

Dorset County Council, Weymouth & Portland Borough Council, West Dorset District Council, South West RDA



ECONOMIC VISION FOR WEYMOUTH & DORCHESTER

Vision

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INVESTING FOR SUSTAINABLE GROWTH : ECONOMIC VISION FOR WEYMOUTH & DORCHESTER

THE OPPORTUNITY

Over the next 20 years, Weymouth and Dorchester could be one of the most special and significant economic growth poles in southern coastal England. An extraordinary combination of unique environmental assets, niche sector growth and quality town centres provide the foundation for growth in modern businesses. New sites for growth would be planned to create compact, vibrant towns based on the most modern approach to sustainable planning, design and technology. The existing historical character of the towns and the wonderful quality of environment in surrounding countryside and coast would be conserved, enhanced and integrated with new development to provide a uniquely high quality of life, supporting sustainable long-term economic growth.

THE VISION FOR WEYMOUTH AND DORCHESTER

Key issues for the future of Weymouth and Dorchester are their ability to respond effectively to pressures for growth in population and employment; pressures for change in the nature and scale of businesses in different sectors; and a fundamental problem of relatively low productivity and low incomes in some sectors - particularly in Weymouth.

The aspiration is to plan for these pressures and changes, taking opportunities to create a balanced, competitive business economy and particularly to implement actions to bridge the productivity gap and thus raise incomes

The Vision for Weymouth and Dorchester is of a special and significant economic growth pole, based on the unique assets and competitive strengths of two distinct but complementary towns, creating an integrated living and business environment to support a thriving, sustainable, modern local economy

While the two towns work well together, and residents, businesses and visitors gain benefits from their proximity, Weymouth and Dorchester play different roles in serving South Dorset, and their future development should build on and enhance their distinctiveness while also strengthening their synergy.

For this reason, we propose complementary Visions for the towns:

The Vision for Weymouth

As an attractive compact waterfront resort town, surrounded by attractive coastline, a history in maritime and specialist industries and major employment potential at Portland, Weymouth is naturally an appropriate location for town centre functions, leisure and tourism, and growth in other specialist sectors including creative industries. Loss of 4,500 jobs from the defence sector in the 1990s has left Weymouth with a jobs deficit and a local economy in which productivity, skills and wages are low, and out-commuting to Dorchester, where many residents have to find work, is a problem. Weymouth has a particular opportunity, presented by hosting the sailing events for the

2012 London Olympic and Paralympic Games, to raise the profile of the area and invest in business development and skills to provide a long-term economic legacy.

“The Vision for Weymouth is of a lively, forward-looking town with a strong, diversified economy building on its advantages in the marine sector, advanced engineering, tourism and leisure, and regenerating its town centre, waterfront and key sites to improve its quality, develop its cultural and leisure offer, support business growth and provide good quality, better paid jobs for all its residents.”

The Vision for Dorchester

Dorchester is a very attractive historic County town. Poundbury in particular is renowned as a model of sustainable growth. Dorchester is attracting further pressures for expansion, though it is - despite its role as a major centre of employment - still a relatively small town. It has particular strengths in the attractive town centre and the size of the service sector, providing employment in local government and other public administration, health and education but these also point to a vulnerability to future change and a failure to grow in other sectors of a modern economy. Dorchester draws a significant proportion of its labourforce from the surrounding rural areas and from Weymouth, creating significant traffic flows every day. A key priority is to deliver housing growth, balanced by appropriate forms of employment growth and town centre functions, to achieve a more balanced, sustainable settlement.

“The Vision for Dorchester is of a quality town with a much-strengthened role as a County hub of shops, services, culture and leisure, with an attractive, vibrant town centre, new housing and new employment areas, and a range of new offices, shops, cultural and leisure facilities providing a more diverse local economy and good employment opportunities to residents and businesses.”

ECONOMIC POTENTIAL

The burgeoning economy of Weymouth and Dorchester could provide up to 12,000 additional new jobs by 2026, as a focus for a local economy in the wider Weymouth, Portland and West Dorset area. Growth would be focussed in specialist sectors where the towns already have significant competitive advantage and unique opportunities relevant to the 21st century UK economy - and sectors where there are genuine opportunities to create better quality, better skilled, better paid jobs. The sectors identified are:

- marine industries
- leisure (and tourism)
- creative industries
- knowledge-based industries, particularly in health, education, professional and administrative services
- environmental technologies, including renewable energy
- retail (town centre and specialist)

Targeted investment would be required to achieve a “Step Change” level of jobs growth as high as 12,000 jobs, with a focus on supporting enhanced skills, new infrastructure and key sites and premises, delivered to high standards.

