

Response to the Joint Local
Plan Review for West Dorset,
Weymouth and Portland (Initial
Issues & Options Consultation)

Final Report

Dorchester Town Council
April 2017



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This report sets out the considered response of Dorchester Town Council to the Joint Local Plan Review for West Dorset, Weymouth and Portland



Feria Urbanism is a planning and design studio that specialises in urban design, urban planning, neighbourhood strategies, public participation and community engagement. Established in 2007, we have been involved in a diverse range of planning and design projects across the UK.

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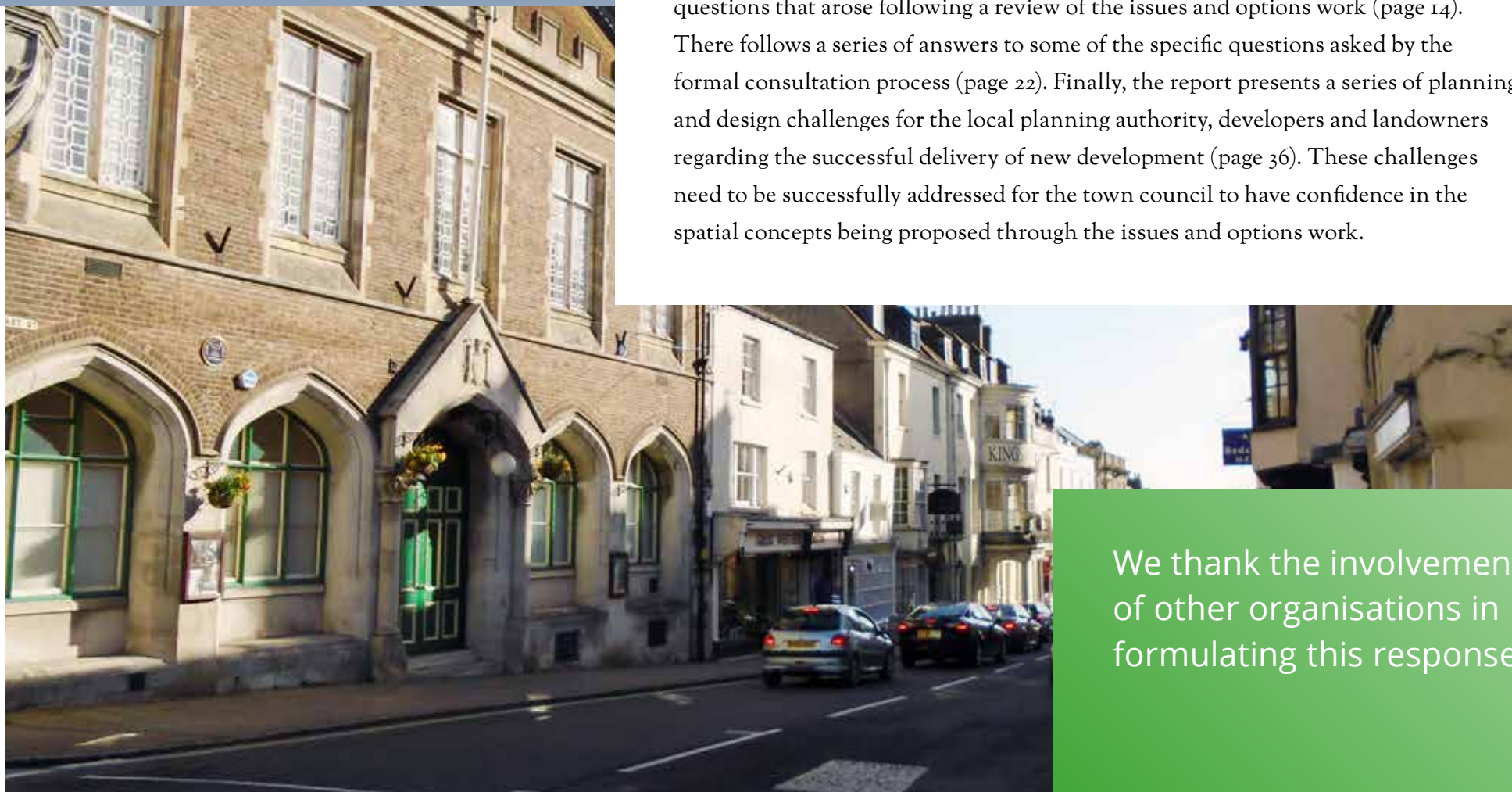
Contents

- 6 Project Background
- 14 Headline Responses
- 22 Answers to Specific Questions
- 36 Planning & Design Challenges

Project Background

This document sets out the considered response of Dorchester Town Council to the Joint Local Plan Review for West Dorset, Weymouth and Portland (Initial Issues & Options Consultation). The consultation period on this local plan review runs from 6th February 2017 to 3rd April 2017.

This response from the town council takes the form of a series of statements and questions that arose following a review of the issues and options work (page 14). There follows a series of answers to some of the specific questions asked by the formal consultation process (page 22). Finally, the report presents a series of planning and design challenges for the local planning authority, developers and landowners regarding the successful delivery of new development (page 36). These challenges need to be successfully addressed for the town council to have confidence in the spatial concepts being proposed through the issues and options work.



We thank the involvement of other organisations in formulating this response

The Dorchester context

Dorchester Town Council is the local parish council for Dorchester. The population is 20,000, having grown from 15,000 in the 1980's and with outstanding planning approvals to increase the number to 23,000 people by around 2025. Much of this growth is expected to be at Poundbury but there were also significant brownfield sites (e.g. the Brewery and Prison) and other infill sites too that have since been developed.

The town has 17,000 jobs for its working population of 9,000 residents with well over half of these jobs in the public sector such as within Dorset County Council, Dorset County Hospital and schools.

The economy in the town is currently strong with economic growth at Poundbury and a growing night-time economy based around Brewery Square. The town council is looking to support diversification into more culture and heritage, with several major infrastructure initiatives in the pipeline for Dorchester Museum, Shire Hall and Maltings Arts.

The town has a population that is already much older than the national average and is growing older through recent developments at Poundbury and Brewery Square. A rebalancing of the age profile is therefore sought through new development, with a desire to see more younger people living and working in the town and its immediate surroundings.

There are 20 councillors that serve the town, nine of whom are also district councillors and three are county councillors, so the town council already has a well-informed understanding of the West Dorset District Council Local Plan. The town council has a keen interest in planning and welcomes this opportunity to provide a considered response to the local plan review.

About this response document

In order to prepare this response, Dorchester Town Council sought the expertise of an independent planning advisor. Following written submissions and selection interviews, the team from Feria Urbanism, an urban design and planning practice based in Bournemouth, was appointed to assist the town council.

The Feria Urbanism team collated and interpreted the views of town council members to inform the content of this response document. The process involved workshops, one-to-one meetings and attendance at formal committees.

Members of the town council were keen to be engaged, as were outside organisations that share the same aims and concerns as the town council. These include the Dorchester Civic Society, the Magna Housing Group and the neighbouring parishes of Stinsford and Charminster. Representatives of the civic society and both parish councils offered their own views to help inform this response. We thank the involvement of other organisations in formulating this response

The local plan review process

There have been four iterations of the West Dorset District Local Plan for the area over the last five years, as follows:

- Version 1 — Growth in Sherborne, Beaminster and Crossways, but not Dorchester. Dropped due to opposition in other towns.
- Version 2 — An extra 1,000 houses on the south-eastern border of Dorchester. Dropped due to opposition in Dorchester.
- Version 3 — A local plan which promised to find sites to meet West Dorset's in-house housing target. Rejected by planning inspector before the inspection process commenced.
- Version 4 — A local plan which promised to find sites to meet West Dorset's reassessed and much higher housing target. Accepted by the planning inspector following thorough inspection in 2015

In signing-off the last version of the plan, the independent planning inspector required a review of the local plan by 2020, to identify sites for 4,500 houses across the plan area.

The inspector also required the new local plan to address the issue of Dorchester's next phase of growth, a heavy hint that a significant element of the development should be local to the town. It is within this context that this response has been formulated to the current Joint Local Plan Review for West Dorset, Weymouth and Portland

The process of drafting the response

An inception meeting between the Feria Urbanism team and officers and members of Dorchester Town Council was held on Monday 27th February 2017. This meeting was used to establish the forward programme of dates, to share ideas and initial reactions to the various issues and options and discuss how these could be framed in the formal response. It was also an opportunity to visit and photograph the sites under discussion, in particular those north of the river valley (i.e. options for development D1, D2, D3 and D7). These sites would become a focus of attention throughout the rest of the process.

Following the inception meeting, a series of stakeholder workshop sessions were convened by Dorchester Town Council on Monday 13th March 2017. The Feria Urbanism team helped to organise and run these sessions, each designed to uncover and then record the concerns and aspirations of different groups that have a stake in the future of Dorchester. Those in attendance included representatives of:

- The Dorchester Civic Society
- Stinsford Parish Council
- Charminster Parish Council
- Magna Housing Association
- Members of Dorchester Town Council

The workshop sessions were held in sequence (one after another) during the afternoon and evening. This format allowed each group dedicated time to contribute to the process. All who took part gave their views on the issues and options contained in the local plan review, with specific regard for Dorchester.

Based on the extensive notes taken during the workshop series, a draft report was produced. This was circulated on Thursday 23rd March 2017 and councillors were invited to comment. The working group of members reconvened on the evening of Monday 27th March to recommend refinements and revisions.

These revisions were enabled later that same week. The final report was approved by Dorchester Town Council on Monday 3rd April 2017 and submitted to West Dorset District Council the following morning.

