



# **Weymouth and Portland**

# **landscape character assessment**

**February 2013**

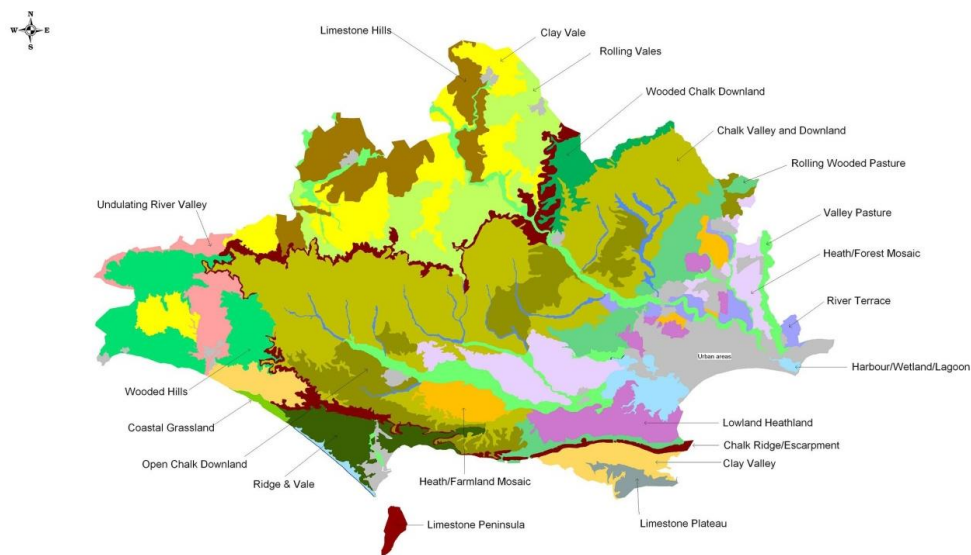
## Introduction

### Why do a landscape character assessment for Weymouth and Portland?

i In 1996 the former Countryside Commission and English Nature (now Natural England) produced a map of Joint Character Areas for the whole of England<sup>1</sup>. In 2002 a revised approach to assessing landscape character was agreed nationally<sup>2</sup>, prompting a review of landscape character work at a national and local level. This has been done for the area of Weymouth and Portland within the Dorset AONB as part of the work on the Dorset AONB Management Plan, and has also been carried out within West Dorset. This piece of work brings the assessment of the landscapes of Weymouth and Portland in line with these documents. The information in this landscape character assessment provides guidance in the planning application decision making process; where development affects the character of the landscape, and where a new landscape scheme may be necessary to mitigate the effects of a development. It will also influence county-wide work carried out based on broader landscape types (made up of individual character areas). Figure 1 shows the approximate extent of the landscape types for the whole of Dorset, which will be finalised once the landscape assessments are completed for all the districts.

This approach allows for accurate cross-boundary character descriptions to be drawn up, identifying areas based on character rather than administrative boundaries. For example, the ridge & vale landscape to the south of the study area crosses the Dorset AONB, the landscape of Weymouth and Portland, and that of West Dorset and is consequently covered by three separate landscape character assessments. However, the area retains a strong identity across these boundaries. Although some features may be present in only a small part of the character area, the value of, or damage caused by, these features would be apparent wherever they occur in an area of this character. For that reason, where areas included in this assessment are considered to form part of a wider landscape character area, the descriptions of key characteristics and detrimental features reflect the area as a whole.

**Figure 1: draft landscape types across Dorset**



<sup>1</sup> <http://www.naturalengland.org.uk/publications/nca/default.aspx>

<sup>2</sup> Landscape Character Assessment: Guidance for England and Scotland, The Countryside Agency and Scottish Natural Heritage, 2002

