
Employment Land Review

West Dorset District Council
Weymouth & Portland
Borough Council

Site Assessment 2013

INTRODUCTION

It is vital that future planning policy and employment allocations meet the economic needs of the business community, raise competitiveness and diversify the local economy. As part of the review process and evidence base for the production of planning policy Local Authorities are required to assess the existing and future supply of land available for economic development and its sufficiency and suitability to meet identified needs.

This report assesses the characteristics and quality of employment sites in West Dorset, Weymouth and Portland to provide an assessment of the 'fitness for purpose' of the employment land portfolio.



Figure 1 Location map of the study area - West Dorset, Weymouth and Portland

The aim of the study is to review the existing supply of employment land in order to identify those sites that will meet the needs of the market, while fulfilling sustainability objectives and policy requirements and should be retained and protected for employment uses, and those which do not meet such requirements and could be made available for an alternative purpose.

The following types of sectors have been the primary focus of the study:

- B1(a) Offices (other than professional and financial services)
- B1(b) Research and Development
- B1(c) Light Industry
- B2 General Industry
- B8 Storage and Distribution

This report specifically does not deal with other employment generating uses such as retail and leisure uses which are planned for in different ways.

The West Dorset, Weymouth and Portland Employment Land Review will provide a tool for use in developing future planning policy, informing long term employment land provision in the district, and help to create an up to date portfolio of sites.

STATUS OF SITES

The employment land review itself does not constitute or create policy. It is a technical document. This review provides an indication of land that is deliverable and developable.

Some sites may have been included in the assessment that would not be permitted under the current development plan. This does not provide any certainty that these sites will come forward as a result of a change in policy. The employment land review has assessed the suitability of these sites in the event that future policy may change.

This document does not make decisions on the future use of land, these decisions will be made through the formal planning process and will be subject to public consultation. Therefore any sites identified as having potential for future employment uses carry no planning status (unless they are existing local plan allocations or they benefit from an existing planning permission). All planning applications, whether on land identified in this review or not, will be subject to detailed planning consideration in accordance with the adopted development plan.

SITE ASSESSMENT

SITE IDENTIFICATION

The Councils have not previously undertaken any frequent monitoring of employment land/sites, therefore there were no existing databases that could be re-evaluated / updated for this study. The first step of the assessment therefore involved defining the sites and areas the appraisal would cover.

New development should be located in the most sustainable locations. The larger settlements have key role to play because of their access to labour, support services and

infrastructure. Therefore sites were identified for assessment within, or in locations well related to, the larger settlements in the study area and a minimum site size threshold of 0.25ha was applied to potential sites.

Elsewhere the conversion of rural buildings, farm diversification schemes and sensitive small scale new development provides a number of units that serve the more rural parts of the district and make a valuable contribution to local employment opportunities. However, as with all development, the future growth potential has to be balanced against sustainability concerns and these rural areas are unlikely to be the location of development allocations in future local development plans. Furthermore, many of the sites in such rural locations would fail to meet the threshold for inclusion in the site assessment and in the majority of cases it is evident that the predominant character of the area would not be described as employment.

The focus of the site assessment on larger sites at the bigger settlements was the best use of the resources available as these have been identified as the most suitable locations for major future employment development.

National policy requires that reviews of land available for economic development include a reappraisal of the suitability of previously allocated land. In addition to an assessment of allocated employment sites, this study afforded the opportunity to assess a range of other sites in the study area based on the relative importance of these types of sites as components of local land supply

ALLOCATED SITES

The primary focus of the site assessment process is the 'fitness for purpose' of the employment land currently allocated by the local development plan, where little or no development has taken place. Accordingly it is the key purpose of this review to assess the planned supply, or portfolio, so that it may be compared with future requirements to see if it needs to be increased, reduced or modified.

Allocated sites that were mostly or wholly developed were not subject to a detailed site assessment.

Sites specifically allocated for employment purposes are identified in the West Dorset District Local Plan adopted 2006 at Table 7.1 and the Weymouth and Portland Local Plan adopted 2005 at Table 5.

