

# A National Park for Dorset



Considering the case for rural Dorset - the evidence

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### Foreword and Executive Summary

The case for a National Park in Dorset and East Devon was originally put forward in 2013 by the Dorset and East Devon National Park Group, with further evidence submitted in 2014 and 2018. This initially suggested an area covering the Dorset and East Devon Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty and what remains of Thomas Hardy's Egdon Heath between Dorchester and Wareham. Dorset CPRE, in its submission to the Glover Review, has suggested that, subject to Natural England's detailed assessment, the National Park should align with the new Dorset Council boundary. The evidence to support such a case, based on National Park designation criteria, needs to be assembled and its coverage and quality assessed.

This is a first stage in assembling the evidence which could be presented for the quality, diversity and interest of the natural environment, biodiversity, cultural heritage and recreational significance and potential of all rural Dorset.

There is a considerable array of evidence that can be called upon. This review also shows that the attributes important to a National Park are in no way limited to the two Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty or coastal areas. However, the coverage and scope of the evidence is variable and incomplete, and, unsurprisingly, there is less evidence and monitoring outside of the AONBs and outside of the national wildlife and heritage designations. There has been an understandable focus on evidence to deal with development pressures (particularly the need to accommodate more housing) and this is concentrated around the main settlements, but does not generally look much further than the existing statutory designations and consideration of landform and settlement characteristics.

In principle the various local and national designations should help protect the special character and qualities of rural Dorset's countryside and settlements from potentially harmful change. However, such protection can only be effective if the decision-makers are well informed about the characteristics and qualities of the areas concerned, and the planning system acts on the evidence available. The AONB Partnership, for example, is not a statutory consultee for planning purposes and has limited resources.

Dorset's environment, heritage and natural capital are its greatest economic asset. But these are shown by various studies, including the 2014 State of Dorset report, to face ongoing challenges and deterioration. A Dorset National Park, through its various responsibilities including planning, would work in close partnership with the Dorset Council, communities, businesses, land managers and others, to conserve and enhance Dorset's environment, biodiversity and cultural heritage and to promote the economic and social wellbeing of communities. It would proactively promote sustainable development that meets local needs. A National Park would bring additional resources to this work and invest these through partners for the benefit of all of Dorset.

With the Local Government Organisation now complete and the new Dorset Council established as a unitary authority, there is a unique opportunity to review what evidence is collected across the various departments and how. This is even more important because of the need to produce a comprehensive Local Plan for the area by 2024.

There are many societies and groups, at national, county and local level, including civic societies, heritage and conservation groups, environmental and wildlife organisations, and recreational groups which could add to this evidence base, along with many publications on every topic. CPRE Dorset intends making this an ongoing project and looks forward to receiving further contributions. The possibility of creating a 'Wikipedia' style database that embraces the themes and places across Dorset is an attractive proposition that could have multiple benefits.

As well as finding a better way to compile data on rural Dorset's important attributes, key recommendations from this report include the need for a historic landscape characterisation from which to produce Historic Landscape Character Areas (HLCAs), as well as encouraging the review of the landscape character assessments outside of the AONB to bring them up to the standard of those assessments. There is potential for a Dorset National Park to take the lead in establishing and providing expert support and resources for a Dorset Local Heritage Partnership and to engage with the Dorset Tourism Association on research into the current and future recreational potential of the Dorset Council area.

### 1. Introduction:

- 1.1. The case for a National Park in Dorset and East Devon was originally put forward in 2013 by the Dorset and East Devon National Park Group, with further evidence submitted in 2014 and 2018. This initially suggested an area covering the Dorset and East Devon Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty and what remains of Thomas Hardy's Egdon Heath between Dorchester and Wareham. The concept of a National Park in Dorset dates back further, as there was a recommendation for a Dorset National Park in the 1945 and 1947 first official reports on National Parks for England and Wales.
- 1.2. Dorset CPRE, in its submission to the Glover Review, has suggested that, subject to Natural England's detailed assessment, the National Park should align with the new Dorset Council boundary. With the Local Government reorganisation in Dorset (April 2019) and creation of Dorset Council (covering the more rural Dorset authorities of Purbeck, West Dorset, North Dorset and East Dorset), the potential advantages of realigning the National Park proposal to the new Dorset Council boundary should usefully be explored. The evidence to support such a case, based on National Park designation criteria, needs to be assembled and its coverage and quality assessed.
- 1.3. This report was prepared by Jo Witherden BSc(Hons) DipTP DipUD MRTPI of Dorset planning Consultant Limited in response. Its main aim to provide a report considering the potential case and supporting evidence for the proposal for a National Park in Dorset – to cover the whole of proposed Dorset Council area. The report therefore considers the availability and strength (in terms of coverage, depth and quality) of existing evidence with regard to:
  - the natural beauty of Dorset
  - the breadth of cultural heritage
  - the wildlife importance of Dorset
  - recreational opportunities and potential
- 1.4. It also considers what further evidence would be desirable to support a case for the designation of rural Dorset as a National Park.
- 1.5. The study does not propose to come to a view on the quality of the areas or settlements involved, as to whether these might or might not meet the designation criteria. That would be for Natural England to consider in due course if the Glover Review recommends further assessment of the proposal for a Dorset National Park.