### **What is covered in the assessment**

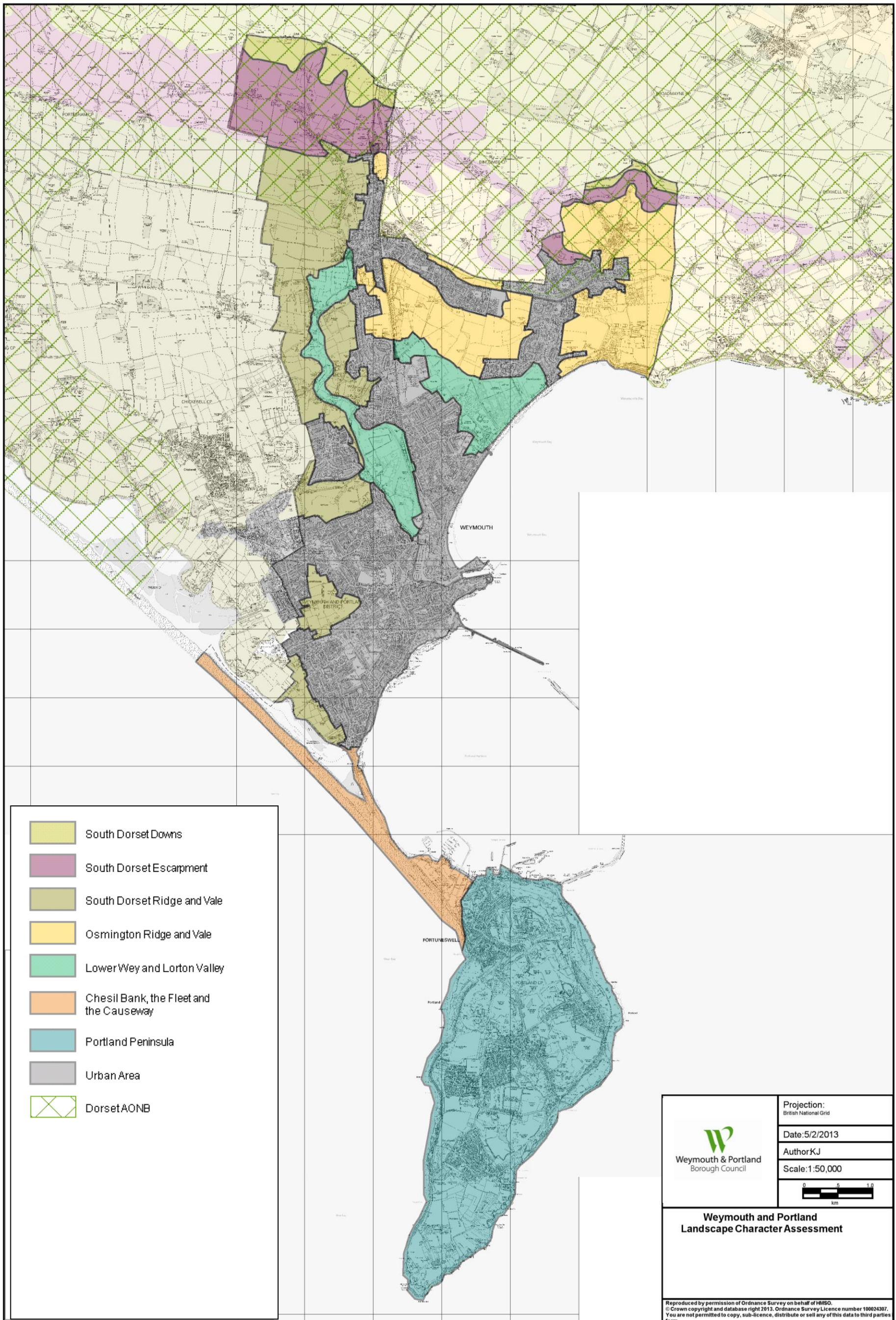
- ii This guidance looks at the areas outside the main urban areas of Weymouth. It identifies the landscape type, based on the geology, topography, vegetation and human influences, and within each type, individual character areas which are unique, discrete geographical areas having an overall identity. For each character area the report contains an overview of the area and its key landscape characteristics, and outlines features which are detrimental to the character of the area.
- iii Landscape characteristics describe those features, elements or qualities that are present and distinct in each of the landscape character areas. These can range from field patterns and boundaries, to locally prevalent materials or a presence of historic earthworks.
- iv Detrimental features can often be a result of social, economic, and environmental pressures on the landscape. The poor location and design of new development, creeping urbanisation, growth in new land uses and a decline in traditional land management can all be responsible for the incremental decline in strength and unity of landscape character. The detrimental features listed identify the pressures which are most prevalent or likely in each of the areas, and should be used to guide change in the landscape away from these trends. This is set out with the intention of maintaining a strong and unified landscape character.

### **How the assessment was carried out**


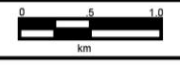
- v The methodology of the assessment follows best practice, with reference to the Landscape Character Assessment: Guidance for England and Scotland, The Countryside Agency and Scottish Natural Heritage, 2002.
- vi The process began with a desk study looking at areas based upon relief, geology and soils plus the farm and settlement types, and dividing the area into landscape units. The next stage was to carry out a field survey of each unit, to identify the aesthetic qualities of the landscape including any distinctive features, its condition, land uses and historic and ecological character. The units were then combined into landscape character areas, based on their visual and cultural character. Landscape character types were then identified, combining those character areas which had visually significant attributes in common.
- vii Figure 2 shows the landscape character areas for Weymouth and Portland.



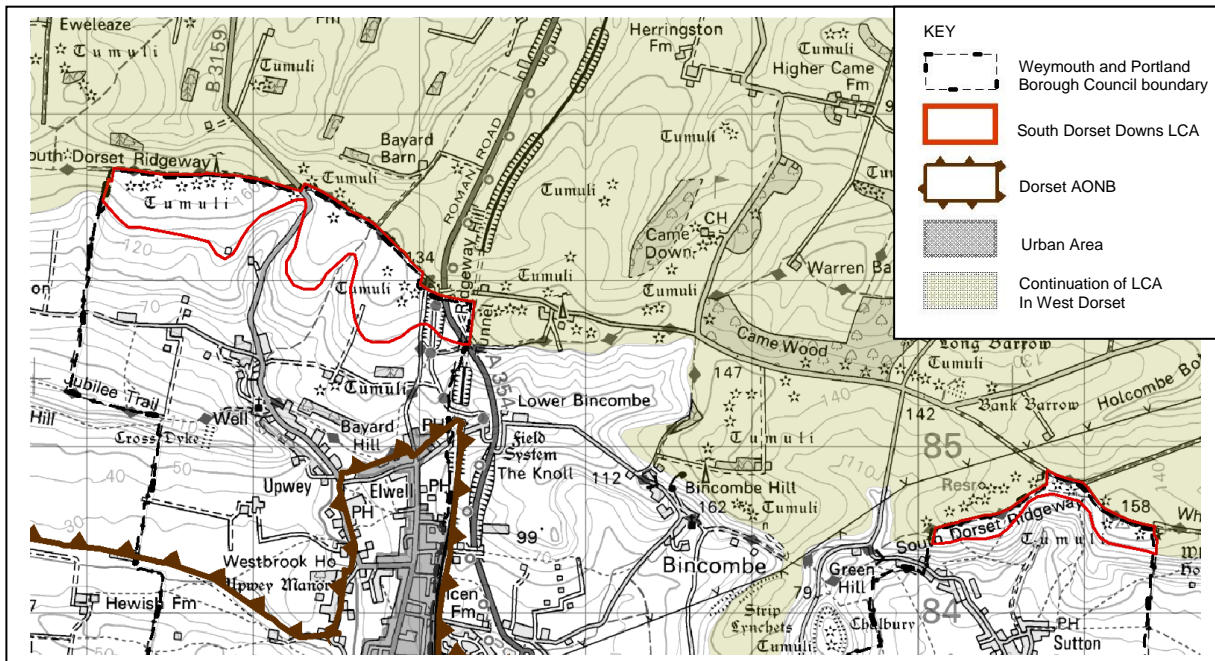
Figure 2: Landscape Character Areas for Weymouth and Portland