Common aims, shared ideas

The section below sets out the key messages that arose from the workshop series. There was substantial common ground between the different stakeholder groups which gives greater substance to the formal response from Dorchester Town Council.

1. Alternative scenarios not fully explored

All stakeholders shared the view that alternative development scenarios had not yet been fully explored. The issues and options that show significant new development focused around Dorchester have

been seemingly proposed without either a demonstration that a full investigation into other options has been undertaken or a summary describing such a process.

Alternatives that have not seemingly been explored fully would include an intensification of the Weymouth — Dorchester corridor, with more housing and employment development along this route. Following substantial investment in new road infrastructure in this area in recent years, better value could be derived from this investment if the area were to also accommodate more jobs and homes.

Another option that deserves further consideration is the managed growth of villages and smaller settlements across the district. For example, settlements of all sizes being asked to take 5-10% growth over the plan period. In this way, all areas can take a share of the pain and the gain. It was acknowledged that while new development can cause upheaval and distress in some instances (the “pain”) it can also add to the life and vitality of villages, keep essential services running and stop smaller settlements going into decline (the “gain”).

With neighbourhood planning now well-established, the mechanisms for managed growth in smaller settlements are already in place yet there was no clear demonstration in any of the documentation that this option had been fully considered.

The managed growth of Crossways is a third option that requires further exploration. While it is acknowledged that Crossways is already identified for additional growth through the current issues and options report, there was a clear expression from all who took part in this process

that a more substantial development opportunity exists here. This could help deliver a range of additional services and facilities currently absent from Crossways. However, this will need a full and proper master plan to help deliver a successful new settlement pattern rather than simply adding bits on here and there.

All of these options, and others, require greater scrutiny from the local planning authority. At the present time, it does not appear this has happened to the level expected.

2. Concern about land north of the river valley

Much of the debate during the workshop and internal consultation process was concerned with the development options north of the water meadows. Parish councillors from Stinsford and Charminster were strongly opposed to the scale of growth outlined in the issues and options diagrams.

That said, there was consensus amongst all those who took part that any large development in this location, should it happen, must bring with it the necessary infrastructure to support both the new and existing residents. Such infrastructure should include east to west links that connect with the existing road network, new north to south links to effectively connect the new neighbourhoods with Dorchester town centre, together with additional schools and other important community facilities and services.

Town councillors were generally opposed to Site D₄, due to its location beyond the southern bypass and its consequent dislocation from the

town centre. Conversely, the small infill sites comprising Site D₅ were unanimously accepted. These were seen as relatively straightforward and unlikely to cause any obvious negative impact, subject to the usual planning processes and attention to detail.

3. The need for a thorough & responsive master plan

Most notable of the shared views from stakeholders was the need for a thorough and responsive master plan to establish a clear vision for the future of Dorchester and its surrounding settlements. Participants wished to see generic planning processes avoided as they felt it would not lead to the types of high quality design and successful outcomes they wish to see.

All development in and around Dorchester should place a clear emphasis upon Dorchester's unique identity as a market town and the county town of Dorset. This includes any development proposals north of the river valley (i.e. design options for development D₁, D₂, D₃ and D₇). These must have clear, convenient and direct connections to the town centre. Development north of the river cannot simply be satellite developments with no apparent physical, cultural or social links with the host town.

Exactly how these physical, cultural or social links manifest themselves will be a key challenge for a responsive master plan to address. This response document sets out a series of design and planning challenges on page 36. These are considered tests that must be met in order to prove that development in this location can be a success.



Poundbury has shown the effectiveness of a good master planning process. These lessons need to be applied to future development.

4. *Housing affordability*

Affordable housing was frequently mentioned as a key priority to be addressed through new development. Related to this was a strong belief that future housing should be designed to respond to the local character, with affordability not undermining high quality design and local distinctiveness. Participants in the workshops were disappointed that the issues and options report does not give proper consideration to matter of local distinctiveness and high quality architecture.

Dorchester-based registered social landlord Magna Housing stated that it has the capacity to build 200+ homes per year, and is growing their own in-house development team (e.g. project managers, development professionals etc) to help it do so. After some years of not building homes, Magna are keen to do this again. As an association, it is not interested in taking on the management of affordable homes built by the major house builders. This is primarily due to quality control issues. Instead, it wants to be given land as part of a wider development on which it can design, build and manage its own estate.

Magna stated during the workshops sessions that there is currently a high demand for one and two bedroom homes in the Dorchester area. Magna is keen to respond to local need and niche demands. An example of its thinking is a bespoke apartment block comprising twelve one bedroom flats for young people in need of care, with assistance on site. This is a particular building typology that could be used to help to meet an identified local demand.

Such an architectural form could also respond to locally distinctive styles and form part of a higher density cluster of new development. This part of the discussion illustrated how aspects of detailed design, such as house typologies that respond to both housing need and local styles, really need early consideration to help bring to life the somewhat abstract land use planning diagrams in the issues and options work.

Magna further commented that the people on housing waiting lists have expressed a strong preference to live in Dorchester over elsewhere in the county. This is due to it being an attractive town with easy access to a range of services and facilities. The association struggles to let properties in outlying areas, some distance from larger towns. This adds further support to a widely held wish to see a high proportion of any new development to be within reach of more people, more often.

5. Benefits to Dorchester

Workshop participants raised the question of how future development growth can benefit Dorchester, rather than focusing on how Dorchester can benefit the developers of new homes and new residents of these areas. There was a feeling that house builders will be able to market and sell new homes at a premium off the back of Dorchester's image, heritage and range of services and facilities. All very well, but what benefits flow back the other way, to the existing town and existing residents?

More intensive housing development within the town centre was championed as a means of providing greater vibrancy to the town itself. Particular mention was given to the stalled Charles Street retail-led development (through a switch to a greater residential component and fewer retail outlets) and reviving many of the empty living spaces above shops. It was also suggested that other public sector sites should be considered early on, such as the Ministry of Defence site on Poundbury Road. This early consideration may help influence any future decisions by government departments.

Concerted efforts to tackle both of these issues must be made in tandem with efforts to promote the development of land outside the town boundary. The landowners and developers who stand to profit from greenfield development on the edge should also be obliged to help solve these urban regeneration problems in the centre as part of a coordinated deal or joint venture.

6. Innovation

Innovation in design was encouraged to increase housing density, as has been successful in Poundbury. Using responsive house typologies, such as the twelve unit apartment block described by Magna, will help meet local needs and raise densities. There was a feeling that a low-density, low-rise suburbia that is reliant on private car movements would be profligate use of greenfield land around the town. However, there is no apparent mechanism in the issues and options work to influence matters of density and design that will be critical to a successful outcome.

Innovation in process was also discussed. In terms of land procurement, development north of the river requires an equalisation of land values and a joint venture model that would lead to better, more coordinated outcomes. A conventional approach, where landowners sign development options with a national house builder will not lead to outcomes good enough to support. Effective “land value capture” is needed to help deliver the range of social, cultural, environmental and economic infrastructure required to make excellent places.

One aspect of a future master plan to be addressed was a desire for green spaces to be included within and between higher density residential developments. The concept of a “country park” atmosphere for the larger open spaces, together with more intensively used green spaces within the developments is to be encouraged. The popular Borough Gardens could be used as inspiration for new, more intensive green spaces.

Workshop participants were keen to see development processes work effectively across land ownership boundaries to gain the maximum benefits for the community. Developments need to be in accordance with an objective-led master plan to ensure positive outcomes.

7. Baseline data review

There were concerns that the local plan review process may be operating without the correct information, as certain sites highlighted as development options may be located in aquifer protection zones. It was alleged that previous planning applications in these areas have been denied for this reason and further examination of technical data may be needed. This issues applies particularly to land parcel D3 and D4.

Furthermore, participants requested that the local planning authority interrogates the most recent local plan inspector’s comments more rigorously, rather than following the suggestions too closely. It was the Dorchester Civic Society that pointed out that the inspector referred only to “... at or in the vicinity of Dorchester” not “Dorchester” when it came to the location of the bulk of housing delivery.

This could be interpreted that outlying settlements, close to but not within Dorchester, could receive a higher housing allocation. This does not appear to have been tested fully.

Headline Responses

Following a review of the issues and options document, Dorchester Town Council has a range of opinions to offer West Dorset District Council and further question to ask. These are set out in a series of statements and questions and comprise a key part of the town council's response. The three main messages are on page 15, opposite.

While it is appreciated that a series of specific questions has been asked through the formal consultation process, the town council wishes to take this opportunity to make its opinion known on a range of associated issues that do not necessarily fit with the formal response format. Specific answers are provided on page 22 — 34.



1. All alternative options must be fully assessed

It is not clear that all alternative options have been fully assessed with the intensity or rigour required to dismiss them. The current issues and options work appears to have settled on a preferred scenario where the majority of new development is in and around Dorchester, in particular to the north of the town. However, it has not been sufficiently demonstrated that alternatives to this scenario have been subject to the required level of scrutiny.

2. Developing adjacent to Dorchester will not be straightforward

Qualified local support for the proposed development scenarios is only likely to be forthcoming once these other alternatives have been more fully explored. Once a preferred position is established, there are a series of fundamental planning and design challenges facing any development north of the water meadows. Early master planning work will be vital to demonstrate how these challenges can be overcome.

3. We want to take a leading role in the process

Growth of the town on the scale envisaged will require significant partnership working to achieve the right outcomes. Land owners, developers and a range of public sector organisations must all work together. Dorchester Town Council wishes to have a leading role in the process to ensure that the views of the local community are fairly reflected in the work that lies ahead.

We want to see all other development options to be subject to greater scrutiny

It is felt that the surrounding settlements of, for example, Crossways, Broadmayne and Winterbourne Abbas all have the means to expand, carefully and methodically. This would relieve pressure on Dorchester. Has this been assessed properly?