Economic growth should be planned to achieve a better balance of growth across the area and supported by new housing development in key locations, so as to retain and

attract young people and key workers with skills to meet the needs of the modern economy. Housing - which supports sustainable economic growth through attracting and retaining a skilled labourforce - will be planned to provide the full range of opportunities, from high density town centre flats, affordable family housing and larger houses to attract executive families to the towns. All housing should be planned, designed and built to the highest standards of sustainability.

KEY STRENGTHS

Key strengths already found in Weymouth and Dorchester, which combine to provide a fine quality of life already but which establish the platform for future sustainable growth, include

- established businesses and skills in sectors with major growth potential
- unique physical assets for business, particularly the waterfront areas of Weymouth and Portland, the strengths of the two town centres, and the landscape quality on the town fringes
- the historical character and potential of the town centres

The coastline of Weymouth Bay and Chesil Beach, part of the Jurassic Coast World Heritage Site, and the inland downland areas not only provide a landscape and sense of place of extraordinary character but also provide a setting for watersports and coastal recreation of world-class quality. These assets may be further conserved and used through innovation in environmental technologies, for instance in renewable energy technologies based on tidal or wind power; and through development of low-impact marine and coastal leisure activities and sports.

The development of Poundbury has established a new profile for Dorchester and demonstrates a way in which new housing areas can provide a high quality environment, attract new residents and be comprehensively planned to include shops, services and modern businesses. These principles should be taken forward into all new housing development (though possibly with different design styles) to create even more sustainable growth and use the momentum of housing development to support quality economic change.

CURRENT PLANS AND STRATEGIC OPPORTUNITIES

Plans for investment already include

- regeneration of the Weymouth Esplanade seafront area
- implementation of the Dorchester Transport and Environment Plan to enhance the town centre and reduce the impact of traffic
- two major town centre mixed use developments in Dorchester
- redevelopment of the Weymouth Pavilion/Ferry Terminal site for a mixed use development and marina
- continued investment at Osprey Quay and expansion of the new National Sailing Academy at Portland
- hosting the sailing events of the 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games at Weymouth and Portland

- major growth of marine sector employment at Sunseeker, potentially growing by up to 500 employees
- development of the Mount Pleasant Business Park in Weymouth, and continued growth of activity at the Southwell Business Park on Portland
- major expansion and growth at Portland Port
- continued growth of the highly successful Poundbury development area
- (subject to the necessary Orders) construction of the Weymouth Relief Road

Major opportunities to catalyse growth are provided by a number of factors, particularly:

- hosting the sailing events for the 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games at Weymouth and Portland will provide a major boost to marine industries, tourism and the business profile of the town
- the planned growth in the local labourforce, with over 12,700 new homes to be provided at the two towns by 2026
- targeted investment to provide sites, premises, skills and improved communications

SCENARIOS FOR SUSTAINABLE GROWTH

This visionary approach to development of the area highlights the opportunity to achieve a better balance and more sustainable future for Weymouth and Dorchester, using economic growth to meet community, environmental and business aspirations. At present, the two towns show a poor balance of employment sectors - Weymouth heavily weighted towards tourism, retail and some manufacturing sectors compared to Dorchester which is heavily weighted towards local town centre functions and public sector services including health, education and public administration. This has serious effects in terms of employment opportunities for residents, pay levels, skills, and travel to work. Despite its much greater size, which would normally create a critical mass of employment drawing labour in from across its hinterland, Weymouth is a net exporter of labour, particularly to Dorchester.

New housing development provides the opportunity to focus labourforce growth closer to employment opportunities, and to support a better balance between the two towns; but this balance also requires strong employment growth in Weymouth, and emphasis on particular sectors of growth to balance the economic sector profile of each of the two towns.

Three scenarios have been considered which reflect these opportunities and risks. Each could contribute to achieving the Vision, but the most ambitious “Step Change” scenario envisages the higher levels of growth, based on more concerted effort to secure the benefits of economic growth, and the greater probability of secure the whole Vision :

“Consolidation” : In this scenario, current plans and commitments are satisfied, but development continues according to recent trends and new opportunities to stimulate specific forms or locations of economic growth are limited. At best, this approach will maintain the current roles of the towns, but there is a genuine risk that the two town centres will loose out to other adjacent towns, key sectors will decline, there will be a

lack of good quality jobs in the towns, and a growing population will have to commute further to work.