- South Dorset Downs
- South Dorset Escarpment
- South Dorset Ridge and Vale
- Osmington Ridge and Vale
- Lower Wey and Lorton Valley
- Chesil Bank, the Fleet and the Causeway
- Portland Peninsula
- Urban Area
- Dorset AONB

 <p>Weymouth &amp; Portland Borough Council</p>	Projection: British National Grid
	Date: 5/2/2013
	Author: KJ
	Scale: 1:50,000
	
<p><b>Weymouth and Portland Landscape Character Assessment</b></p>	
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## 1. SOUTH DORSET DOWNS

Landscape Character Type: Open Chalk Downland

### Overview

- 1.1 The South Dorset Downs is an expansive, agricultural area of open chalk downland running from Blackdown in the west to Owermoigne in the east. The rolling downland hills drain from the South Dorset Escarpment into the South Winterbourne, towards the River Frome.

### Underlying geology and predominant land use

- 1.2 Thin calcareous soils with underlying geology of chalk. The landscape has a textured appearance due to agricultural patterns of arable cultivation on gentle slopes, some rough grazing on the steeper valley sides and pasture on the broad valley floors. A capping of gravels supports a heathland plant community at Blackdown, along with large plantations of conifer trees.

### Settlement pattern and characteristics

- 1.3 Small nucleated and linear villages are sited along the valley floor. There are occasional farmsteads. Local building materials consist of local Portland and Purbeck limestone plus some brick, flint, cob and thatch

### Landscape characteristics

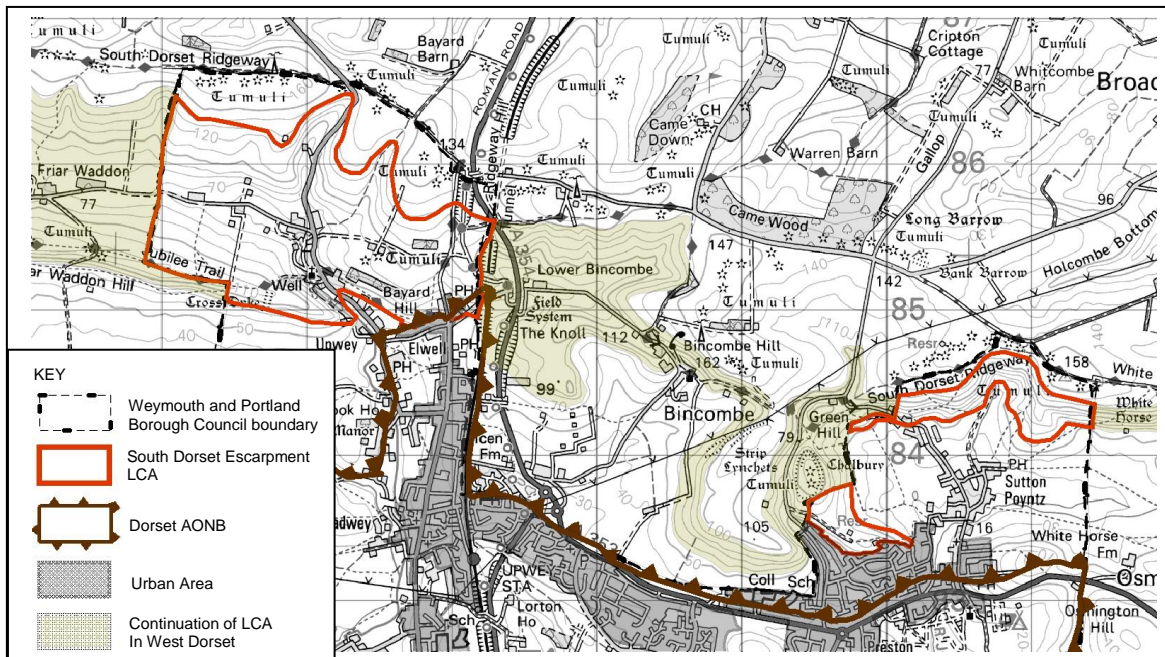
- 1.4
- The area is dominated by broad, open and rolling uplands, with gentle convex slopes and small broad valleys giving way to large open views and skylines.
  - Large, straight-sided arable and grassland fields (late c18th / early c19th enclosures) with hazel hedgerows, with post and wire on higher ground.
  - Extensive scattering of prehistoric monuments on higher ground.
  - Network of stone walls towards the South Dorset Escarpment.
  - Valley slopes with patches of semi-natural chalk grassland, old hazel coppice stands and occasional small broadleaved woodlands.

- Remnant winding chalk winterbourne with floodplain supporting occasional water meadows, wet woodlands, water cress beds and rough damp meadows.
- Straight rural lanes have an open character and characteristic finger posts and furniture.