Perhaps if each settlement in the whole district was required to expand by 10% of its current size, then the total housing allocation could be shared. In such an instance, there may be no need for a substantial development in Dorchester which may completely transform its character. Meanwhile, such small-scale development at smaller settlements could be very beneficial. Again, was this considered to be an option?

What about more development located in the Weymouth to Dorchester corridor? Has this been assessed too? Has all potential brownfield land within the town been considered? What about the old military barracks site? What about areas of potentially under-utilised employment land?

See page 9 and 10 of this report for more information on these alternative development scenarios.

Once these other alternatives, and others, have been more fully explored, development in Dorchester will be more widely accepted if it is then (and only then) found to be necessary.

We want to see a greater interrogation of the inspector's comments

The inspector's reference to "... at or in the vicinity of Dorchester" rather than simply "Dorchester" suggests that more development could be allocated to the surrounding settlements, such as Crossways, Broadmayne and Winterbourne Abbas. Has this been properly considered? It is understood that Crossways has already been allocated substantial future development but could it take more? Smaller settlements could also share the load.

We must have a robust master plan to establish a clear vision for Dorchester

As exemplified by both Poundbury and Brewery Square, an effective master planning process establishes a vision for an area and allows local residents to comprehend the bigger picture. Both the design and phasing of work can be clearly understood. Quality can be controlled.

In creating a master plan, all elements of the future development are considered and a cohesive strategy can be delivered. Community input in this vision is essential. This is a necessary if there is to be any confidence in the issues and options being considered. When will any detailed master planning begin? Only then can there be confidence in the options being offered.

The master planning process should take a “whole town” approach and not just deal with the new development sites. This will help reveal how existing problems and challenges can be addressed by new investment. It will also show how local distinctiveness, character and culture can influence new developments to help ensure they effectively assimilate and embed into the wider town.

Without a robust, whole-town master plan there is a risk of piece-meal development, fragmentation and a lack of cohesion, with the town experienced not as a coordinated whole but as a series of individual inward-looking developments. This is to be avoided.

Future development will benefit from the Dorchester positive image and reputation but we want future development to benefit the existing town too

Such a large addition of housing must bring benefits to the town. Rather than the focus being on how the existing settlement of Dorchester can provide for new residents, the vibrancy and sustainability of the town should be of equal concern. At present, it does not appear to be so. How and when will mechanisms to secure benefits for the town be introduced?

The whole-town master planning approach as described earlier will be vital if the benefits of new investment are to be felt beyond the new development sites.

We need objective-led planning steered by the community

Setting out core objectives of Dorchester’s future needs and how to achieve them will provide a checklist against which any proposed development can be measured. Inclusive, regular community consultation to define such objectives will ensure that any development remains responsive and benefits the community. How can a process like this be linked to development expansion on the edges?

We need more affordable housing

In order to meet the high demand for affordable housing, new and innovative processes will be needed. The different ways in which investment is directed will have an influence on the level of affordable housing that can be provided. For example, too high a proportion of funds used to build costly infrastructure (e.g. roads and transport) may mean less money for affordable housing. Therefore, innovative approaches to the whole development process will be needed to secure the right level of affordable homes for the town in the future. We also want to see open market housing aimed towards young families and key workers as a key part of the overall housing mix.

We want to see a thoughtful and responsive design approach

Designing to a higher density will prevent unnecessary encroachment upon green space. As demonstrated in Poundbury, setting higher density houses against high quality open space, such as public squares and gardens, can give breathing space to higher density schemes.

There is disappointment that the issues and options report does not effectively address design matters such as the relationship between development and the adjoining countryside.

We want our world famous “literary landscape” to be recognised and protected

“Casterbridge, as has been hinted, was a place deposited in the block upon a corn-field. There was no suburb in the modern sense, or transitional intermixture of town and down. It stood, with regard to the wide fertile land adjoining, clean-cut and distinct, like a chess-board on a green table-cloth” — Thomas Hardy

Thomas Hardy’s fictional Casterbridge used Dorchester as its inspiration. This quote shows that while Dorchester might be connected with the surrounding countryside more intimately than most towns, it still is completely separate and distinct from the farmland that surrounds it. Making sure this relationship is continued through new development will be critical.

We need to explore ways of getting more housing within the town centre

Charles Street is a large redevelopment site with huge potential. It is a shame that surface car parking completely dominates such a core part of the town. This site could be a thriving addition to the centre of Dorchester, providing a mix of residential, civic and commercial activity. Meanwhile, there is existing living space above some shops which remains empty.

All these challenges within the town need concerted action in tandem with any outward expansion. Ideally, in advance of any outward expansion. How will this concerted action be secured? We feel the “whole-town” master plan process will be a vital part of the answer.

We need guaranteed infrastructure, in particular better connections and schools

The Thomas Hardye School is already at capacity, so further schools need to be provided alongside part of the new housing developments. Congestion is significant at peak times within the town, so new connections need to be provided to accommodate additional movement patterns. When will an infrastructure delivery plan be available?

We need strong connections between existing and future development

Clear, direct and safe cycling routes and pedestrian links will help existing and future development to work as one. Where possible, new links for public transport should connect the new and existing. Without ignoring a particular need for cars, more effort should be put into making sustainable transport modes and active travel the default option in new residential areas. A radical and sustainable travel plan is needed to demonstrate that land to the north of the river can be made to work.

We need to promote Dorchester's local character as the county and market town

Local residents and tourists alike recognise that Dorchester is an attractive, historic town. Dorchester is the county and market town and should be promoted as such, without large future development undermining this unique character. A master plan for the land north of the river must include design guidance that draws upon local architectural heritage in a contemporary way.

We need to protect our built heritage and natural history

Borough Gardens is an excellent example of public green space. These qualities should be understood and then applied to all future growth areas to establish a sense of character responsive to the existing settlement. The town's built heritage is similarly important and housing designs should reflect the West Dorset vernacular.

We need innovative procurement and delivery models to make it work for the community

It is essential to move away from a "land owner first" model, focused on land availability, towards one that has effective land value capture at its heart. This will lead to a truly "community first" model of development that is likely to win greater local support. There is no evidence at this time that new or innovative procurement models are being considered.

General opposition to Site D4 with general support for Sites D5

Site D4 sits beyond the southern bypass, making it likely to be an isolated estate without community links to Dorchester. Sites D5 meanwhile, lie within the bypass, appear to be a practical proposition and causes little concern, subject to the usual development management and design quality control processes.

Concern over Sites D1, D2, D3 and D7

Many who took part in the workshops consider the views north from the town over the water meadows extremely important and in need of protection. Others were cautious in their support for development here, subject to the delivery of substantial benefits for Dorchester, an effective master plan and only if no other options are available.

General opposition to Site D6

There was some ambiguity over Site D6. Some participants felt it could work yet recognise it will not fulfil the housing need on its own. Therefore, a comprehensive, higher density and well-planned development north of the river, that delivers benefits for the wider town would be preferred as a single comprehensive project. In this way, Site D6 will not be required.

The question of developing Site D6 therefore heavily relies on the success of development north of the water meadows. It was recognised that a substantial amount of housing is required and Site D6 alone will not provide this. Capturing the benefits of a larger, well-planned development which benefits the wider town is seen as preferable to pockets of isolated or piece-meal, greenfield development spread across a wider area.

We are keen to engage and work together

The process of developing this response has shown the value in parishes working together. Dorchester Town Council is keen to collaborate with Stinsford Parish Council and Charminster Parish Council again to help to address the next stage of the local plan review.

The opportunity for a coordinated neighbourhood plan covering the area of the three parishes should be explored by all partners in the process to ensure implementation on the ground happens in a way that is responsive to residents concerns.

For example, the local plan could deal with strategic issues of land allocation and infrastructure delivery while a coordinated neighbourhood plan for the same development area could address matters of design, master planning and community facilities. In this way, shared responsibilities could be apportioned between complementary local and neighbourhood plans.