As well as 100% employment sites, the audit included mixed use sites that contain an element of employment as part of the scheme. These sites fall into two categories; those where the nature and amount of employment required is defined by the policy, and those allocations where an element of employment is likely to be provided but the amount of land expected to be delivered is not specified by the policy. In reviewing sites that fall into the

latter category although it was not possible to predict the amount of land that would be delivered, it was considered appropriate to include the sites in the assessment in order to evaluate their general suitability for employment uses.

EXISTING EMPLOYMENT AREAS

It is important to recognise the potential contribution the stock of existing office and general industrial/warehousing premises can make to meeting employment needs. There are a number of existing employment sites in West Dorset, Weymouth and Portland. These sites are not formally identified in either adopted Local Plans, but are afforded some protection under policy ET1 of the West Dorset Plan and policy E2 of the Weymouth and Portland Plan which seek to retain employment land and premises in employment uses.

A potential source of new employment floorspace could be through the intensification of existing employment sites – increased floorspace on given sites and areas. Intensification opportunities are in effect part of the land supply. This development can take place in two ways; as redevelopment – where intensification is associated with the redevelopment of the site; or as new development – where intensification takes the form of new development filling in gaps on existing employment sites or areas.

The main existing employment sites were reviewed to assess their suitability for continued employment uses, and their potential to accommodate future development as intensification. For pragmatic reasons it was necessary to generally restrict the analysis not to take into account single occupier sites or isolated employment uses. The decision was taken because it would use a large amount of resources to assess these sites which were not anticipated to make any significant contribution to the districts strategic future land supply. However, if there were known to be current or potential issues in relation to the provision or retention of employment uses at particular sites, these were included in the review.

In order to undertake an effective review a stock take of employment sites was required. Major existing employment areas (above 0.25ha) were identified. The audit was generally restricted to broad employment areas rather than individual sites (plots). This exercise did not exclude motorcar showrooms and other similar sui generis uses where it was considered appropriate that they locate on employment land.

PLANNING PERMISSION

There are also a number of sites with planning permission for employment uses in West Dorset, Weymouth and Portland. The supply and take up of employment land are monitored by Dorset County Council. The employment monitoring is based primarily on two sources of information; a database of planning permissions and site visits. The amount of land developed for employment in the use classes B1, B2 and B8 is recorded. The type, size and location of proposed employment development is noted. The change of use of buildings

or sites that would create new commercial space is also captured, as are planning permissions granted for the extension of an existing business.

The monitoring figures are updated on an annual basis on the 1st of April to add any new permissions and remove any that are completed, expired or superseded. The supply is therefore subject to some fluctuation. This report has used information on sites with planning permission from the 2012 monitoring (covering 2011/12) which was the most up to date available at the time of writing. Some of the sites recorded as “under construction” may now have been completed. Similarly, some of the permissions recorded may now have been implemented.

These sites are not formally identified in the adopted Local Plans, but will contribute to the future supply of employment land. The suitability of these sites for employment uses has already been assessed through the granting of planning permission. Therefore it was not necessary to reassess them through this review.

OTHER SITES

One possible approach is to base the site assessment initially on current commitments only, and consider further sites if analysis concludes that more land should be identified for employment over and above these current commitments. This seems an unduly conservative approach, because some potential sites not yet committed might be more suitable than some existing allocations. Therefore, in the interests of sound planning and efficient use of land, the opportunity has been taken to assess a range of non allocated sites to review their potential as future employment allocations. This will provide the councils with the opportunity to consider de-allocating any poorer sites already committed and replacing them with potential new sites if suitable, available and appropriate.

Sites were identified using a variety of sources such as the National Land Use Database (NLUD), officer knowledge, desk top survey, the Evolutive property database, the Halcrow urban extensions study and sites proposed through the last Local Plan Inquiries. The review is not comprehensive, although it has identified as many sites as possible that meet the site size and location criteria.