**Detrimental features**

1.5

- Pylons and masts are visually prominent creating visual clutter and detracting from the characteristic open views.
- The main road corridors and some urban fringe areas can have an urbanising and detrimental impact in some places.
- Some boundaries block important open views.
- Neglected traditional barns and farm buildings in a poor state of repair.
- Conifer tree plantations have a negative visual impact.
- Intensive farming has led to loss of some landscape features with fragmented hedges and stone walls often replaced with post and wire fencing.



## 2. SOUTH DORSET ESCARPMENT

Landscape Type: Chalk ridge / escarpment

### Overview

- 2.1 The South Dorset Escarpment has a more consistent character and landform than the more twisted escarpments to the west and north. The landform becomes rounded towards the foot of the escarpment with regular fields of pastures, which are smaller scale and more intimate around the Bride Valley. The landscape is particularly open and exposed around the higher ground at Abbotsbury with impressive views over the Weymouth lowlands, the Isle of Portland, the Fleet and the open seas beyond.

### Underlying geology and predominant land use

- 2.2 Thin calcareous soils with underlying geology of chalk. The steep topography ensures a near continuous cover of rough, open grasslands and arable fields. The existing balance of open land and woodland cover should be retained.

### Settlement pattern and characteristics

- 2.3 A largely unsettled landscape with occasional isolated farmsteads set within breaks in the ridge surrounded by small broadleaved woodlands and open grasslands. Common local building stones include Purbeck, Lower Purbeck and Portland limestones.

### Landscape characteristics

- 2.4
- A dramatic and exposed steep and narrow escarpment with occasional rounded spurs and deep coombes.
  - Panoramic long distance views to and from the ridge / escarpment, particularly of the surrounding coastal landscape.
  - Large, straight-sided arable fields (late c18th / early c19th enclosures) on escarpment top, with post and wire fencing retaining the openness of character.

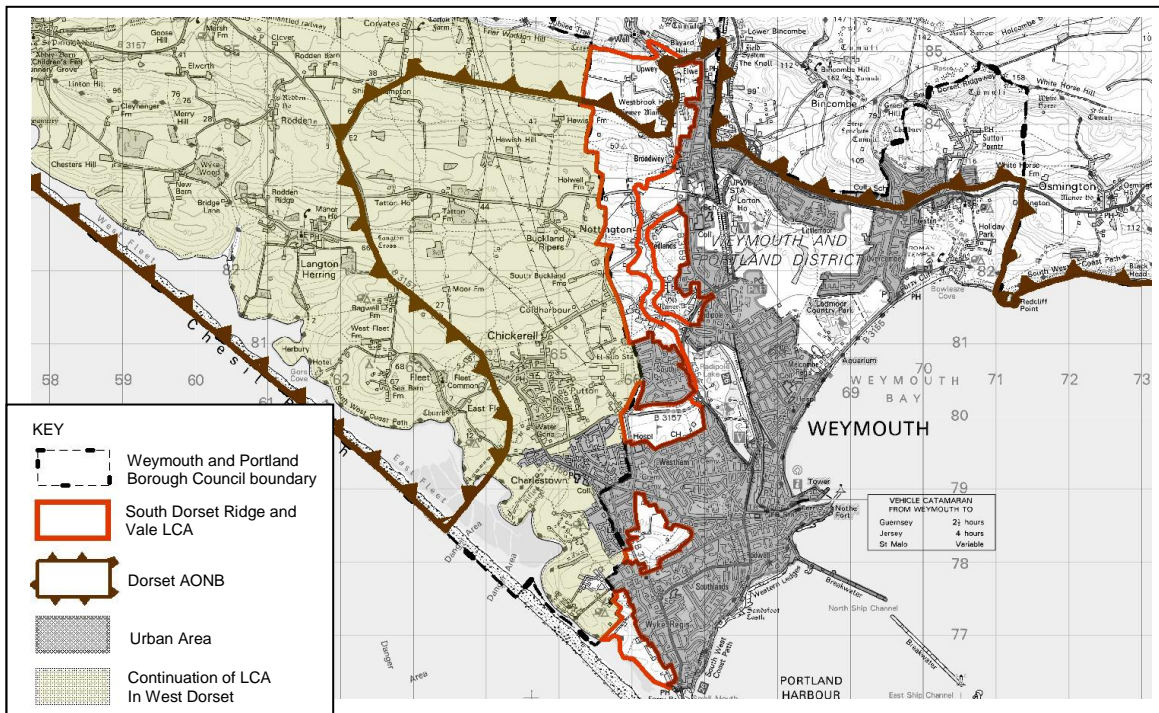
- Prehistoric barrows, prominent hilltop forts and extensive prehistoric field patterns.
- The steep slopes, with some sparse hedgerows, are covered in areas of rough unimproved calcareous downland turf and patches of scrub. These are subject to extensive soil creep.
- Patchwork of small scale grassland fields and occasional hanging ancient oak, ash, hazel woodlands on lower slopes.
- Ancient sunken, winding lanes with an open character towards the top.

### **Detrimental features**

#### 2.5

- Pylons and communication masts are visually prominent creating visual clutter and interrupting the characteristic open views.
- The main road corridors can have a detrimental impact in some places.
- Some agricultural barns have a negative visual impact.
- Invasive scrub vegetation has encroached onto areas of grassland.
- Some fragmentation of grasslands through conifer plantations and arable encroachment from the surrounding uplands.
- Roadside banks are subject to erosion in the narrow, sunken and the open lanes.





### 3. SOUTH DORSET RIDGE AND VALE

Landscape Type: Ridge and vale

#### Overview

- 3.1 The South Dorset Ridge and Vale landscape is characterised by a series of small limestone ridges and clay vales running east to west, enclosed by the South Dorset chalk escarpment to the north. Towards Abbotsbury in the west of the area, the landscape becomes more intimate due to the undulating topography. Further east towards Weymouth, the landscape is broader in scale with urban fringe land uses encroaching into the open countryside. The shingle bank and saline lagoon of the Fleet has a particularly exposed and wild character with little evidence of development. There are sweeping views towards the smooth ridge tops, the fleet and coast.