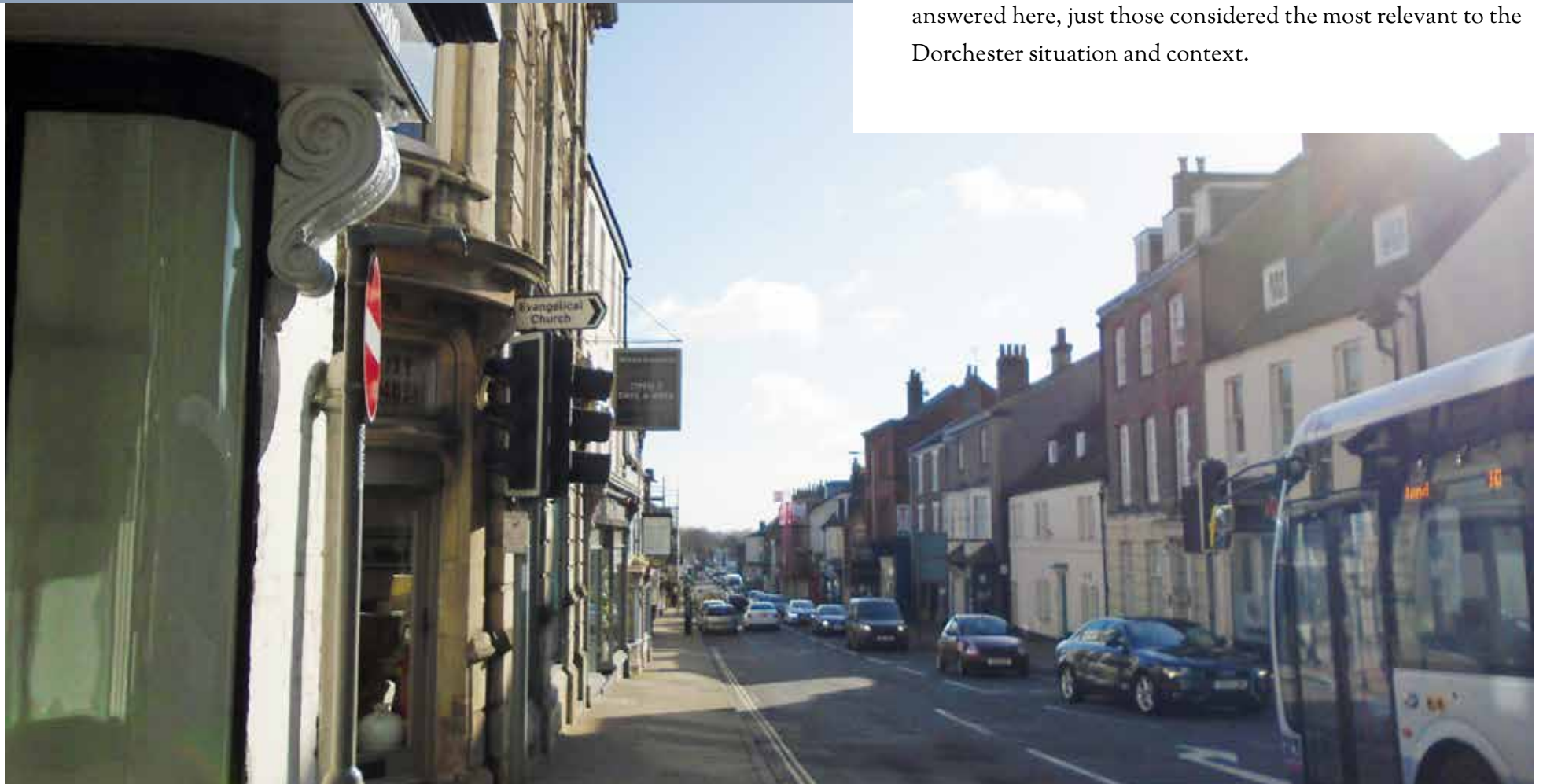
Whatever mechanisms are finally agreed upon, an effective partnership between the local planning authority and the parishes will be vital moving forwards.



These 18 headline responses represent the main concerns and aspirations of the town council in its contribution to the local plan process

Answers to Specific Questions

Following a review of the issues and options document, Dorchester Town Council has directly answered a range of the specific questions as asked by the formal consultation process. This section sets out the answers, using the references found in the West Dorset District Council report. It should be noted that not all questions have been answered here, just those considered the most relevant to the Dorchester situation and context.



3. A Vision for the Area

Question 3-i — Do you agree with the proposed single vision being used to develop objectives and guide the strategy for development within the Local Plan area?

Answer 3-i — It may be possible to have a single vision for the whole plan area, but there are distinct differences between the settlements which need addressing, particularly between Weymouth and Dorchester. Aside from their differences in being a coastal town and a county and market town, Weymouth provides the bulk of the more affordable housing and is often the home of those who work in Dorchester. Dorchester, as the county town, provides greater employment opportunities.

Attempts to create a single vision for two distinct settlements that are some distance apart is not necessarily the correct way forward. Much greater emphasis must be placed on the need for visions and master plans at different scales to plan appropriately for the needs of each settlement.

The proposed vision also lacks an acknowledgement that such plans need to be led by the community, rather than being land owner or developer-led. Measuring proposals against a series of robust master plan objectives will ensure that only appropriate development goes ahead.

4. Sustainable Development

Question 4-i — Should more information be included in the local plan to explain what is meant by the term ‘sustainable development’?

Answer 4-i — Further detail of what is meant by “sustainable development” will allow specific outcomes to be achieved, rather than vague objectives being ignored. Sustainable development should be defined by local indicators, not just nationally or internationally recognised definitions.

5. Level of Growth — Housing

Question 5-i — Do you consider that the figure of 775 dwellings per annum remains an appropriate figure for the objectively assessed need for housing in the local plan area in the light of the 2014-based household projections?

Answer 5-i — The proposed figure of 775 dwellings per annum is ambitious but not impossible. There needs to be an appropriate response and this may well require innovative measures which take a different path to current conventional mechanisms. Delivery at this rate is likely to only be possible with all sectors involved, such as private sector, public agencies, housing associations, and using new methods of land procurement and delivery.

With regard to the 775 figure, there is concern that this includes within it an acceptance of empty properties and second home ownership moving forwards into the plan period (i.e. page 16 of the issues and options report, paragraph 5.10: “... equating to an objectively assessed need of 775 dwellings per annum, taking account of vacant properties and second homes”).

If this is indeed the case, then Dorchester Town Council wishes to object to the calculations as it does not believe that we should be building at a rate to accommodate such unwanted features of the housing market. If the difference between the 709 figure, also quoted in paragraph 5.10 of the issues and options report, and the preferred 775 figure reflects the quantity of vacant properties and second homes, then we are planning to build at least 66 homes every year that will either sit empty or only be used for a relatively small proportion of the time.

Over the twenty year plan period (2011 — 2031) that equates to 1,320 homes that will either sit empty or only be used for a relatively small proportion of the time. This is unacceptable to the town council and we strongly request this assumption is reconsidered.

Second Homes & Local Connections

We wish to take this opportunity to raise the need for planning restrictions on second home ownership being included in the new local plan, together with a mechanism for giving priority for new homes to people with a local connection. Second home ownership has been restricted in St Ives, Cornwall, through policy contained in its recently made neighbourhood plan.

Meanwhile, those with a local connection can be given priority in the allocation of social housing. The Localism Act 2011 has given authorities power to define qualifying persons as those with a local connection.

For example, the London Borough of Ealing’s housing allocations policy has, since August 2012, provided that (except in certain limited circumstances) applicants who have not resided in the borough for the last five years may not apply for social housing. Basildon’s housing allocations scheme (October 2014) specifies a continuous residency requirement in the borough of seven years (with certain exceptions). Do mechanisms exist for a similar local connection test to be applied to open-market housing, not just social housing?

In Dorchester, there is a feeling that both these issues need to be understood more fully and the appropriate measures put in place to mitigate against the consequences before any new building takes place. Both these factors have a direct impact on levels of affordability in the remaining market housing supply.

Question 5-ii — Do you agree with the level of additional housing provision proposed for the local plan area to meet needs for a further five years (i.e. at least an additional 4,520 new homes in the local plan area on top of that already identified)?

Answer 5-ii — We recognise the increasing demand for housing and accept the figure. However, we would like to highlight that such targets should be met using a more innovative approach, such as implementing higher housing densities to prevent unnecessary use of greenfield sites, and creating high quality public spaces embedded within residential developments to offset the effects of higher density development.

There is nothing in the current issues and options work to give confidence that new ways of working are being explored.

The town council wishes to state once again its concern that the housing provision includes within it an acceptance of empty properties and second home ownership, moving forwards into the plan period (i.e. page 16 of the issues and options report, paragraph 5.10). If this is indeed the case, then Dorchester Town Council wishes to object to the calculations as it does not believe that we should be building at a rate to accommodate such unwanted features of the housing market.

Paragraph 5.6 of the issues and options report states that the deliverable supply of housing land to accommodate a total of 15,500 new homes over the plan period will support the local economy, helping to generate around 13,000 jobs, and allowing in-migration of working age people to boost the currently reducing workforce.

However, if a significant proportion of these homes will be vacant or second homes, then this places considerable restrictions on the assumptions made about 13,000 new jobs, as many of these new properties will be denied to working age people.

6. Distribution of Development

Question 6-i — Do you agree that the vast majority of the additional growth proposed for the period up to 2036 should be accommodated at Dorchester, Weymouth (including Chickerell and Littlemoor), Beaminster, Bridport, Lyme Regis, Portland, Sherborne and Crossways?

Answer 6-i — We feel that all alternative options for accommodating growth have not been fully considered. It is logical for towns to grow, but these new additions should also benefit the town, rather than the town only benefiting new residents. We note that the inspector refers to “... at or in the vicinity of Dorchester” rather than simply “Dorchester” in his comments, and therefore we feel there is wider scope for housing growth within the surrounding settlements.

It is felt that villages such as Winterbourne Abbas, Broadmayne and Crossways have the facilities and capacity to expand. Perhaps all villages should take a certain percentage of the total proposed development to spread the load. However, we recognise that the benefits of new development may not be delivered through such small additions and we acknowledge that larger scale growth can be beneficial if planned in the best interests of the new and existing communities.

Question 6-ii — If the local plan review is to consider identifying sites for growth at other settlements, should opportunities be considered: at settlements with populations of more than 1,000; or at settlements with populations of more than 600; or at any settlement with a defined development boundary?

Answer 6-ii — Taking the existing infrastructure in these settlements into consideration is important, not merely the housing numbers themselves. If smaller settlements have good facilities such as schools, good shops, post office and road and/or rail links, then these should be considered rather than purely the existing population thresholds.

Question 6-iii — Should Policy SUS2 continue to strictly control development outside defined development boundaries, having particular regard to the need for the protection of the countryside and environmental constraints?

Answer 6-iii — Development boundaries need to be drawn and the countryside protected. However, these should be revisited regularly and not be treated as equal to natural boundaries. Again, having a master plan phased over time would help to objectively decide the appropriate development boundaries. There should be a greater encouragement for neighbourhood planning and local authority support for neighbourhood plan groups to help define and redefine settlement boundaries in the most effective way.