Local land owners, agents and developers were contacted and information placed on the councils website and in the Dorset Echo newspaper inviting the submission of potential sites for assessment. In response to the ‘call for sites’ a number of potential new employment sites were submitted to the council for consideration.

There were further opportunities to propose potential new development sites through consultation on the preparation of a new Local Plan.

INITIAL ASSESSMENT

Over 700 sites were identified from the range of sources. Sites were initially appraised to identify any constraints to give an early indication of whether the site was ‘fit for purpose’ and able to meet current market needs. Much of the information on constraints was gained through a desktop assessment process.

An appraisal using basic assessment criteria was applied to the site data to give an impression of the suitability or otherwise for employment uses. This assessment provided an indication of any potential barriers to development and whether they could be overcome. The assessment of sites under this initial process focused on any obvious barriers that would result in the site being unsuitable for employment development. At this stage the factors concerned were absolute accept/reject criteria. The later more detailed appraisal considered less absolute constraints.

Sites with the constraints identified in Table 1 were judged as having little future employment potential at the current time:

Table 1 Exclusion Criteria

SITES TO BE EXCLUDED FROM ELR	JUSTIFICATION
Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI), Special Area of Conservation (SAC), Ramsar site (wetlands of international importance), National Nature Reserve (NNR), Special Protection Area (SPA) Scheduled Ancient Monuments and sites within 400m of protected heathland.	National policy protects against development that would have an adverse impact on national and internationally important nature conservation interests
Car parks and private garages	The change of use from car parks and garages can result in the displacement of parked vehicles to the highway resulting in highways problems as well as increasing pressure on remaining parking facilities.
Allotments and areas of informal/formal open space Schools and community facilities Playgrounds, sports/leisure facilities Cemeteries	These sites are important community uses and as such have not been identified as suitable for consideration for alternative employment uses
Gardens	Land in close proximity to a dwelling, in a predominantly residential area is unlikely to be suitable for employment uses. There can also be issues associated with land assembly.
Sites with an unacceptable impact on landscape/townscape	It is important to protect the character of both the built and natural landscape. Therefore sites in exceptionally sensitive locations where development would have an obvious significantly adverse impact were excluded.
Sites with highways or access issues	Good access is a particularly important requirement for employment development, so sites which are obviously constrained in terms of highways or infrastructure were excluded
Land within flood zones 2 or 3	In line with national guidance the potential flood risk of sites

	was assessed, and in order to direct future development to those land least at risk of flooding sites significantly affected by Environment Agency flood risk zones 2 or 3 was excluded
Lyme Regis and Charmouth Land Instability Zone 4	Extensive site investigations have identified these areas as unsuitable for development because of land slipping and/or coastal erosion
Sites deemed more suitable for residential uses than employment	Where sites have been identified as having potential in the SHLAA for housing and are considered more appropriate for residential uses (for example, is in a predominantly residential location) it is unlikely that employment provision would be desirable or deliverable. However the sites that have been identified in the SHLAA as having potential for residential uses that may be suitable for mixed use development have been included in the appraisal

Sites which were obviously unsuitable, measured against the selected criteria were discounted at this stage. Sites which were marginal or gave ambiguous results were retained to be assessed in the more detailed appraisal. All undeveloped Local Plan allocations or sites identified in current development briefs or concept statements were retained for further assessment regardless of their site constraints.

When considering flood risk, the expected extents of Flood Zones taking into account the impact of climate change have been used. The intention is to minimise the risk of flooding as far as possible. However in certain areas, for instance town centre regeneration areas complete restrictions on development would harm the vitality of that area and therefore cause further harm to the town as a whole. Where potential sites are situated within flood risk areas the sequential test (and exception test if appropriate) should be applied in accordance with the National Planning Policy Framework.

Following this preliminary research and analysis a large number of sites were excluded and not taken any further through the assessment process. Sites identified as being suitable for further investigation were then subject to a more detailed site appraisal to determine their potential to contribute to the future employment land portfolio of West Dorset, Weymouth and Portland.