“Enhancement” : In this scenario, the current plans and commitments are extended to include further work to plan for growth in housing and employment sites, and to pursue opportunities evident in the two towns. In Weymouth this would include further development of tourism accommodation and facilities; investment in standard business parks and industrial estates to meet demand, and improvement in skills levels - and in Dorchester this would be likely to include work with the Duchy of Cornwall and other developers to take forward further stages of integrated housing and employment site development. Further action in the town centres, including environmental enhancements and new development schemes could follow. This approach would be likely to achieve much better planned development and better quality of development, and will stimulate important improvements in the quality of jobs and prosperity. It will secure significant gains in terms of self-containment, balance and the quality of life of both of the towns. It will be important with this option to maintain the drive to provide for growth in key sectors and meet the skills, premises and innovation needs of businesses.

“Step Change” : A step change in the approach to the two towns may be necessary to ensure long-term economic success and to achieve the many benefits from sustainable growth for residents and businesses. The focus of this scenario is on creating new places which contain the best qualities of the existing Weymouth and Dorchester but re-engineer them to achieve high quality sustainable development and secure economic growth.

“Step Change” will only be achieved by adding further special initiatives, significant effort and targetted investment over and above those envisaged in the “Enhancement” scenario, to maximise the growth potential and impact.

In Weymouth, this means creating a vibrant town centre, waterfront areas and new business areas to work in growth sectors serving national and international markets. Business clusters in niche markets of target sectors of marine, leisure and creative industries should be linked physically and economically to the existing assets of the town; and growth should also be targetted in education, business services and public administration to seek a better balance of employment and skills. A more balanced and thriving local economy will support a town with a new, lively profile to attract and retain younger residents, entrepreneurs and visitors, thus adding skills, spending power and vitality to the town, and creating a foundation for long-term growth and investment.

In Dorchester, the development of a high quality town centre based on historic buildings but now including modern buildings of high quality will provide an “up-market” destination for specialist shopping and tourism, and an appropriate location for new service-based businesses for whom quality of place is significant. Dorchester should be stimulated to act as a cultural centre for the sub-region and catalyst for growth in cultural and creative industries. New sites and premises, linked to business innovation initiatives, will secure good quality growth in creative and knowledge-based sectors, and change the profile of Dorchester towards business growth in a modern sustainable town.

This scenario would be very challenging to deliver, but ultimately does not necessarily envisage increasing the number of homes or jobs planned in the town through the emerging Regional Spatial Strategy - it may achieve much higher levels of growth, but

primarily looks to achieve a “step change” in the quality and the profile of the towns significantly, for the benefit of those residents, businesses and employees.

Each scenario builds on the previous one, and the most ambitious - “Step Change” in particular will require significant effort and high levels of investment. However, the returns, in terms of employment, earnings, productivity, and quality of life for residents and businesses will be higher.

The choice of the overall level of ambition and the specific actions to pursue it, will depend on the decisions, commitment and resources of the key partners - particularly the local authorities which will need to weigh the priorities of self-containment, growth and development through a number of processes, including the Local Development Frameworks.

KEY ACTIONS

Key actions need to be targetted on the issues which will make a difference to the future of the towns, particularly a focus on the specific needs of the priority sectors to create thriving business clusters: marine industries, leisure, creative industries, environmental technologies, health, education, professional services, public administration.

This sector focus will include:

- sites and premises to meet the specific sector needs and create attractive opportunities for business growth and inward investment
- skills development relevant to these sectors - particularly at FE and HE levels
- innovation in the sectors through linking opportunities for research and development, modern premises, business support, and skills development

These economic sector growth actions will need to be supported by development, planning and investment delivered by the local authorities and their partners which will build the platform growth and should include:

- Town Centre growth and enhancement, planned sensitively but dynamically to provide space for new business premises, culture and leisure facilities, more shops (to meet growing population needs and provide specialist shops) and modern town centre housing
- Planning and development for new business sites and premises of the right quality and in the right locations
- Continued improvement to the road, rail and sea transport infrastructure, particularly emphasising use of public transport, cycling and pedestrian routes in the context of a sustainable pattern of development
- Skills development and business growth initiatives to work with key sectors, enhancing skills and supporting growth in modern sectors through a range of initiatives
- Key projects to include:
 - Marine Centre of Excellence, Weymouth and Portland, creating a “campus” of innovative new businesses, with joint development, marketing and skills training infrastructure, in new high quality premises and enhancement of marine leisure development opportunities
 - creative industries cluster development, Dorchester

