

WEST DORSET, WEYMOUTH AND PORTLAND LOCAL PLAN EXAMINATION FURTHER STATEMENT

MATTER 8 - WEYMOUTH

Issue No. 8.2. Are proposals for the town centre, other retail, commercial, recreational and residential sites realistic and deliverable?

Reference No. 914 **WEYMOUTH CIVIC SOCIETY**

Para's 7.3.7 to 7.3.9 and Policy WEY 2 (pp 85-86)

The decline of our traditional town centres is evident all across the country, and at a local level this is a threat to Weymouth's historic centre, increasingly so even since the current draft Local Plan was prepared. We fear that the loss of the busy town centre car parks, as proposed in Policy Wey 2 of the draft Local Plan would do great harm to the prospects for businesses in the main shopping streets, and consequently to the historic fabric of the town centre. This would in our view be contrary to the government's current policy and advice, which, since the Local Plan was prepared, has increasingly stressed the need to provide adequate convenient parking for town centres. In terms of the main question above, we do not think it at all realistic to propose development of all the main car parks that serve the needs of shoppers to Weymouth Town Centre, contrary to government advice.

The Civic Society wrote to the Borough Council on 6 September, expressing our concerns in relation to the emerging Town Centre Masterplan. We think those comments have strong relevance to the Local Plan consideration, and we would like to submit them for the Inspector's attention. They overlap in part with the Society's letter of the same date in response to the Local Plan consultation on Further Proposed Changes, of which we trust the Inspector has a copy. For ease of reference, we think it best to set out the contents of the Masterplan-related letter in full, for his attention, as follows:

We are strongly opposed to residential development of the existing town centre car parking areas, namely Park Street, Governors Lane, all those in Commercial Road, Jubilee Sidings, Ferry Peninsula; also the railway station forecourt. While the latter is important for any planned transport interchange (currently limited to taxis), the other areas all contain parking facilities directly serving town centre businesses, retail outlets, churches and tourism related areas of town. Apart from local need, visitors and tourists are Weymouth's lifeblood. If people cannot conveniently access Weymouth's attractions and facilities, they will go elsewhere.

The additional imposition of 200+ dwellings to Weymouth's town centre housing provision target should be resisted. The Borough does not have sufficient available land to avoid 'urban cramming', whereas adjacent West Dorset does. The housing load should be more equitably spread between the two authorities.

Development of inner urban spaces such as car parks can only result in apartment-style accommodation. This does not meet the requirements of the majority seeking family homes. This imbalance will be the inevitable result of the above-mentioned urban cramming. Moreover, the more desirable harbourside sites are liable to become second or 'holiday' homes marketed as prestige waterfront apartments.

The ferry peninsula should not be regarded as a potential extension of a 'vibrant' town centre, or indeed as a competitor, since it will in either case accelerate the decline of the existing retail centre. Development of the peninsula should be leisure and tourism oriented (as in the currently adopted Local Plan), as an extension to the beach and Esplanade, rather than the town. It is not suitable for 'landmark' or high-rise buildings. Moreover, it is important to reserve appropriate areas of the peninsula for future ferry terminal use.

It is vital to retain a prosperous business sector in the core area of the town centre, based on St Mary and St Thomas Streets, without which the historic fabric of the town will decay. Overdevelopment of the Pavilion Peninsula and elimination of car parking from the central areas risk destroying prospects for a healthy town centre economy.

The car parks can, and should, be enhanced by appropriate hard and soft landscaping, to give an open, sunny and attractive waterfront outlook; in contrast, apartment blocks would be liable to dominate and overshadow the harbourside walkway.

Policy Wey 2 states that 'Land to the west of the main retail core will be developed as an extension to the primary shopping area, with a similar mix of uses. Development should create an active waterside frontage with shopping, café and restaurant uses on the ground floor area with residential uses above'. This land is not 'underutilised' as suggested in paragraph 7.3.8, but consists of the vitally important, popular and very well used town centre car parks, which we feel strongly should not be lost to development.

For the sake of the future viability of the town centre and the preservation of its historic fabric, it should not be put at greater risk by removing all the main car parks which serve it so well.