#### Underlying geology and predominant land use

- 3.2 Limestone ridges and clay vales run from east to west. Landcover has remained largely pastoral on the higher ground with mixed arable and pastoral farming and small woodlands in the vales.

#### Settlement pattern and characteristics

- 3.3 Nucleated settlements with well defined edges are found along the vales. Common local building stones include Forest Marble sandstone plus Lower Purbeck, Portland and Forest Marble limestones. Other materials include some brick, flint and cob.

#### Landscape characteristics

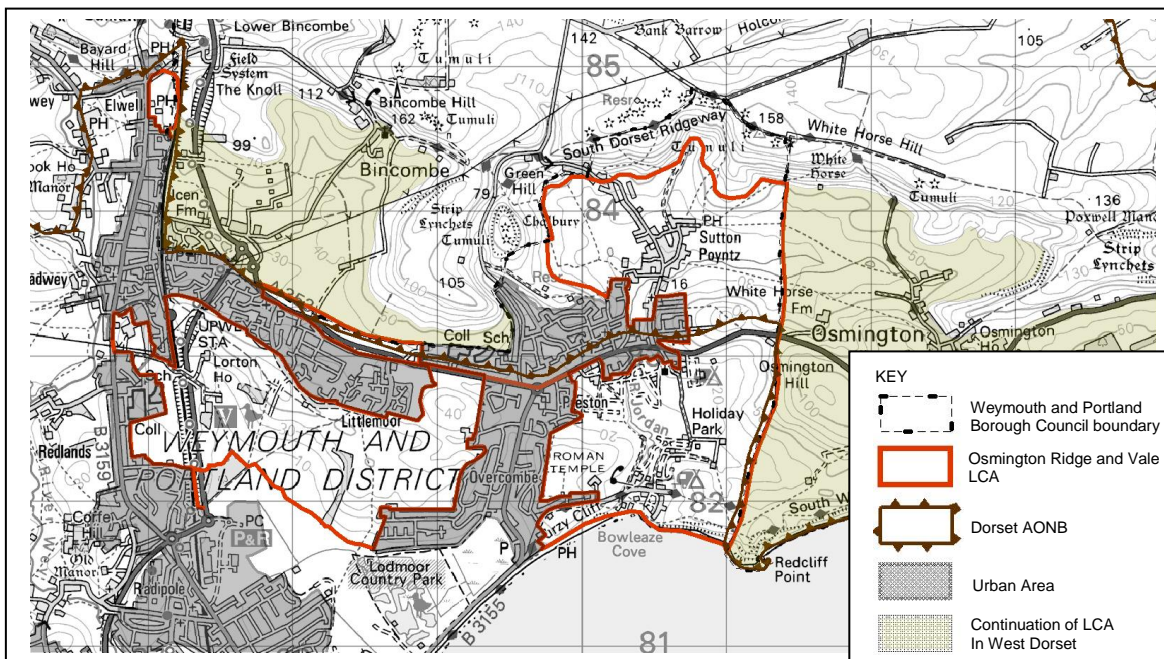
- 3.4
- Smooth ridge tops, where the character is open and there are stunning views towards the Fleet and coast.
  - Small limestone ridges with rocky outcrops running east to west.

- Continuous patchwork of planned enclosures becoming larger and open at higher elevations.
- Remnant patches of acid grassland are found along the ridge tops. Mixed boundaries of stone walls and hedges and occasional hedgerow trees.
- Stunted and clipped hedgerows towards the coast due to exposure to the elements and intensive agricultural management regimes.
- Tall and bushy hedgerows towards the settlement edge of Weymouth and Chickerell due to less intensive management regimes associated with urban fringe uses such as hobby farming and horse/pony paddocks.
- Along the vale floor and ridge slopes, small broadleaved woodlands of oak and ash and occasional hazel coppice add texture and diversity to the landscape.
- Roads have an open, rural character with characteristic features such as fingerposts.

### **Detrimental features**

3.5

- Pylons and masts are visually prominent creating visual clutter and detracting from the characteristic open views.
- Some traditional barns and farm buildings are in a poor state of repair.
- Historic loss of traditional orchards around settlements.
- Urban fringe land uses, including equine development, around the edges of Weymouth and Chickerell have an urbanising influence in this locality.
- Visual impact of caravan parks and other visitor based development.
- Visual impact of excessive road signage.
- Deterioration of some lengths of dry stone walling.
- Hedgerows are intensively managed with a lack of hedgerow trees in the clay vale.
- Towards the coast, rough grasslands are subject to scrub encroachment and a lack of management.



#### 4. OSMINGTON RIDGE AND VALE

Landscape Type: Ridge and vale

##### Overview

- 4.1 The Osmington Ridge and Vale landscape is similar in character to the South Dorset Ridge and Vale landscape with the typical series of small limestone ridges and clay vales running east to west and enclosed by the South Dorset Escarpment to the north, and sweeping views of the coast and the dominant Isle of Portland. As with the South Dorset Ridge and Vale, the land use becomes more intensive around Weymouth with horse paddocks, caravan parks along the coastal strip and other urban influences.

##### Underlying geology and predominant land use

- 4.2 Limestone ridges and clay vales run from east to west. Land use is mainly pastoral on the higher and steeper ground with mixed arable and pastoral farming with small woodlands along the broad valleys and vales.

