

Weymouth Neighbourhood Plan (WNP): Frequently Asked Questions

This document is produced to provide answers for member of the public to frequently asked questions relating to the Weymouth Neighbourhood Plan (WNP). These questions arose in emails, public engagement and consultation.

For the details of the plan please see our webpage:

<https://www.weymouthtowncouncil.gov.uk/neighbourhood-plan> which has all the details of surveys, technical studies and Steering Group Meetings.

1. What is the WNP?

The Weymouth Neighbourhood Plan is a policy document for planning for land use and development in the Weymouth area. It represents an overview of Weymouth residents views on what is desirable for future development in the Weymouth Area. It also identifies areas which are already protected as well as new areas for local protection which have been nominated by residents.

2. Who is producing the WNP?

The WNP is being proposed by Weymouth Town Council (WTC) as the Qualifying Body. The responsibility for its production has been delegated to the WNP Steering Group which comprises 4 councillors and 6 residents.

3. Who is paying for this?

This work is funded by grants and support from Locality (a government agency) and Weymouth Town Council using Community Infrastructure Levy payments. This funds officer support from Weymouth Town Council, technical support from contractors employed by Locality, and employment of a Technical Consultant. Much of the work is carried out by a Steering Group who are not paid.

4. What area does it cover?

It covers the Weymouth Town Council parished area as it was in 2021. In May 2024 the parished area was changed to include parts of Bincombe parish etc – the next update of the plan, following its adoption will include these areas.

5. What does the WNP cover?

The WNP describes the Neighbourhood Area, the strategic context, the purpose, the structure, the Vision, Aims, and Objectives, and the policies across the five theme areas of Environmental Sustainability, Landscape & Greenspaces, Development & Homes, Jobs and Local Economy, and Community Neighbourhoods. It also includes how the plan will be monitored and a section on community aspirations (these are outside the scope of planning policy but are included for further action in other ways).

6. Why do we need a Neighbourhood Plan?

Without a development plan to guide the use of land in Weymouth's best interest, development will be driven by property developers in an unplanned and opportunistic manner.

Our 1st public engagement showed that people want more affordable housing, better paid jobs, the environment to be protected, development to address the climate

emergency, and community facilities. For this to take place the right development needs to take place in the right place and other areas need to be protected. The WNP seeks to do this by giving local residents a say rather than leaving it to others.

7. How is the plan approved?

The plan is subjected to formal consultation with residents and statutory bodies, including the Dorset Local Planning Authority (Dorset Council), whose views must be considered. The plan must comply with the National Planning Policy Framework and this is checked by an Independent Examiner. A referendum of Weymouth electors (Residents) is then held to accept or reject the WNP. If the majority supports the Plan it is then 'made' (adopted) by the Local Planning Authority (Dorset Council).

8. How long will the plan be valid?

The plan runs between 2021 and 2038. The referendum is likely to be held in 2025. The plan will be monitored and updated to reflect local boundary changes, feedback from the monitoring process, the new Dorset Local Plan (when made), and future changes to legislation.

9. What authority will the plan have?

Once 'made' the WNP forms part of the Development Plan for Weymouth and its Policies must be adhered to by property developers and are a vital part of the Dorset Local Planning Authority (Dorset Council) criteria for assessing planning applications.

10. How has the plan been produced?

The plan production has followed the guidelines for Neighbourhood Planning produced by Locality. This emphasises the need for public engagement from the outset and includes two statutory phases of consultation, independent examination by a qualified planning inspector and a public referendum.

Stage 1: helped shape the plan establishing, through public engagement, a Vision for Weymouth and the Aims and Objectives the plan should meet. The details for this were determined through public consultation, technical analysis, a public call for sites for development as well as protection and formation of Theme Groups to research evidence.

Stage 2: has developed and tested some of the policy ideas through public engagement and assessed the reaction to the Plan through formal consultation of the public and statutory bodies (Regulation 14). The analysis of this feedback is nearing completion. Stage 2 concludes with a revised plan being submitted to Dorset Council.