The remaining sites fell into several distinct categories:

- Existing adopted local plan allocations
- Established employment sites
- Sites with planning permission
- Potential new employment sites (including vacant sites, officer identified sites, potential urban extensions and sites submitted by members of the public)

In total 106 sites were shortlisted for further detailed assessment.

DETAILED ASSESSMENT CRITERIA

The second stage in the site appraisal methodology was to select the most effective appraisal criteria.

The basic framework was jointly agreed by, and made available to, all local authorities in Dorset, so that individual Local Authority Employment Land Reviews were conducted to a consistent and uniform methodology.

The overall design of the assessment framework is intended to allow balanced judgments between different views. The framework was also designed to provide flexibility so it could be adapted to incorporate localised differences. The criteria can be divided into four groups, against which sites identified in the review process were assessed. The groups and criteria are as follows:

Table 2 Detailed Assessment Criteria

BASE INFORMATION
<i>Base information</i>
KEY PARAMETERS
<i>Quality of existing portfolio and internal environment</i>
<i>Quality of the wider environment</i>
<i>Strategic access</i>
<i>Market conditions/perception and demand</i>
DETAILED SITE CONSTRAINTS
<i>Ownership and user constraints on development/redevelopment</i>
<i>Site development constraints</i>
<i>Accessibility</i>
<i>Sequential test and brownfield/greenfield</i>
POLICY CONSIDERATIONS
<i>Social and regeneration policy</i>
<i>Other policy considerations</i>

Site assessment sheets showing the resulting detailed appraisals and settlement maps showing the location of sites are incorporated into this report. Where there was duplication between shortlisted sites, or where sites were located in very close proximity, their potential was considered as a combined whole. This occurred for example where a smaller part of a larger existing employment site was submitted, or where sites were located within areas identified as potential strategic mixed use locations. This not only represented the most efficient use of resources, but also provided the opportunity for consideration of the greatest number of options and the most deliverable development scenarios.

Site Ref No	Comments
PLAND 01	The 2005 Weymouth and Portland Local Plan Allocation has been included as a part of the existing employment site at Inmosthay.
WEY 07	The 2005 Weymouth and Portland Local Plan Allocation has been included as a part of the existing employment site at Mount Pleasant.
BEAM 02	The site to the North of Broadwindsor Road incorporates land allocated by Policy WA1 of the 2006 West Dorset Local Plan.
LYME 02	The site at Woodberry down incorporates land allocated by Policy WA24 of the 2006 West Dorset Local Plan.
BRID 17	The 2006 West Dorset Local Plan allocation WA14 has been included as part of the existing employment site at North Mills.
LITTLE 01	A small area of this site at Bincombe Marsh Dairy was submitted for assessment.
CROSS 05	Two smaller parcels of land within this site were submitted for assessment.

Although undertaken by officers, the detailed site assessment was informed by input at appropriate stages with a number of people and organisations. In order to provide robust evidence of potential site constraints the councils consulted with a range of experts before making the final assessment on sites, including: Environment Agency, Natural England, Highways Agency, Economic Development Officers, Development Control Officers, Environmental Health Officers, Landscape Officers, Minerals and Waste Authority, Highways Authority and other local stakeholders. Commercial input from an external property agent was also sought on market factors and the development viability of a number of sites. The information contained in the detailed site appraisal sheets reflects the comments received.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The detailed site assessment confirmed which sites are likely to respond well to the expectations of occupiers/developers and also meet sustainability criteria. The results of the assessment had to be translated into a recommendation for each site.

The relationship between individual criteria and the overall judgement is not straightforward. There is no scoring system that can do justice to the complex interplay between the different characteristics and circumstances of each site and translate scores into a robust overall assessment. It was therefore decided that rather than use mechanical calculation to make an assessment of sites it was appropriate to make informed decisions based on professional judgement and experience which were recorded as comments instead of numerical scores. This overall verdict has been based on the thoughtful consideration of market appeal, policy contribution, availability and constraints, together with any additional factors that may be relevant at a given time. It is not derived from any manipulation of average scores.