##### Settlement pattern and characteristics

- 4.3 Tight knit nucleated villages are located along the chalk escarpment base and valley floors. The common local building stones include both Portland and Purbeck limestone. Rural roads with characteristic features such as fingerposts.

##### Landscape characteristics

- 4.4
- Continuous patchwork of complex regular fields becoming larger towards the ridge tops.
  - Remnant patches of acid grassland found along the ridge tops.
  - Mixed boundaries include stone walls and hedges with occasional hedgerow trees.
  - Stunted and clipped hedgerows towards the coast due to exposure to the elements and intensive agricultural management regimes

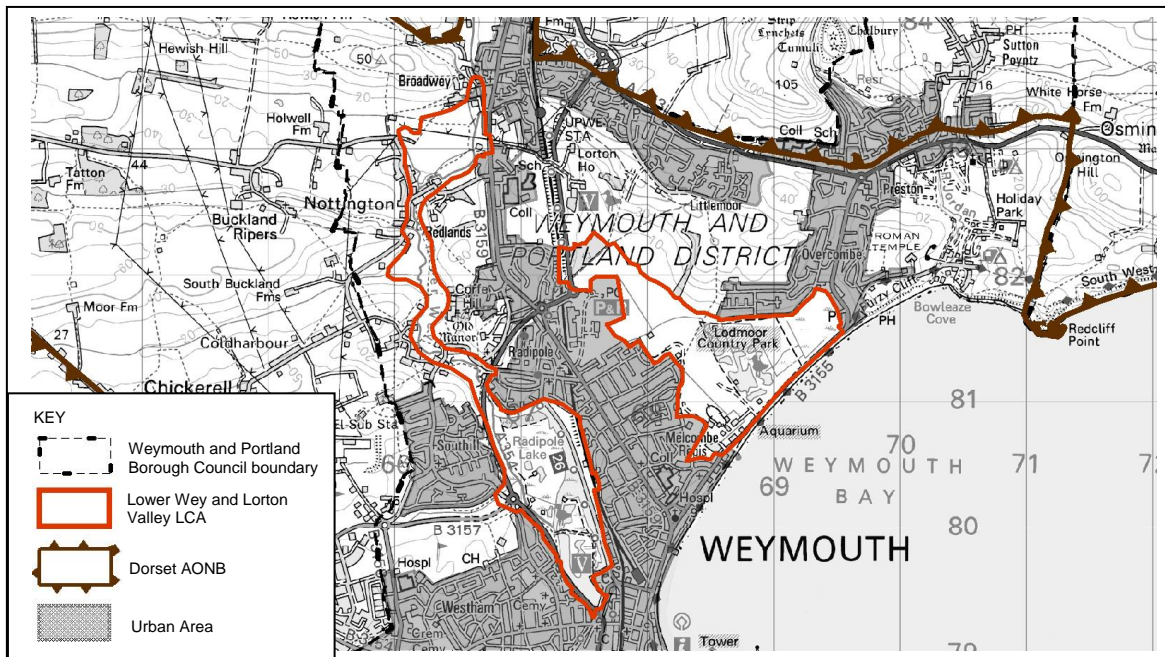


- Tall and bushy hedgerows towards the settlement edge of Weymouth due to less intensive management regimes associated with urban fringe uses such as hobby farming and horse/pony paddocks.
- Sweeping views towards smooth ridge tops, Portland and the coast, where the character is open.
- Occasional barrows.
- Along the shallower slopes and settled vale floors, larger fields of arable use are enclosed by clipped hedgerows and ribbons of hedgerow trees. Small broadleaved woodlands of oak and hazel coppice.
- Deep valleys of rough pasture, blocks of organic shaped woodland of oak and hazel and patches of scrub provide an intimate feel (particularly around Osmington).

### **Detrimental features**

4.5

- Pylons and masts are visually prominent creating visual clutter and detracting from the characteristic open views.
- Some traditional barns and farm buildings are in a poor state of repair.
- Urban fringe land uses, including equine development, around the edges of Weymouth have an urbanising influence in this locality.
- Deterioration of some lengths of dry stone walling.
- Visual impact of excessive road signage.
- Visual impact of caravan parks and other tourism development.



## 5. LOWER WEY AND LORTON VALLEY

Landscape Type: Valley Pasture

### Overview

- 5.1 The lower Wey valley is characterised by a flat valley floor and associated floodplain, with large areas of wetland to the south. Significant riverside vegetation and small-scale fields between sloping valley sides result in an intimate character to the north, however in more open areas, the skyline broadens and extensive views are available along the South Dorset Escarpment. There is a general north/south divide that separates Radipole Lake and Lodmoor with their extensive reed beds and areas of open water from the pastoral floodplain of the River Wey. Towards the south the area is subject to a significant urban influence, running through to the centre of Weymouth and bordered by major highway links to Weymouth.

### Underlying geology and predominant land use

- 5.2 The flat-bottomed valley floor is formed of fluvial deposits of clay, silt, sand & gravel. To the north, the land use is typically grazed pasture, with small blocks of wet woodland remaining along the river banks and within estate parkland. To the south, the land use and management is predominantly in the interests of biodiversity conservation and recreation associated with the Radipole Lake and Lodmoor SSSIs and LNRs.

### Settlement pattern and characteristics

- 5.3 Settlement within the floodplain is generally sparse except where ribbon development at Nottingham follows roads that cross the area. Scattered farmsteads are also present. Predominant building materials include brick and local Purbeck and Portland limestone, though the strength of character in Nottingham is weakened in places by uncharacteristic modern development. The large urban form of Weymouth is an ever-present feature to the south of the area.

