

West Dorset, Weymouth and Portland Local Plan Examination

Hearing Statement for Matter 5: Economy



Prepared by West Dorset District Council and
Weymouth & Portland Borough Council

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Matter 5: Economy

Agenda Item 5.1: Does the spatial strategy provide an adequate basis for addressing the future needs of the two areas or would other options provide better outcomes?

- 1.1 As identified in the Submission Plan’s strategic approach, the distribution of development has been influenced by:
- The needs, size, and roles of the area’s settlements, taking into account and current imbalances;
 - The benefits of concentrating most development in locations where homes, jobs and facilities will be easily accessible to each other and there is a choice of transport modes;
 - The availability of land; and
 - The environmental constraints of the plan area.
- 1.2 In line with this strategy, to help meet the anticipated demand for employment land, sites for employment uses have been identified and allocated at the main towns (see Submission Plan Table 3.3). Generic policies for the rural areas have been included instead of specific allocations.
- 1.3 The Sustainable Pattern of Development Background Paper (CD/SUSBP), the Economy Background Paper (CD/ECONBP) and the Sustainability Appraisal (CD/SA4) considered other options for the spatial strategy. A more restrictive approach to the distribution of employment development, while having positive effects on environmental considerations, would be likely to provide less economic opportunities and adversely impact on rural communities’ ability to meet their needs. A more permissive approach to the location of employment sites is likely to result in a dispersed pattern of development; though this would create very positive economic outcomes the adverse environmental impacts associated with this approach would be considerable.
- 1.4 The approach taken by the Submission Plan will ensure a flexible and ready supply of employment sites in sustainable locations. By ensuring development takes place in the most sustainable locations it will help reduce the need to travel as well as promote social inclusion. The spatial strategy allows employment needs to be met locally, avoiding a dispersed pattern of development and adverse environmental impacts, while still providing support for appropriate opportunities to develop and diversify the rural economy.

Agenda Item 5.2: Is sufficient attention given to employment needs in rural areas?

- 2.1 Paragraph 28 of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) supports sustainable economic growth and expansion of all types of business and enterprise in rural areas (both through the conversion of existing buildings and well designed new buildings). In accordance with national policy, the strategic objectives of the Submission Plan include supporting the local economy and sustainable communities. While development opportunities in the more rural areas will primarily be focused at the larger villages as the most sustainable locations, activities that will help continue to support the rural economy are supported away from existing settlements.
- 2.2 While Submission Plan Policy SUS2 strictly controls development outside Defined Development Boundaries, it does have regard to employment needs in rural areas and permits in principle economic development in the following forms: primary industries and the diversification of land based rural industries, equestrian development, tourism, education/training, recreation or leisure related development and other employment uses (as defined by the Submission Plan in Chapter 4). Similarly, Policy SUS3 supports the adaptation and re-use of rural buildings for employment uses, which will increase the stock and variety of rural employment premises.
- 2.3 The Submission Plan supports the provision of land to meet a range of employment needs, although some of these uses have quite different impacts and specific requirements. It would therefore be inappropriate to take the same approach to all these types of development. Where necessary and appropriate, further requirements have been set out in specific Submission Plan policies:
- Policy ECON1 Provision of employment
 - Policy ECON4 Retail and town centre development
 - Policy ECON5 Tourism attractions and facilities
 - Policy ECON6 Built tourism accommodation
 - Policy ECON7 Caravan and camping sites
 - Policy ECON8 Farming and the diversification of land based rural businesses
 - Policy ECON9 New agricultural buildings
 - Policy ECON10 Equestrian development
 - Policy COM2 New or improved local community buildings and structures
 - Policy COM4 New or improved local recreational facilities

- Policy COM6 The provision of education and training facilities

Agenda Item 5.3: Is the general approach to retail development appropriate and in accordance with the principles in the NPPF?

- 3.1 The NPPF sets out a clear strategy to support the vitality and viability of existing town centres. The Submission Plan has defined a network and hierarchy of town and local centres. It identifies the extent of the town centres, primary shopping areas and primary/secondary frontages on the proposals map and sets out in Policy ECON4 what uses will be appropriate in these locations.
- 3.2 The retail and leisure development needs of the town centres and their capacity to accommodate new development has been independently assessed through the Joint Town Centre Retail and Leisure Study (CD/ECON3) and the update (CD/ECON4) produced by CBRE. To ensure that potential future needs are met in full and are not compromised by limited site availability, where necessary the Submission Plan has identified sites to accommodate future growth in and around the town centres based on the retail sequential tests of the CBRE report (see Submission Plan Policies WEY1, DOR4, DOR5, BRID4 and SHER2).
- 3.3 Weymouth town centre is an important place for a number of reasons; however without a clear strategy for development there was a risk of failing to meet its potential and falling into decline. As the regeneration and continuing economic viability of Weymouth town centre was identified as essential for the future sustainability of the borough, this has been positively planned for through Policy WEY1.
- 3.4 In accordance with paragraph 24 of the NPPF, Policy ECON4 requires a sequential test to be applied to planning applications for main town centre uses that are not in an existing centre and not in accordance with an up to date Local Plan. To reflect paragraph 25 of the NPPF and not unduly restrict suitable economic development, exceptions are made to this sequential approach to allow the consideration of out of centre development where appropriate, for example small scale rural development.
- 3.5 In line with the NPPF (paragraphs 26 and 27) the Submission Plan sets a proportional, local threshold above which a retail impact assessment is required. Policy ECON4 states that development leading to significant adverse impacts should be refused.