Stage 3: is yet to take place and will involve the plan being 'made'. This is expected to start in November/December 2024 and is managed by Dorset Council and involves Regulation 16 Formal Consultation, Independent Examination, the Referendum and formal adoption by Dorset Council.

11. What is the difference between public engagement and consultation and referendum?

Locality recommend that the public are engaged throughout the WNP process. Public engagement looks to involve the public in the process and elicit their views. Such views

are many and varied and often contradictory. However, the WNP tries to take account of these views to produce a representative and balanced plan.

The WNP Process requires 2 phases of statutory Public Consultation; one after the first formal draft of the plan is made conducted by Weymouth Town Council (the Qualifying Body) and second after the plan has been submitted to the Dorset Council (the Dorset Local Planning Authority).

All the responses made to the first statutory consultation are captured, reviewed and are referenced in the Consultation Statement which supports the WNP. These influence the development of the Plan which is submitted to the Dorset Local Planning Authority.

Following the second consultation by Dorset Council the final submission version of the plan along with supporting evidence and the Consultation Statement are reviewed by an Independent Examiner who makes recommendations to the Dorset Local Planning Authority.

The Dorset Local Planning Authority works with the Town Council and WNP Steering Group to assess the recommendations and incorporate them into the WNP. The revised WNP is then published and a referendum of electors within the WNP area is held on whether to accept the WNP. The result of the referendum is judged by a simple majority being in favour or against the plan.

12. How much public engagement and consultation has taken place?

Public Engagement has taken place from December 2020 through to January 2024. This has comprised public meetings and attendance at community events, public questionnaires and surveys, formation of a public forum, public walkabouts, workshops promotion of the WNP has been through the press, radio, community tv, social media and at public events and with schools. This will be published in the Consultation Statement.

13. Who wanted a Neighbourhood Plan?

Weymouth Town Council started considering the benefits of a WNP in Oct 2019. Application was made to Dorset Council on 2nd July 2020 Dorset Council approved the designation of the Weymouth Neighbourhood Area on 23rd July 2020.

14. How was the Steering Group formed?

The Town Council advertised for members of the public to contribute to the WNP. The Steering Group first met on 7th Dec 2020. 10 councillors were present together with 16 members of the public and representatives of local interest groups (Civic Society, Weymouth BID, WEYForward, Chamber of Commerce, North Harbourside Residents Group, Lansdowne Square Residents Association, South Dorset Ramblers Association, Weymouth Area Development Trust, The Upwey Society and the Sutton Poyntz Neighbourhood Plan group).

A further meeting was held on the 18th January 2021 at which 5 Councillors were present along with 20 members of the public and representatives of local groups. A structure for ensuring broad representation across the area and the next steps were agreed, Terms of Reference for the Steering Group were presented and attendees were

urged to spread the word and nominations to the Steering Group were sought by 1st February 2021.

From this a Steering Group comprising 4 councillors and 6 residents was formed and first met in March 2021. This was followed by a Neighbourhood Plan Forum meeting on 19th April 2021 which invited people to join one of the 5 theme groups developing the plan.

15. When did a wider public engagement start?

The first Public Engagement was advertised in December 2020 and ran until January 2021. This was held as an online survey because of COVID restrictions. It asked the public what they liked/disliked and wanted to change in Weymouth, and what the biggest challenges were. This formed the basis for further public engagement and consultation through public events, online surveys and drop-in sessions. From this we derived the Vision, Mission and Aims and outline policies.

16. How did you ensure that the whole of the Neighbourhood Area was taken into consideration?

Our consultants recommended they carry out a Character Area Assessment. This took place in 2020 and was reviewed and published in March 2021 for comment. This divided Weymouth into five character areas; Central, Urban, Semi-rural, Late 20th Century Suburban, and Coastal urban. These were further subdivided and the key characteristics and features of each outlined.