### Landscape characteristics

5.4

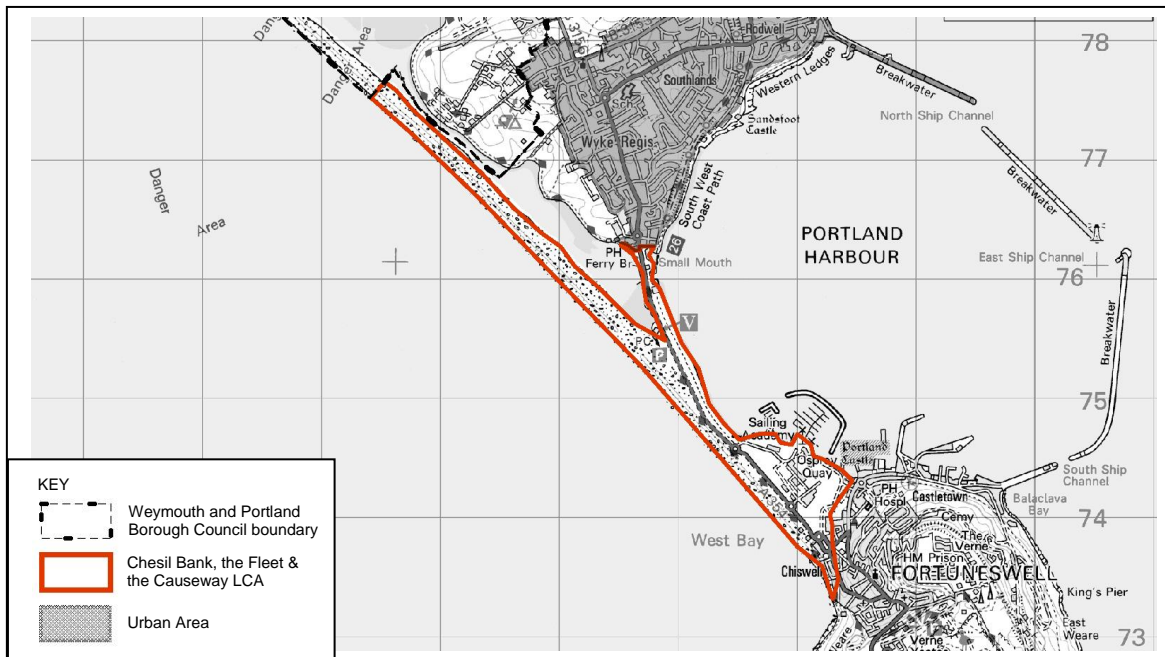
- A flat valley floor landscape with distinctively meandering river channels.
- To the north, a grazed pastoral landscape based on deep alluvial and gravel soils.
- Small-scale fields bordered by species rich hedgerows with hedgerow trees, and remnant blocks of wet woodland associated with the river floodplain.
- To the south, Radipole Lake and Lodmoor are distinctive open areas with extensive reed beds, walkways, and open water.
- Long open views are available along the South Dorset Escarpment.

### Detrimental features

5.5

- Intrusive large scale urban development around the edge of Weymouth. Wide roads with uncharacteristic wide verges, street lighting and conifer planting detract from the rural character of the area.
- Loss of riverside vegetation as a result of more intensive farming practices.
- Fragmentation and intensive management of characteristic hedgerows which have been replaced with post and wire fencing in places.
- Visually intrusive pylons cross the north of the area.
- Decline in hedgerow trees.
- Loss of wet woodland on the valley floor, now restricted to blocks of willow and alder along the immediate riverbanks.
- Traditional stone bridges and walls are in a poor state or repair and are often lost amongst other roadside paraphernalia.





## 6. CHESIL BANK, THE FLEET & THE CAUSEWAY

Landscape Type: Harbour/Wetland/Lagoon

### Overview

- 6.1 Chesil Beach is one of the iconic landscape features along the south coast, and its long slender shingle ridge forms an effective coastal buffer contributing to the tranquil character of the Fleet margins. A wide open and exposed character is present along the causeway, with very little development beside the road, however towards the northern and southern extents, the urban influences of Wyke Regis and Osprey Quay are notable. The wedge-shaped mass of Portland peninsula is visually prominent, forming the southern skyline from much of the area.

### Underlying geology and predominant land use

- 6.2 Consolidated soft silty clay, with layers of sand, gravel and peat form much of the area, with the bank comprising flint and gravel storm deposits. The bank, mudflats and salt marshes that run the length of the causeway are protected and managed for their biodiversity value as SSSIs and a SAC, and the land use reflects this management. The remaining land use is predominantly urban, with a major transport corridor running the length of the area and large scale development at Osprey Quay.

### Settlement pattern and characteristics

- 6.3 Built development is predominantly clustered towards the south, but the physical presence of Wyke Regis and Weymouth's urban area to the north are strong influences. Portland limestone is a consistent local building material (noticeably in walls and other ancillary structures) but the visual unity is weakened by modern industrial and residential development with varying architectural styles and materials.