Question 6-iv. Should the supporting text to Policy SUS2 be amended to clarify the other matters that need to be taken into account when applying the policy to market housing developments outside DDBs, most notably: national planning policy; Policy INT1: Presumption in Favour of Sustainable Development; and the Councils' housing land supply position?

Answer 6-iv — This is an unusual question as we feel that all supporting text should be clear and inform the reader of the relating matters. We appreciate the decisions facing the local planning authority are not easy and that the constraints of national policy are often strongly influencing factors.

Question 6-v — Should the following factors be taken into account when determining whether a development proposal in rural areas is “at an appropriate scale to the size of the settlement”? whether the proposals are of a strategic nature; whether the proposals would help communities to meet their local needs; whether the proposals would change the character and setting of the settlement; whether local infrastructure, including any necessary improvements, could accommodate or be supported by the proposed development; cumulative impacts?

Answer 6-v — All listed factors should be considered when reviewing a development proposal. A concise way of assessing suitability would be to match such factors against community-led master plans or neighbourhood plans informed by well-founded objectives.

Question 6-vi — Should different policy approaches apply to settlements with DDBs identified in the local plan and settlements with new DDBs identified through neighbourhood plans?

Answer 6-vi — Not necessarily. Every development proposal should be considered on a case-by-case basis. However, there should be greater encouragement for neighbourhood planning across the district to ensure all communities get a say in their own defined development boundaries. At present, there are differences between areas with a neighbourhood plan and those without. This may lead to unequal outcomes.

7. Development at Dorchester

Question 7-i — Dorchester has grown at an average rate of 175 new dwellings each year over the last 5 years. Should we plan for a lower level of growth, maintain that level of growth, or take a strategic longer term view for the growth of the town?

Answer 7-i — Some who took part in the response process believe the existing growth figure of 175 dwellings per annum to be incorrect. Through the Poundbury development alone, a higher number was expected. In answer to the question, we believe that the solution is to take a strategic longer term view for the growth of the town. Development is inevitable, so must be planned for correctly. Dorchester is in particular need of a vision and a master plan to effectively manage longer term growth.

Question 7-ii — Are there any issues related to any of the site options that are not mentioned here?

Answer 7-ii — We understand that Sites D₃ and D₄ may be located above protected aquifers supplying Dorchester's water and it is understood that one kilometre "no build zone" applies in the these areas. We understand that a recent planning application on land near to or within Site D₃ was declined due to this reason. This possible oversight leads to questions over what other background evidence may be incorrect.

Question 7-iii — What are the infrastructure requirements for the development of the site options, individually or in combination with others?

Answer 7-iii — The infrastructure requirements for the development options are principally physical connections (especially links across the water meadows) and new schools. An east to west connection to north of Dorchester is crucial, to help "close the loop" and alleviate traffic through the centre which will inevitably increase with the arrival of 4000+ homes. Thomas Hardy School is currently at capacity, so further schools must be built early to match the increasing population.

There is also an ongoing requirement for a lorry park in and around Dorchester. This facility could be on land to the south of the Stadium Roundabout, parallel to the road to Weymouth, notwithstanding that this has previously been discounted by a planning inspector. The emerging local plan needs to consider this infrastructure requirement as part of the wider process.

17. Affordable Housing

Question 17-i — Should Policy HOUS1 be revised to apply the optional lower threshold in national policy and guidance within ‘rural areas’ as shown in Figure 17.1 (rather than the national 10-unit threshold), so that affordable housing contributions would not be sought on sites of 5 units or less in these areas?

Answer 17-i — Affordable housing is a high priority for the town council. Therefore, strong policies on the topic need to be written to secure its delivery and such policies then need to be implemented effectively. We understand that the demand for affordable housing is principally around the larger settlements and towns, so requesting a much higher level of affordable housing in these areas in return for a lower level in outlying areas would seem to be appropriate, subject to further research.

Innovative design needs to be used to enable affordable housing to integrate with the wider community and dedicated, affordable “estates” will not be welcomed. Design quality should be equal to market housing. See also “Second Homes & Local Connections” section on page 24.

Question 17-ii — What should the priorities be for the provision of different types of affordable housing in the local plan, such as: affordable rent; social rent; shared equity; elderly persons’ affordable housing (including extra care); key worker accommodation; and specialist accommodation (for example for disabled people).

Answer 17-ii — The existing waiting lists for housing need to be consulted and then an appropriate response made accordingly. A representative from Magna stated during our workshops that out of the current 1,400 people waiting, approximately 600 are looking for one bedroom “general need” accommodation (i.e. under age of 50) while 600 are looking for two bedroom properties. The remaining 200 are looking for properties with 3+ bedrooms. Magna is keen to build houses for those in need of assistance, be it disabilities, mental issues or addiction. Furthermore, Magna is looking for land on which to design, build and manage its own estate. It does not want to take on the management of properties built by others.

Question 17-iii — In the light of the expected statutory requirement to provide a proportion of starter homes on all reasonably sized housing sites, should the focus for the provision of other types of affordable housing be primarily on: affordable housing to rent; or affordable housing to buy or part-buy (for example, under a shared equity arrangement); or meeting the needs of particular groups (such as the elderly – including extra care housing; key workers; or people with specialised needs, including disabled people)?

Answer 17-iii — This is difficult to answer as provision should be assessed according to need. The local authority needs to define the specific demands and cater for them. In terms of rental vs. purchase, a good mix of both needs to be provided due to the inability of many to find the means to buy. Renting may also be the preferred choice for those wanting flexibility. In this case, renting must be controlled using secure tenancies.

Question 17-iv — Should Policy HOUS2 allow market homes to cross-subsidise the provision of affordable housing on exception sites?

Answer 17-iv — Yes, as the provision of affordable housing requires radical new thought to meet demand without the need for market homes to cross-subsidise on exception sites. Further work should be done to understand the different options available, such as higher density, new procurement models and using innovative design to deliver on the identified requirements.

Question 17-v — How should the provision of market homes on such sites be controlled to ensure that the emphasis remains on meeting local affordable housing needs and significant unplanned growth adjoining settlements is avoided?

Answer 17-v — If cross-subsidisation by market homes is deemed necessary, this should be controlled through neighbourhood plan or local plan policy. Support through accordance with an overarching community-led master plan will also be vital.

18. Self Build Housing

Question 18-i — Should serviced self build plots be delivered to meet the demand identified on the local Self-build Register through: Current approach; Land allocation; Housing mix; Exception site; or A mixture of the above.

Answer 18-i — We believe self-build housing should be encouraged where possible. Therefore, we agree with the change in policy to accommodate this. A combination of land allocation, housing mix and exception sites should deliver self-build housing, on the condition that it benefits the local community. Specific rules should be defined to meet the criteria. Design guidance for self-build should be embedded in neighbourhood plans and other community-led documents.

Question 18-ii — Should proposals for Low Impact Dwellings that meet a set of criteria, be considered more permissively than conventional market housing to increase the supply of self-build homes?

Answer 18-ii — Yes, proposals for Low Impact Dwellings that meet a set of criteria should be considered more permissively than conventional market housing. The nature of self-build will likely mean that it is local individuals and then immediate community (including local trades people and crafts) who will gain most, rather than larger land owners and national-scale house builders.

Question 18-iii — Is there an alternative mechanism that can be used to meet the demand for self-build and custom housebuilding?

Answer 18-iii — The local planning authority should investigate alternative mechanisms, such as those used in other European countries, to meet the demand for self-build. There is likely to be an effective method currently not used in this country. Mechanisms and methods could then be embedded in neighbourhood plans and other community-led documents.

19. Level of Growth — Employment Land

Question 19-i — Do the figures in the revised workspace strategy provide an objective assessment of the overall need for employment land in the local plan area, especially in the light of national and local aspirations for economic growth?

Answer 19-i — If the figures are accurately based on demand for employment land, then these should continue to be used to determine land allocation. However, there is concern amongst members that the whole topic of employment and where future jobs will come from needs deeper thought and consideration.

Question 19-ii — Do you agree with the assessment that there is no need to allocate any additional employment land in the local plan area in order to meet overall employment needs in West Dorset and Weymouth & Portland in the period up to 2036?

Answer 19-ii — We do not agree. We consider that there is a need to provide further employment land in the revised local plan. This is because the future housing development is potentially on such a large scale that it will require a mix of land uses within the sites themselves to prevent the development from being a mono-cultural residential area. Furthermore, there needs to be an uplift in employment opportunities elsewhere across the town to provide access to recreational, leisure and cultural activities for new residents. A growing town needs to grow in all aspects of community life, not just in terms of homes.

Question 19-iii — Is there a need at any of the towns (or other locations) in the local plan area for additional employment land to be allocated in order to meet particular local employment needs or encourage greater self containment?

Answer 19-iii — The town council does not have a grasp of the necessary data for the demand, so is therefore unable to answer this question.

Demand for employment sites should be met accordingly through land allocations in the local plan and through neighbourhood plans.

20. Protection of Employment Sites

Question 20-i — Are there “key employment sites” listed in figure 20.1 that should no longer be given the higher level of protection afforded to “key employment sites”? Please tell us which ones and why.

Answer 20-i — The town council believes that all employment sites listed should be protected. With the level of housing growth predicted the district cannot afford to lose employment land.

Question 20-ii — Are there any additional sites which should be added to the list of “key employment sites” listed in figure 20.1 and given a higher level of protection? Please tell us which ones and why.

20-ii. — The town council believes that there needs to be a range of approaches to new employment land provision, with a shrinking public sector and demand for more diversity in employment. While it has no specific sites to add at this time, it is supportive of all efforts made to secure a suitable range of sites to accommodate a range of new job opportunities.

21. Retail & Town Centres

Question 21-i — Are there any other factors in defining a retail hierarchy that the councils should consider?