To support this the Steering Group organised 11 public Walkabouts across the various areas in the Character Area Assessment, looking to understand the character of the area, the infrastructure and service needs, – the opportunities for development and important areas and facilities to be protected. These took place from July 2021 to December 2021 and covered Mount Pleasant/Lodmoor, Sutton Poyntz, Preston, Littlemoor, Lodmoor Hill, Rodwell/Chapelhay/South Harbourside, Upwey/Broadway, Nottingham, Redlands, Westham/Abbotsbury Road, and the Town Centre/Park District.

17. How were the Theme Groups formed?

The five theme groups were each led by a member of the Steering Group and brought together residents and organisations to contribute to gathering the supporting evidence for the Plan. A meeting was held in April 2021 to explain the role of the Theme Groups and where members of the Forum were invited to volunteer to contribute to one or more theme groups. The Theme Groups continued to provide a wider reference to support the Steering Groups – this included considering draft policies, both directly and through focus groups.

18. How were the public next engaged?

The 2nd Public Engagement was conducted on behalf of the Steering Group by Dorset Coast Forum. The purpose of the engagement was to promote the Neighbourhood Plan, inform people of the Vision, Mission and Aims and the Housing Needs Analysis and obtain detailed response on the key issues identified in the initial public consultation survey. It was advertised in June 2022 and comprised 4 public events and an online webpage provided information and a survey. The 4 public events were held at The Information Shop, The Park Community Centre, St Francis Church in Littlemoor and St Paul's Church Hall in Westham, resulting in 34 responses. The webpage was visited

over 1000 times with 724 looking at the information, 415 downloading additional information and 216 completing the survey resulting in a total of 424 individual responses.

19. What about the views of young people?

The Steering Group lead for young families organised, 5 sessions with local children from 4 primary schools (Southill, Holy Trinity, Conifers and Radipole) and one secondary school (Wey Valley) in the period May to October 2022. This involved a structured set of questions exploring how young people saw Weymouth's future. In addition, a drop-in was held at Weymouth College where students were encouraged to say what they wanted for a future Weymouth. Overall approximately 525 young people were consulted.

20. What was the 3rd Public Engagement?

The third public engagement aimed to test the public response to key policies particularly those related to land use, development and protection. The engagement was held in January / February 2023 and involved a series of public meetings supported by a questionnaire.

573 people chose to complete the online questionnaire during the consultation period and a further 23 people submitted written replies.

21. Why was the 3rd Public Engagement contentious?

Information was circulated by third parties relating to questions 7 & 8 pertaining to land use in Preston. Analysis suggests that this information distorted the results - before this information was made public 42% of people were in favour of development outside the Defined Development Boundary with 32% against whilst after the information was made public this shifted to 11% in favour and 74% against.

These results are published in full on the Town Council website with an explanation, have **NOT** been discounted and have been taken into consideration by the Steering Group. The responses from all the feedback were considered and fed into the draft plan which was consulted on in our recent Regulation 14 consultation.

22. What action was taken to address the distortion of results in relation to questions 7 & 8 of the 3rd Public Engagement?

Following independent advice from Locality a fourth engagement was undertaken to specifically address the site allocations, including those related to Question 7 & 8, giving people an additional opportunity to comment on them. It also provided an opportunity to seek views on the proposed Local Green Spaces and the incorporation of sustainability features within future developments.

23. What was the 4th Public Engagement?

The 4th engagement was held in August 2023, taking the advice given by Locality in relation to reported concerns about the distortion of responses in the 3rd Public Engagement. The event was advertised on Facebook / Twitter / Instagram, in the Dorset Echo, and posters were displayed across the area. Five drop-in events were held using 28 information panels at each location - The Waverley, Redlands Community Sports Hub, Wellworthy Sports & Social Club and Preston Village Hall, the New Town Hall. 61 members of the public attended, and 34 response forms were completed.

