also be encouraged but where the activity is specific to the evening/nighttime periods, locations outside the central retail/commercial areas should be preferred in order to avoid dead frontage in prime locations during the daytime;

- Seek to encourage new leisure uses in appropriate locations within the Council area where they meet the needs of local residents and/or visitors. Appropriate locations may need to be defined and would be expected to include higher order town centres and/or locations that would support the visitor/tourism sector where a specialised use is proposed. Many other leisure uses however will be Class E uses that can be covered by the same policies as retail uses. However, all leisure proposals should also comply with the other planning policies set out in the Local Plan; and

- Provision should be made for new convenience and other main town centre uses in areas of new housing growth and this should be reflected in planning policy. The scale of development and overall offer should be appropriate for the level of population increase expected. In most cases this is likely to mean a neighbourhood parade or similar be provided and at most a new local centre. However, provision should be based on a review of existing provision in the area, with the preference being to support existing facilities that can meet the emerging need prior to proposals for new development being brought forward. Where a local deficit already exists, the new development should seek to meet this as well, both in terms of the quantum of development and its location.

  One approach to incorporate this requirement within the Local Plan would be to include a policy relating to new residential development of greater than a certain size needing to be accompanied by an assessment of the need for additional retail and other main town centre use provision. Where current provision is not considered sufficient to meet the needs of future residents then development proposals should include appropriate provision in a suitable location.

456. We would also suggest that a spatial analysis of provision (existing and proposed) is undertaken once new housing growth areas have been identified, to ensure local retail and service needs can be met locally where possible.

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