Answer 21-i — The town council considers that the retail hierarchy thought process is somewhat dated and new ways of thinking may be required to plan for retail provision as we move further into the 21st Century. With more and more retail moving online and high streets and town centres assuming a greater role in recreation, food, drink, leisure and culture, town centres across the UK are becoming less retail focussed but no less vibrant as a result. This apparent paradox is not recognised in the retail hierarchy thought process that often aims to main vibrancy through retail provision alone.

Question 21-ii — Using the draft definition of local and town centres, do you agree with the centres named under each category?

Answer 21-ii — It is difficult to agree or disagree here in light of the above answer.

22. Green Infrastructure

Question 22-i — Do you think the definitions of Green Infrastructure above offer a suitable framework for identifying green infrastructure types?

Answer 22-i — We agree that the definitions of Green Infrastructure offer a suitable framework for identifying green infrastructure types. This should be added to in terms of Dorchester, to include a focus on a new “country park” setting. Green spaces throughout future residential development will greatly improve the quality, accessibility and popularity of the new public realm.

Question 22-ii — Is there anything missing from the categories?

Answer 22-ii — Not at this time, no.

23. Design

Question 23-i — Should modular housing play a more important role in meeting housing needs within the area?

Answer 23-i — Yes. Prefabrication and off-site construction should indeed be welcomed as just one of many modern solutions to meet housing need. New housing development, whatever the construction technique or building technology, should be designed to respond to local character. Affordable housing should be required to meet the same design quality standards as other housing tenures and type.

The question of design aesthetics, vernacular and locally distinctive designs has not been asked through the local plan review. This is an important issue to address, as new development needs to have a sense of belonging to Dorchester in particular and west Dorset more generally.

This is not to say that all designs should be the same, but rather that there should remain an overriding sense of character and identity with a west Dorset vernacular. The next stages of the local plan review need to address this oversight.

Question 23-ii — Should there be a requirement to provide a proportion of new houses at the enhanced accessibility and adaptability standards?

Answer 23-ii — Yes but it is considered that all future housing, not just a proportion, should be designed with the ability to adapt to all accessibility needs over time.

Question 23-iii — Or, should the requirement for enhanced accessibility and adaptability standards in new housing apply in certain site specific circumstances only? For example, sites in town centres or sites with level access to facilities most suitable for people with reduced mobility.

Answer 23-iii — No. All housing should have built-in enhanced accessibility or the opportunity to be converted. Although the logical location would be within the larger towns, due to proximity to health services etc, it is unpredictable when an occupant may start to benefit from such design standards so these must be common to all properties.

Question 23-iv — Should a requirement for a proportion of new houses to be suitable for wheelchair users be included within the Local Plan?

Answer 23-iv — No. All housing should have built-in enhanced accessibility and conversion opportunities for wheelchair users. As above, it is unpredictable when an occupant may start to benefit from such design standards so these must be common to all properties.

Question 23-v — Should a requirement for new homes to be suitable for wheelchair users be introduced in certain site specific circumstances? Examples might be sites in town centres or sites with level access to facilities.

Answer 23-v — No, see above. All housing should have built-in enhanced accessibility and conversion opportunities for wheelchair users. The risk of these features only being made on a site-specific basis is fragmented communities with enclaves of people with similar needs all living together. This runs counter to a desire to have truly mixed-communities.

Question 23-vi — Should there be a requirement for new housing to comply with nationally described space standards?

Answer 23-vi — Yes, all housing should comply with national minimum space standards. A frequent criticism of newly built houses over the past 10 to 15 years has been the meanness of room dimensions, lack of storage and poorly thought-out internal arrangements. Meeting national minimum described standards can help overcome these issues but good design and rigours checking and planning permission stage is vital to ensure delivery on this aspect.

Question 23-vii. Is there any evidence not considered above which would support the inclusion of enhanced standards for water efficiency within the local plan?

Answer 23-vii — No further evidence to add here although a recognition of the Dorchester’s potential negative effect on the Poole Harbour area of nature sensitivity may be required in the emerging local plan.

Question 25-i — Should the councils allocate suitable sites for wind energy through the local plan or rely on locally led initiatives such as neighbourhood plans?

Answer 25-i — Reliance on local or neighbourhood level planning is unlikely to be effective in securing the right mix of renewable energy sources needed for the future. Such projects are often of national importance and are rightly considered national infrastructure projects.

While local and neighbourhood level support for such schemes can help overcome localised objection, these projects need national leadership to be delivered effectively. This applies to all energy infrastructure, not just renewable energy schemes including wind power.

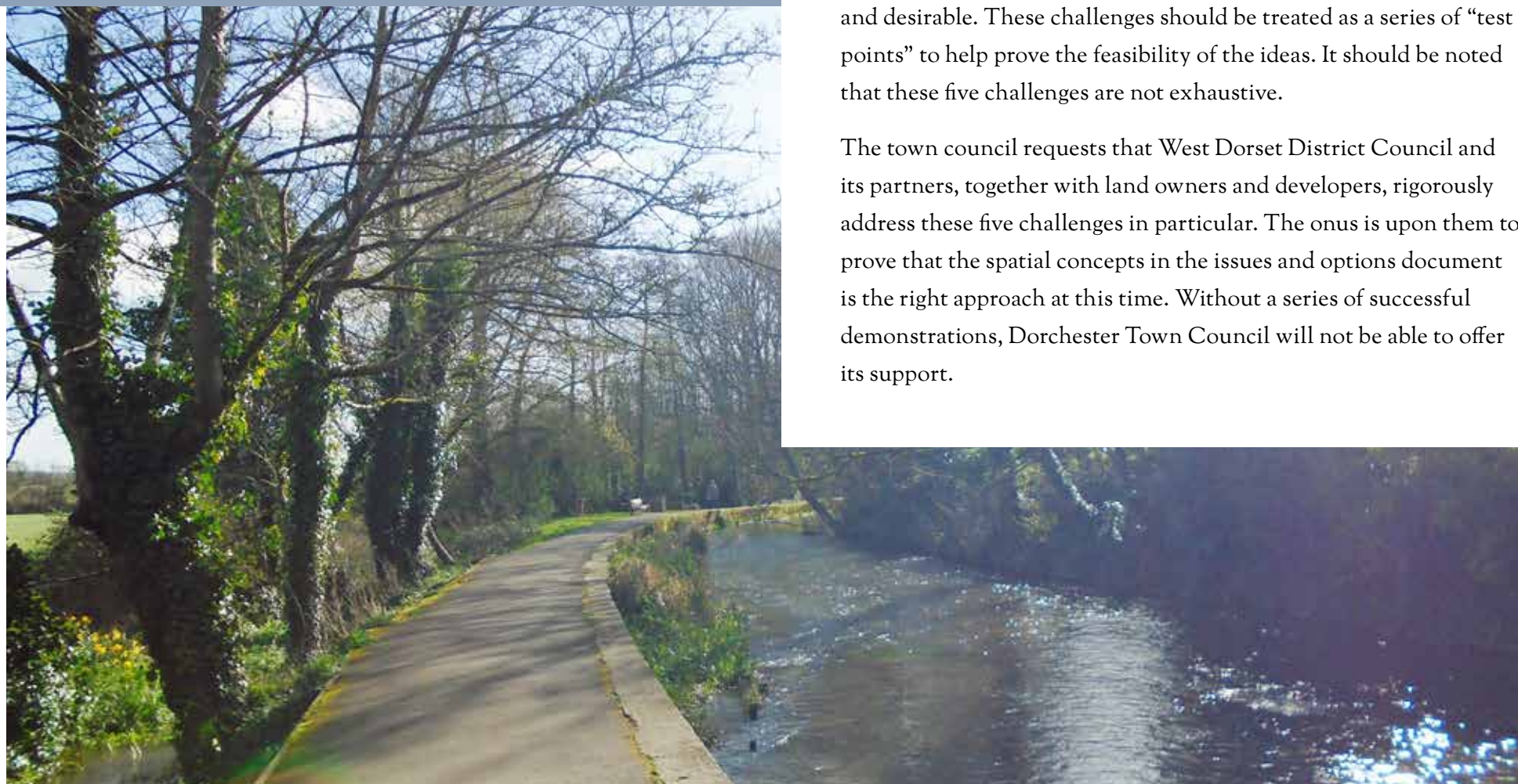


The town council hopes that its answers to the specific questions raised can help move the local plan process forward successfully. It also looks forward to further engagement in the process.

Planning & Design Challenges

Dorchester Town Council does not unquestioningly accept the proposition for large scale development north of the river at this time. That said, it does not rule it out either. Following internal discussion and debate, it sets out here a series of conceptual ideas that need further consideration in order to demonstrate that development in this location and at this scale can be both workable and desirable. These challenges should be treated as a series of “test points” to help prove the feasibility of the ideas. It should be noted that these five challenges are not exhaustive.

The town council requests that West Dorset District Council and its partners, together with land owners and developers, rigorously address these five challenges in particular. The onus is upon them to prove that the spatial concepts in the issues and options document is the right approach at this time. Without a series of successful demonstrations, Dorchester Town Council will not be able to offer its support.