Agenda Item 5.4: Does the Plan provide a suitable framework for supporting the tourist economy?

- 4.1 As paragraph 4.5.3 of the Submission Plan explains, allocating specific sites for tourism related development is not considered to be a pragmatic approach, as the right location will vary depending on the particular market and niche being targeted. The approach taken is to make sure that the general policies of the Submission Plan support the most suitable types of tourism in the most appropriate locations.
- 4.2 The Submission Plan (Policy ECON5) generally directs tourism attractions and facilities towards the existing settlements (with major attractions preferably within town centres) as the most sustainable locations likely to provide more local benefits and more opportunities for travel other than by car. Some new tourist development will, by its nature, not be appropriate for these locations, and some existing attractions in countryside locations may need new or enhanced facilities. Such development may be beneficial in increasing the quality and diversity of the tourism offer and the policy enables attractions in other locations where this would provide wider environmental, community or economic benefits.
- 4.3 Larger hotels and guesthouses are directed to established settlements as the most sustainable locations and the places where tourist attractions are concentrated (Policy ECON6). However, visitors also come to enjoy the many attractive rural areas and coastline and the policy allows for smaller scale accommodation at other established settlements for those businesses targeting tourists seeking such an experience. In order to support the ongoing viability of the already established businesses that add to the tourism offer of the area, the Submission Plan also allows improvements to the quality of the accommodation on offer and the appearance of the site through intensification, extension or replacement of existing premises. In acknowledgement of the contribution they make to the economy and the critical support they provide to other tourism based businesses, the Submission Plan seeks to prevent the loss or reduction in size of hotels and larger guesthouses. However, a flexible approach is taken in order to prevent the unreasonable retention of accommodation which is unviable or for which there is no market.
- 4.4 Caravan and camping sites are key components of the areas stock of self catering accommodation and Policy ECON7 permits development that is well located in relation to existing facilities. However, some larger sites are relatively self-contained with on-site facilities that can also benefit local communities. To restrict the development of caravan and camping sites exclusively to settlement/edge of settlement locations would stifle the growth of new sites and constrain the success of existing sites. Therefore the policy takes a flexible approach to consider

development that makes provision for appropriate facilities on site and supports improvements in the quality of the accommodation on offer and proposals that enable existing sites to extend the visitor season. However, caravan and camping sites, especially the larger coastal ones can be visually intrusive in the landscape and adversely impact on the general rural amenity of the countryside and resident population. While the policy is supportive of this sector it also includes appropriate safeguards to ensure development would not result in unacceptable detrimental impacts.

- 4.5 Within the Defined Development Boundaries of the larger settlements tourism development will normally be permitted.
- 4.6 Paragraph 28 of the NPPF supports sustainable rural tourism and leisure developments that benefit businesses in rural areas, communities and visitors, and which respect the character of the countryside.
- 4.7 While Policy SUS2 strictly controls development outside Defined Development Boundaries it does have regard to employment needs in rural areas and permits tourism development in principle. Similarly, Policy SUS 3 supports the adaptation and re-use of rural buildings for tourism uses which will increase the stock and variety in rural areas.
- 4.8 The policy framework provided by the Submission Plan looks favourably on investment in new and enhanced tourist development in sustainable locations so that the local tourism industry can continue to be vibrant and competitive while making sure that the environment and other features that are important to visitors and residents are not damaged by this development. The approach is considered to strike a good balance between allowing new or enhanced development in order to support the tourism offer and seeking to minimise adverse environmental and social impacts.

Agenda Item 5.5: Have the needs of primary industries (agriculture, forestry, extraction operations) been adequately addressed?

- 5.1 The Submission Plan's approach to achieving a sustainable pattern of development, limits development away from existing settlements. In order to support the needs of primary industries, activities that help continue to support the rural economy or help in the long term management of the countryside and its unique character - such as agriculture, forestry, horticulture or related enterprises - are supported through Submission Plan Policies:

- Policy SUS2 Distribution of development

- Policy ECON8 Farming and the diversification of land based rural business
- Policy ECON9 New agricultural buildings
- Policy ENV8 Agricultural land and farming resilience

5.2 As identified in paragraph 2.2.8 of the Submission Plan, the geology of the area is an important resource and there are extensive areas of outcropping minerals. The protection and extraction of these mineral resources is implemented through policy in the Bournemouth, Dorset and Poole Minerals Local Plan and Strategy (CD/OCP1).