- a focus on “active leisure” for both Weymouth and Dorchester, with new facilities in the towns linked through managed accessibility to countryside and coast (emphasis on watersports and larger-scale activities in Weymouth; countryside related in Dorchester)
- construction iconic sustainable premises demonstration projects for creative industries, professional and business services - one each in Weymouth and Dorchester
- new cultural facilities linked to cultural industries sector development, Dorchester
- a health sector business innovation project, Dorchester
- a public administration delivery project, Weymouth
- a further/higher education development project, Weymouth
- new town centre leisure industry and retail development, Weymouth
- development of a town centre quality retail development in Dorchester
- studies to progress an innovative high capacity sustainable public transport link between Weymouth & Dorchester

KEY GROWTH TARGETS

As a basis for planning and implementation, it is useful to establish core growth targets and key project milestones, particularly in relation to those sectors where growth should be targeted.

The ambitious approach of the “Step Change” scenario sets the maximum level of employment growth which might be envisaged at 12,000 jobs in the two towns, well above the level projected by the “Scenario 2” (3.2% GVA p.a.) for draft Regional Spatial Strategy - but an aspiration to focus co-ordinated action and investment in key sectors and locations; and a challenging target to help secure benefits for the area.

The key sector growth aspirations in “Step Change”, compared to current employment levels in the two towns are as follows (note that some sectors, where growth is not anticipated - primary industries, public sector:

Sector Growth (jobs)	Weymouth (inc Portland and Chickerell)		Dorchester		Weymouth & Dorchester	Weymouth & Dorchester Total Growth
	2005	Growth by 2026	2005	Growth by 2026	2005	2005 - 2026
Manufacturing	1800	750	500	250	2300	1000
Tourism & Leisure	3800	1200	700	300	4500	1500
Construction	1900	400	700	400	2600	800
Distribution	4800	1000	3200	500	8000	1500
Business Services.	3300	2000	2600	1500	5900	3500
Education/Health	5000	1250	5000	1250	10000	2500
Miscellaneous Services	1100	800	1000	400	2100	1200
Total	21700	7400	13700	4600	35400	12000

THE VISION ACHIEVED

By the end of the process, we will see:

Weymouth is busy attractive and economically successful sub-regional centre. It has enhanced its quality and reputation as a coastal resort, specialising in leisure in active watersports and countryside activities, and tourism is thriving in high quality, activity related short breaks and longer holidays. Its town centre is an attractive, cosmopolitan place, with a mix of housing, offices, cafes, bars, hotels and restaurants in historic streets and waterfront areas and a specialist focus in leisure and retailing. Housing and business premises development throughout the town are planned to provide innovative modern sustainable buildings and integrated neighbourhoods creating a new image and providing the full range of housing types needed to retain and attract young people, key workers and entrepreneurs.

Portland will be a particular focus of specialist business and employment opportunities, having developed around Osprey Quay as an international centre in marine industries. Other niche businesses have taken advantage of the unique environment and facilities offered by Portland Harbour and the Island, which may develop as a unique focus of renewable energy, sustainable development and related businesses.

Employment is available in a more diverse range of sectors, as the town has attracted businesses in a range of sectors, drawn by the quality of life and use of new communications technologies. Targetted skills and business support activities have helped to raise jobs quality and earnings, and this in turn has helped to create a more dynamic local economy.

Dorchester is a thriving County town, offering a wide range of shops, business services and leisure and cultural facilities and a better balance of employment to population than at present. The town centre has expanded in sensitively designed modern mixed use developments linking into to the historic heart, with new flats, offices, shops and other facilities adding life and strength to the local economy. It particularly benefits from a high quality specialist shopping quarter, new cultural facilities, and new offices and working areas housing business services, professionals and creative and cultural industries.

The town has a more diverse employment base, including many more private sector businesses in the town centre in these growth sectors, but also some in new clusters in innovation or incubation centres and specialist business parks within urban extensions.

Good quality public transport, including park and ride facilities from the edge of town, and new cycle and pedestrian routes, minimise congestion and improve the environmental quality.

The two towns are linked by high capacity sustainable public transport and communications infrastructure; and surrounded by high quality countryside and coastline which is conserved, enhanced and accessible to residents and visitors alike.