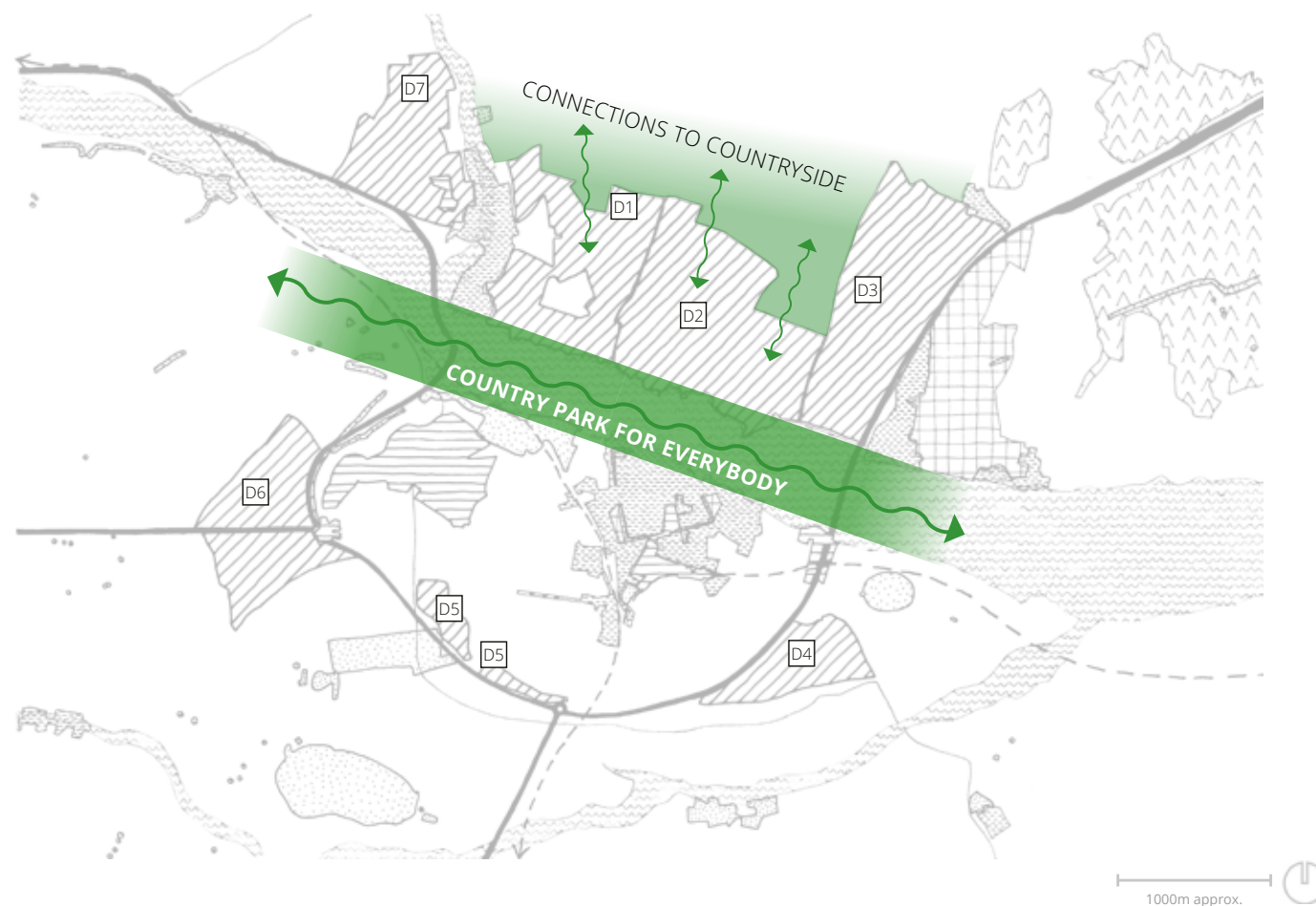


Fig. 01 / It is acknowledged that topographical conditions will lead to no-build areas in and around the river valley. However, all efforts must be made to ensure that this land can bring communities together rather than keep them apart. Meanwhile, a defensible boundary needs to be secured on the northern edge of the development areas to check uncontrolled sprawl. A demonstration of how this can all be delivered is required.

Flood plain, water meadows & protection of the northern edge

The first critical challenge to demonstrate that the concepts being proposed are both workable and desirable is a productive use of the necessary gap between the existing town centre and the new development areas to the north. The river valley and flood plain cannot be built upon and this creates a discontinuous development form, potentially resulting in an “us and them” situation. To overcome this potential division, the gap land needs to be designed and managed in a way that brings communities together, for example as a country park setting to be shared by all.

An associated challenge lies to the north. How can the new development areas be contained within the landscape and not spread backwards, further and further from Dorchester town centre? How can access to land beyond be granted for recreational purposes to help give a sense of permanence to this northern edge?

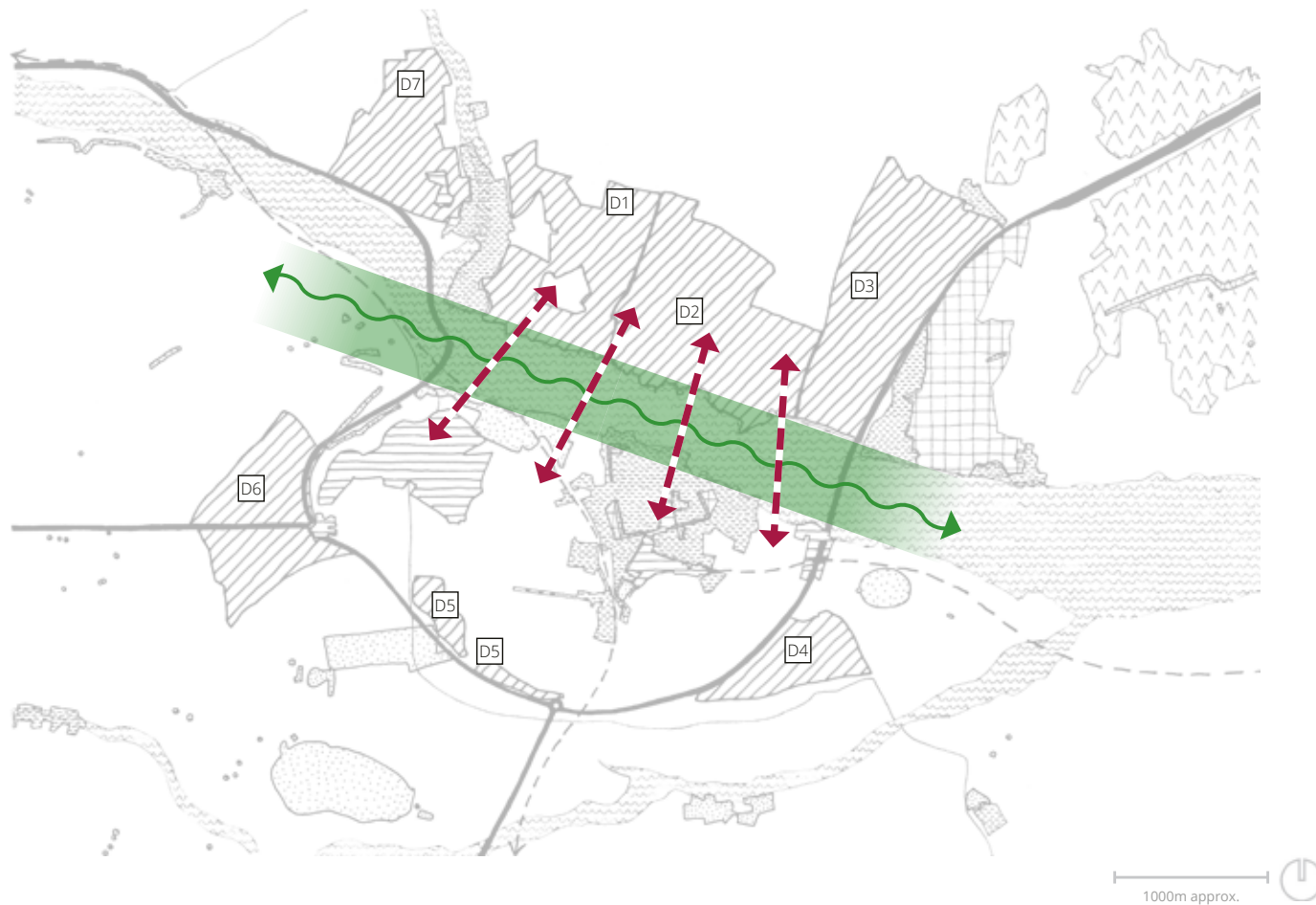


Fig. 02 / There is a need for new north to south connections that can bridge the gap between new and existing neighbourhoods. A demonstration of exactly how many links and in which locations is required. Evidence about how such links can be realistically designed and delivered is also required.

Bridging the gap

The second critical challenge is to demonstrate that the gap between new and existing settlement areas can effectively be bridged. While the productive use of the land subject to flooding (e.g. country park) could help create a shared community resource, there will still be a geographical gap, leading to increased distances between key facilities in the heart of the town and the new residential neighbourhoods.

Walking and cycling links will be critical here, potentially involving the construction of new bridge links over the river. There are many fine examples in recent years of striking modern bridges for this purpose. However, options for new links that can accommodate low-energy or zero-emission shuttle buses should also be given proper consideration. These could help establish more sustainable movement patterns from the earliest phases of development.

Thinking differently about land parcels

The third critical challenge is to break away from the current land parcels that appear within the issues and options diagram. We understand the four parcels of land north of the river reflect different land ownerships. Working to these boundaries does not necessarily help to create the best and most sustainable layouts that will be needed if the new neighbourhoods are to be a success.

Other ways of thinking need to be tested. For example, a “horizontal banding” that could create areas of different character, urban form and density. These bands could also support a phasing strategy, with the southern edge constructed first in its entirety before working northwards, deeper into the sites. This south-facing edge, looking over the water meadows, could comprise a high density, high value, “harder” edge that creates a new, contemporary skyline for the town.