This engagement showed, in its small but detailed response overwhelming support for Affordable Housings 25 (76%) with 3 (9%) against, support for development of 50% Affordable Homes on the following sites Budmouth Ave 16 (48%) for 5 (15%) against, Wyke Oliver Farm 19 (58%) for and 4 (12%) against, and Redlands Farm 15 (45%) for and 12 (36%) against.

24. When will the results of the Regulation 14 Consultation be published?

As we are using the feedback on the Regulation 14 to redraft the submission plan, we will be publishing the results within the Consultation Statement, as soon as we have completed the final draft of the plan.

We had hoped to publish the results earlier, but the high volume of responses and the necessary changes to the Plan have extended our timeline. Additionally, the local and general election periods have further contributed to these delays.

In total we received 1,450 separate comments, by individuals and a range of statutory organisations. One question asked whether responders were broadly in favour of the plan - 51% voted in favour of the plan whilst 49% were against the plan.

25. What is Affordable Housing?

Affordable housing is defined by the government as Social Rented, Affordable Rented, and Intermediate Housing, provided to eligible households whose needs are not met by the market.

The market provides homes to buy and homes to rent but too often these are not affordable to many people. Market led development can be obliged to provide Affordable Housing to address this, as is proposed in the WNP.

26. Are Affordable Homes truly affordable?

No, as shown in the Weymouth Housing Needs Analysis and through public feedback, for many people homes provided on the market to buy or rent are not affordable. With the low incomes for many people, even Social Rent and Affordable Rent can only be afforded through provision of Housing Benefit.

27. Who provides Affordable Housing?

For market-led housing the developer will build the homes and enter into an arrangement with a Housing Association to manage the Affordable Housing. For site-led housing the landowner (usually the Council) will contract with a developer to build the homes and will either manage the Affordable Housing themselves or will enter into an arrangement with a Housing Association to manage the Affordable Housing. In this area Dorset Council currently relies on the market to develop homes.

28. Why aren't more Brownfield Sites being proposed for development?

The large brownfield sites in the town centre are mostly covered by Strategic Policies in the West Dorset Weymouth & Portland Local Plan and so are already proposed for development.

This plan was made in 2015. Most of the sites allocated have not come forward. Brownfield sites are more costly to develop. The Levelling Up Fund will carry out

infrastructure works on certain sites, hopefully, making these more attractive for development.

29. Why are Greenfield sites being proposed for development?

The large brownfield sites in the town centre covered by Strategic Policies in the Dorset Local Plan will not produce sufficient affordable homes to meet the projected need. The large sites outside the town centre are greenfield sites – building on these sites costs less and can therefore deliver more affordable homes. The loss of these greenfield sites is offset by part of the owned land being assigned as public open space or as extension to existing Nature Parks.

If Affordable Homes are to be provided for local residents, they have to be built somewhere.

30. Why does the Plan propose to allocate so many sites for development?

Principally because there is a local need for 'affordable' homes and there are limited other options for building. The Weymouth Housing Needs Analysis (HNA) 2021 identified a chronic need for affordable homes. Need is driven by high prices and rents and the relatively low incomes for many people in Weymouth. The HNA Report estimates a need for affordable homes in Weymouth of between 1,775 and 2,649 during the lifetime of the plan to 2038.

The West Dorset Weymouth & Portland Local Plan requires 35% of new homes, on sites of 10 dwellings or more, to be 'affordable'. If this proportion is viable, it would only deliver 1,129 affordable homes over the plan period. This would leave at best, a shortfall of 646 affordable homes. Dorset Council's latest monitoring information however shows that in 2021 and 2022 only 13% of the homes built in Weymouth were 'affordable'.

In September 2023 there were 543 applications to the Housing Register with a local connection. A further 416 applications have been made with Weymouth their preferred area. There are 158 households in Temporary Accommodation.

The Pre-Submission Plan potentially allocates 7 sites for building homes with 414 of these being Affordable Homes.

31. How much land is being protected from development?

Large areas of Weymouth are already protected as important nature conservation sites e.g. Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs) or Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB).