### **Landscape characteristics**

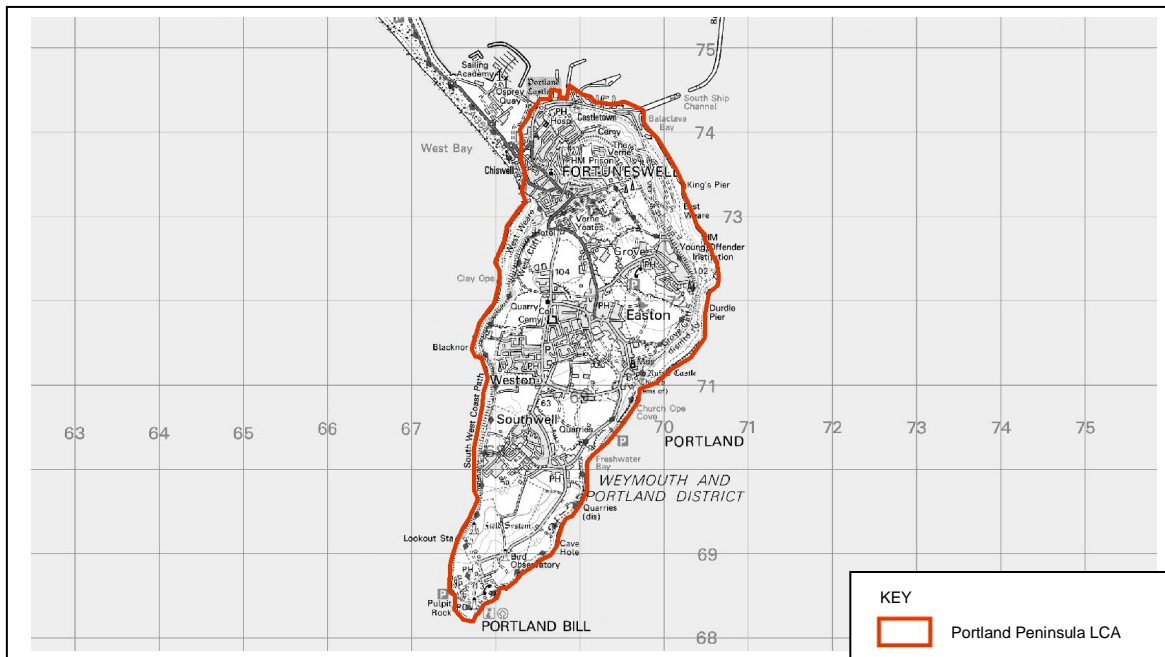
6.4

- A wild and windswept character with extensive skylines, heavily influenced by the exposed coastal location.
- A low lying landscape, overlooked by the rising land of Portland and Wyke Regis.
- A distinctive mix of tidal mudflats, open water and shingle bank.
- The shingle bank is unvegetated and subject to wave action. Some scrub and salt marsh vegetation is present where the bank is stabilised by silt from the lagoon, and on the causeway along the path of the disused railway.
- Open and extensive views are available towards the Osmington Coast and Portland, however views out to sea are restricted by the linear ridge of Chesil bank.
- Masts in Portland harbour provide a strong visual link to the working harbour.

### **Detrimental features**

6.5

- Large scale development at Osprey Quay has had an urbanising influence over much of the area.
- Visual impact of coastal car parks and other visitor based development.
- Intrusive presence of heavy traffic on the A354, and the visual impact of street lights, road signage and other visual clutter.
- Small boat yards and slipways towards the northern end of the area have an industrial and degraded character.
- Visually prominent development at Wyke Regis does not have a strong character or sense of place.



## 7. PORTLAND PENINSULA

Landscape Type: Limestone Peninsula

### Overview

- 7.1 The Isle of Portland forms a dramatic and distinctive wedge shaped peninsula at the end of Chesil Beach. It is an exposed, windswept and rocky landscape with a strong maritime influence. Prominent limestone cliffs and undercliffs surround the island. Tree cover is limited due to the harsh exposed location, and is often only found in sheltered hollows. This lack of trees emphasises the broadly open skyline which is dominated by manmade structures, apart from the extensive outward views from the cliffs that take in much of the Dorset coastline.

### Underlying geology and predominant land use

- 7.2 The wedge shaped peninsula slants southwards, reaching sea level at Portland Bill. Largely of Lulworth and lower Purbeck rock, where the chert and shell-rich Portland Limestone is present, extensive quarrying has resulted in a deeply scarred landscape. Grazing is present on the historic field pattern which is still intact in places, particularly towards the south of the island. The coastal strip comprises rich limestone grassland above the distinctive cliffs and is of high recreational value.

### Settlement pattern and characteristics

- 7.3 The pale grey Portland limestone dominates the natural and built environment, with many structures and buildings made of this local stone. The four main settlements of Fortuneswell, Easton, Weston and Southwell each have distinctive characters. A number of large industrial units are also present, often remnant of military or naval activity brought into modern industrial uses. A network of open spaces separate the settlements, providing important links to the recreational uses of the island and creating a more open character within the built up areas.



### **Landscape characteristics**

7.4

- A dramatic and distinctive wedge shaped limestone peninsula with prominent cliffs.
- An open skyline with sweeping views along the coast.
- The pale grey Portland limestone rock dominates the natural and built landscape, and results in areas of calcareous grassland.
- An exposed, windswept, rocky and raw landscape
- Quarrying and military activity has, and continues to significantly impact upon the island's character.
- Little tree cover on the plateau and an historic strip field pattern, traditionally separated by dry stone walls.
- Areas of the more sheltered north eastern coast are dominated by scrub, trees and woodland.
- Networks of open spaces separate the settlements and provide an important buffer to urban and industrial development.
- Restored quarried landscapes of high amenity, biodiversity and recreational value.
- A number of distinctive landmark features such as Portland Bill and the lighthouse, and The Verne.

### **Detrimental features**

7.5

- The open skylines are dominated by manmade structures and features.
- Impacts of active quarrying works through visual intrusion, noise and movement of large scale plant.
- Often a neglected and disjointed feel, resulting from a complex and diverse range of land uses both historic and current.
- Urban fringe land uses, including equine development have resulted in the erosion of the historic field pattern.
- Traditional stone wall field boundaries are often in poor condition or have been removed and replaced with wire or temporary plastic fencing.