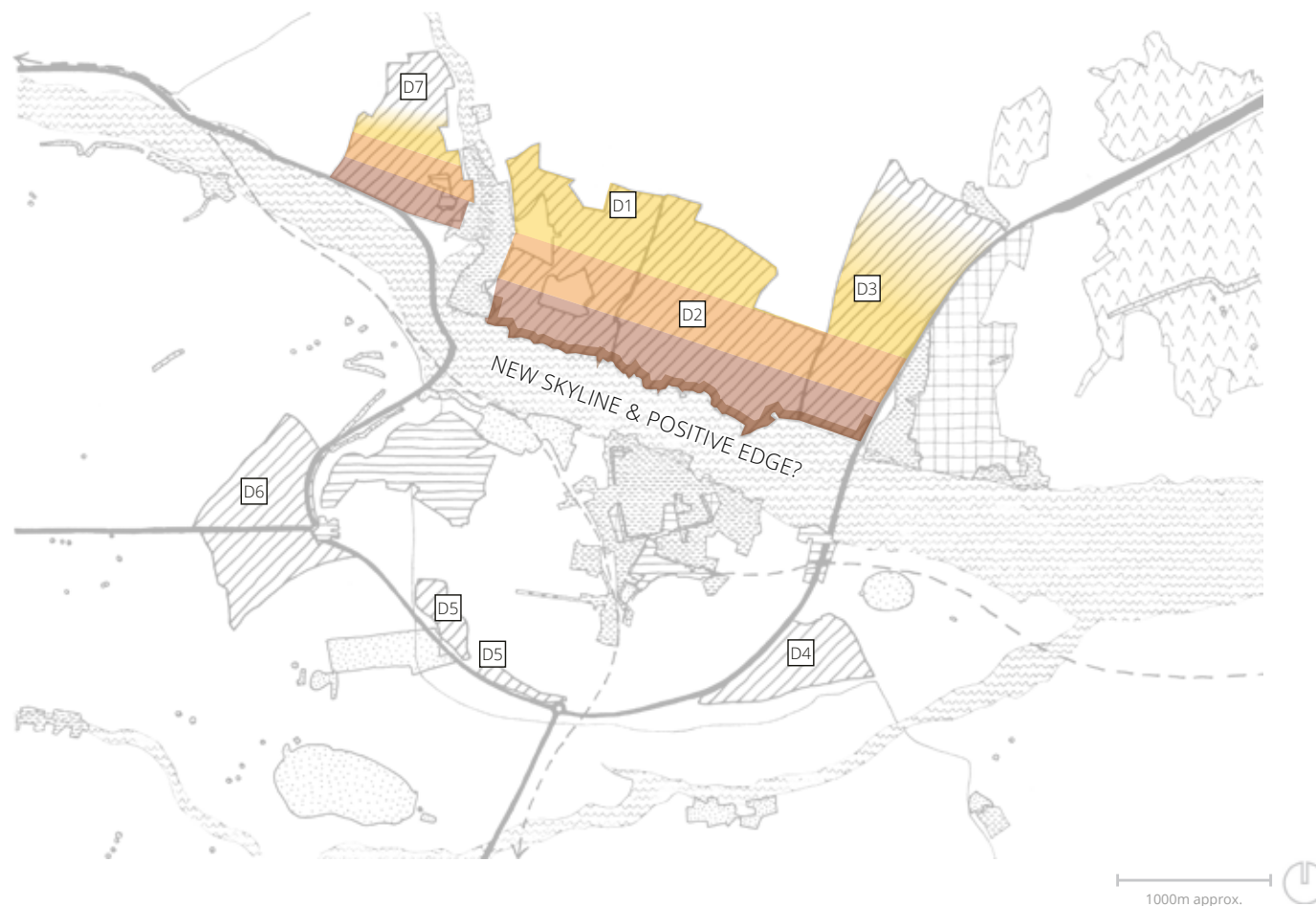
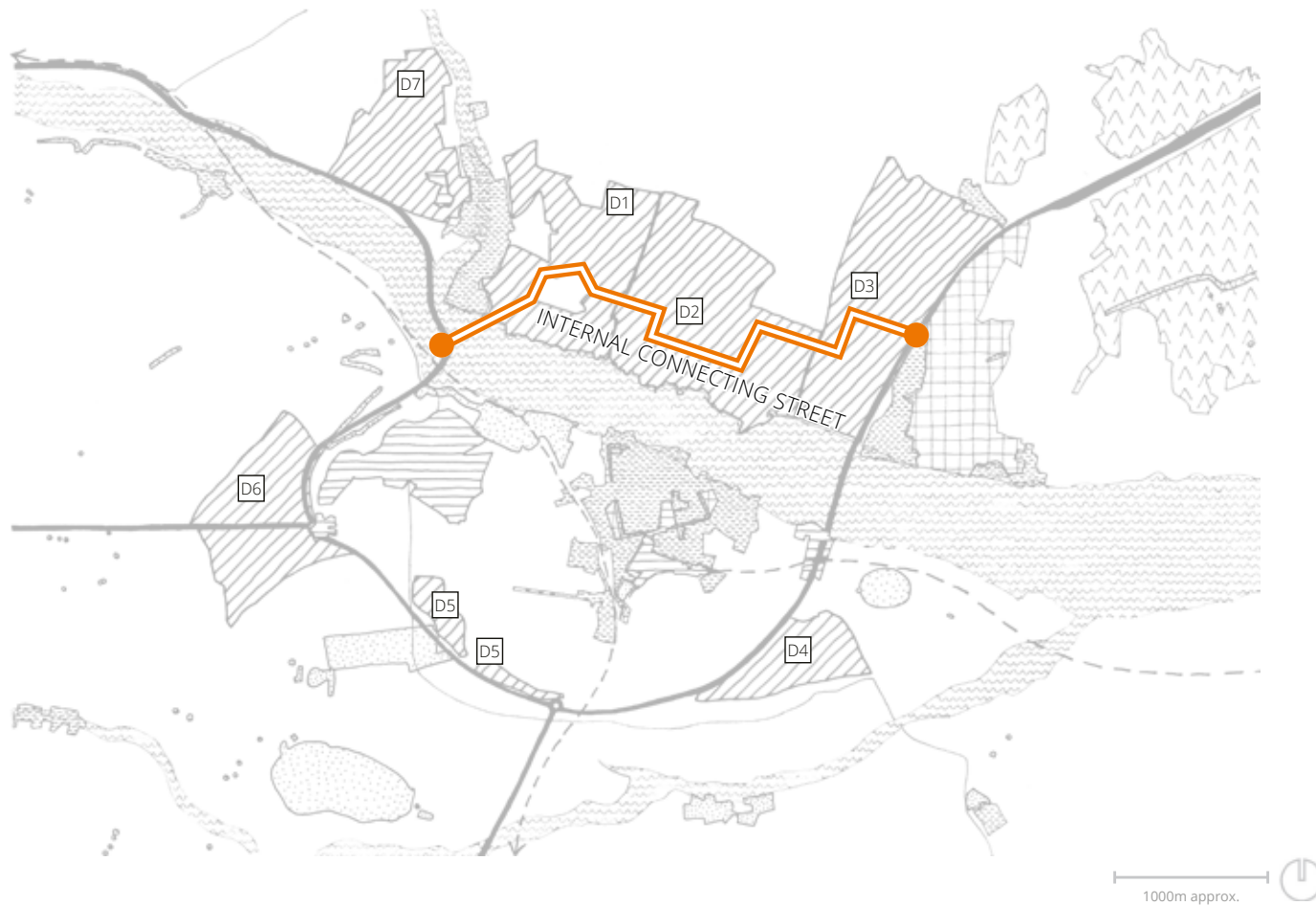


Fig. 03 / It appears that land ownership patterns are the primary reason for the D1, D2, D3 and D7 land parcels being described as they are in the issues and options diagram. Thinking differently about these land parcels can help generate better value outcomes for the town's existing and new residents. A demonstration of how best to compartmentalise this large geographical area is required.



Strong internal connections

The fourth critical challenge is to offer a genuine choice of movement options to new residents. Development north of the river cannot result in large cul-de-sac type developments. It is also acknowledged that a dedicated northern bypass could be ineffective, environmentally harmful and prohibitively expensive.

However, an opportunity exists to create a series of connected streets within the new housing layouts. These could act as a northern relief road, connecting at both ends to the existing road network. The route can be designed from the outset to carry a significant element of through traffic as well as being the main access street for local residents.

This need not be unattractive nor expensive. A series of tree-lined avenues or boulevard streets could connect to form this route and the cost be carried by the developers as these routes will be integrated within their developments.

Fig. 04 / The bypass constructed in the early 1990s south of Dorchester has relieved the town of some through-traffic although rising traffic levels since then have perhaps wiped out those earlier benefits. A different approach should be examined for the north, with the loop being closed by a series of connected multi-modal streets rather than a dedicated bypass route. A demonstration of this, or a similar alternative, as a realistic possibility is required.

Creating new communities and neighbourhoods

The final critical challenge is how the spatial patterns described in the issues and options document will create homes and communities, not just houses and developments. Thriving and vital new neighbourhoods need to emerge, not just soulless expansions of suburbia.

Breaking the large expanse of land down into smaller areas, working across ownership boundaries and using natural landforms and features to define new neighbourhood units will be essential to the success of the development.

Establishing the right mix of community facilities, services and functions in small, accessible clusters, perhaps aligned with a new east-west through route to provide passing trade opportunities, will also ensure that new neighbourhoods will have the right support from the outset.



Fig. 05 / Consideration of how a series of new neighbourhood units can successfully be created in the context of the existing settlement pattern is required. Dorchester should always be the primary centre and the historic core of this expanding 21st Century market town, but the right mix of community services and facilities need to be included in each of these neighbourhood units.