The Pre-Submission Plan identifies 49 areas of proposed Local Green Space totalling an area of over 60 hectares.

The Site Allocations could add to this, with 3 areas of greenfield being made over as official public open space, and a nature park totalling 44 hectares.

32. Why aren't Important Open Gaps being retained?

We have been advised by Dorset Council that the Important Open Gaps designation will not be taken forward in the developing West Dorset Weymouth & Portland Local Plan.

This policy has been difficult to enforce. To address this, we are identifying Green Gaps to prevent urban sprawl.

33. Are car parks in the town centre allocated for development?

No. The car parks are listed by Dorset Council in the Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment as having a potential for housing development. In the third public engagement residents were asked to respond to the idea that car parks might be developed. Concerns were raised about the impact on local businesses and car parking for town centre residents. As a result, the Car Parks will **not** be allocated for development in the WNP. Policy WNP42 seeks to address these concerns.

34. Will the Plan be effective?

There is scepticism that plans are effective in that property developers find ways around the policies in the plans. The effectiveness of the Plan will be annually monitored. Should the plan not be performing effectively changes can be made to the plan periodically but may require a repeat of the process if these are major.

35. Won't Dorset Council just ignore the Plan anyway?

The Plan once 'made' forms part of the Development Plan for the area. Under planning law property developers (including Dorset Council) have to comply with the relevant policies when making a planning application. Dorset Council has a statutory duty as the Dorset Local Planning Authority to assess whether applications comply with Neighbourhood Plans.

36. Won't property developers just do what they want?

Property developers have to comply with the relevant policies when making a planning application. The WNP provides added protection to the Local Plan and aims to set a high bar for planners so as to ensure that future planning meets local needs identified by local people.

Dorset Council is required to demonstrate through the Housing Supply Land Test that within the Dorset area there is sufficient land available to support the housing development needed in the area. When this is the case property developers must comply with the Development Plan and not build outside the Defined Development Boundary. When this is not the case, property developers can apply for development on sites outside the Defined Development Boundary. This becomes a problem when plans are old. Bringing in the WNP provides added protection to building outside the Defined Development Boundary.

37. How will the Plan ensure the infrastructure needed is provided?

The sites allocated in the plan have special conditions which identify particular infrastructure needs within the site. Large sites require a master plan to demonstrate where such facilities will be provided.

It is for the Local Plan to set out an overall strategy for the pattern, scale and design quality of places, and make sufficient provision for:

- (a) housing (including affordable housing), employment, retail, leisure and other commercial development;

- (b) infrastructure for transport, telecommunications, security, waste management, water supply, wastewater, flood risk and coastal change management, and the provision of minerals and energy (including heat);
- (c) community facilities (such as health, education and cultural infrastructure); and
- (d) conservation and enhancement of the natural, built and historic environment, including landscapes and green infrastructure, and planning measures to address climate change mitigation and adaptation.

When planning permission is granted the developer and the Local Authority agree Section 106 obligations and Community Infrastructure Levy. Section 106 set specific site related obligations which may require build or a payment. CIL sets a charge on development to contribute to a range of infrastructure needs in the local area.

38. Does the Plan adequately address the Climate & Ecological Emergency?

The pre-submission has been assessed against the criteria in the audit tool 'How Green Is Your Plan' published by the Centre for Sustainable Environment and scored highly. Following feedback received during Regulation 14 amendments will be made with a view to further improving this rating. The submission version of the plan will then be re-assessed in order to measure these changes in respect of sustainability.

39. Does the Plan provide more jobs?

No, the Weymouth Neighbourhood Plan cannot itself provide jobs. What it can do is set up planning Policies to protect, support and encourage business premises as well as allocate sites for business use. The Pre-Submission Neighbourhood Plan proposes allocation of 3 sites for development including business use at Jubilee Sidings, Lodmoor Old Tip North, and Mount Pleasant Tip.