In cases where future changes could alter the assessment of the site, for example the provision of a new transport link or upgrading of the road that serves the site, the appraisal notes potential quality and the requirements on which the assessment is dependant.

For allocated and potential new development sites the recommendation says whether:

- The site has potential for employment uses
- The site has no potential for employment uses
- Employment uses could be considered as part of a mixed use scheme should the site be deemed suitable for development

Recommendations on existing employment sites identify :

- Sites that should be protected for employment.
- Sites that are suitable for continued employment use but could offer the potential for non employment uses

It is important to note that a recommendation to protect an existing employment site for employment uses does not necessarily mean there is potential to accommodate additional development. In some instances sites may have limited capacity for intensification or redevelopment but still make an important contribution to the economy through their existing employment stock, particularly in cases where they may be the only employment area in a small town or village. Therefore it is appropriate to consider the protection of such sites for employment uses to prevent the loss of key existing stock.

SUMMARY

The main objective of the site assessment process has been to provide an appraisal of the ‘fitness for purpose’ of the existing employment land portfolio in order to identify sites that have potential for employment uses and those which are unsuitable for employment development. In addition the opportunity has been used to undertake the assessment of a number of non-allocated sites and premises.

The detailed site assessment found:

Table 3 Summary of Site Assessment

Site category	Number of Sites	Area (ha)
Sites with potential for new employment uses	13	40.51
Site with potential for employment as part of a mixed use scheme	27	722.88
Sites with no potential for new employment uses	13	38.4
Existing employment sites	53	248.61

In total, thirteen sites (40.5ha) were considered to have potential to accommodate new employment uses, with a further twenty seven sites (722.9ha) considered appropriate for employment uses as part of a potential mixed use scheme. In addition, there are 45 sites (43.2ha) of land currently with permission for employment uses.

REVIEW OF EXISTING ALLOCATIONS

The majority of the sites allocated by the 2006 West Dorset District Local Plan or the 2005 Weymouth and Portland Borough Local Plan have been assessed as suitable to contribute to the future employment land supply are likely to deliver much of the strategic employment requirement. However, four of the current Local Plan allocations have been found to have no potential for additional future employment uses:

- Land at St Andrews Bridport
- Catherstone Manor Farm Charmouth
- Woodberry Down Lyme Regis
- Land at Charlton Down

POTENTIAL NEW SITES

Only one of the sites submitted to the councils for consideration as a potential location for future employment development was concluded to be suitable for employment land. It is likely this could be deliverable within the forecast period subject to adequate infrastructure improvements being provided:

- Land at Broomhills Farm, Bridport

Eight other new sites were also identified as having potential to accommodate employment uses:

- Lane End Farm, Beaminster
- Land adjacent to Gore Cross, Bridport
- Land adjacent to the Bredy Vet Centre, Bridport
- Buildings at Francombe Farm, Cerne Abbas
- Land at St Georges Road, Dorchester
- Land adjacent to the sewerage works, Maiden Newton
- Land at Three Lanes End, Puddletown
- Land adjacent to Coldharbour, Sherborne

MIXED USE SITES

A number of sites have been identified as having the potential to contribute some employment uses as part of a comprehensive mixed use scheme, if the site is thought suitable for development. These mixed use sites include Local Plan allocations, submitted sites as well as a number of potential new ones. They encompass a variety of sizes and types from relatively small redevelopment options to significant Greenfield urban extensions. Should these locations be considered appropriate areas for residential development, it follows that they should also be considered as potential locations to accommodate

identified need for employment land, and as potential alternatives to other greenfield sites. However, not all of this land may be deemed suitable for future development, and only a smaller proportion of developable land is likely to be used for employment .

EXISTING EMPLOYMENT SITES

In total, 53 existing employment sites were assessed. The site visits confirmed that many of the existing employment sites were operating at or near capacity. All of the existing employment sites assessed were found to be suitable for continued employment use, though some were also identified also offering the potential for non-employment uses. A number of existing sites had some potential for future expansion or intensification.