### 2. Background – the basis for National Park Designations:

- 2.1. Section 5(1) of the National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act 1949 (as revised) sets out two statutory purposes for National Parks:
  1. To conserve and enhance the natural beauty, wildlife and cultural heritage
  2. To promote the public's understanding and enjoyment of the special qualities of those areas
- 2.2. In exercising or performing their functions in relation to the National Park, any relevant authority (such as a public body or statutory undertaker) shall have regard to these two statutory purposes. There is also an additional duty for National Park Authorities, which is to seek to foster the economic and social well-being of local communities within the national parks.
- 2.3. Section 5(2) goes on to define a National Park as an extensive tract of country in England which it appears to Natural England that, by reason of its natural beauty and the opportunities it affords for open-air recreation, having regard to both its character and its position in relation to centres of population, it is especially desirable that it is designated for National Park purposes.

### 3. Current designations potentially relevant to the Study Area and National Park status

3.1. The following table reviews the various statutory designations and planning policy tools used in Dorset that may be relevant to the underlying case for a National Park.

Table 1. Designations - Description

Designation	Description
<b>Ancient Woodlands</b>	Areas which have had a continuous cover of native trees and plants since at least 1600 AD and have not been cleared and/or extensively replanted since then. Considered as the most important for nature conservation. No specific designation process – inventory held and published by Natural England
<b>Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB)</b>	The primary purpose of the AONB designation is to conserve natural beauty. Designation is based on an appraisal of natural beauty by considering landscape and scenic quality, relative wildness and tranquillity, natural heritage features (including flora, fauna, geological and physiological features) and cultural heritage. Designation process managed by Natural England, statutory basis: National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act 1949 and Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 (CROW Act). Unless a Conservation Board has been set, up, the Local Planning Authorities are responsible to the preparation of a management plan for the area, and its ongoing review.
<b>Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP) species and habitats</b>	A wide range of seminatural habitat types and species that are judged by the government to be of principal importance for biodiversity conservation. No specific designation process – inventory held and published by Natural England
<b>Conservation Areas</b>	Areas of special architectural or historic interest, the character and appearance of which should be preserved or enhanced. Designation process undertaken by Local Planning Authority, statutory basis Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990
<b>Country Parks</b>	Primarily intended for recreation and leisure opportunities close to population centres. Declared and managed by local authorities under the Countryside Act 1968
<b>Green Belt</b>	The NPPF describes the five purposes of Green Belt, which includes assisting in safeguarding the countryside from encroachment (which is linked to an understanding and appreciation of its character) and preserving the setting and special character of historic towns (relating to cultural heritage). The designation process is managed by Local Planning Authorities through statutory Local Plan, following guidance set out in National Planning Policy (currently the NPPF).
<b>Heritage Coast</b>	Sections of largely undeveloped coast that are of exceptionally fine landscape / scenic quality, established to: conserve, protect and enhance the natural beauty of the coastline, its flora and fauna, its heritage features and to encourage and help the public to enjoy, understand and appreciate these areas. The designation is agreed between local authorities and Natural England but the designation does not have a statutory basis.
<b>Listed Buildings</b>	Buildings or other structures considered to be of special architectural and historical importance. The criteria for listing include architectural interest, historic interest and close historical associations with significant people or events. Designation is managed by Historic England which advises the Secretary of State. Statutory basis contained in the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 <i>There are also Locally Listed Buildings which are deemed of local importance and designated by the Local Planning Authority – however the coverage in Dorset is limited as this is not a statutory designation or legal requirement.</i>
<b>Local Green Spaces</b>	The NPPF introduces the concept of Local Green Spaces in 2012. These can be identified in the development plan (including local communities preparing Neighbourhood Plans). In order to qualify for the designation, the spaces have to

Designation	Description
	be in reasonably close proximity to the community it serves, demonstrably special and of particular local significance (for example because of its beauty, historic significance, recreational value, tranquillity or richness of its wildlife), local in character and not an extensive tract of land.
<b>Local Historic Park and Garden</b>	Designed landscapes of local significance. Within Dorset the designation process is undertaken by the Dorset Garden Trust. No statutory basis.
<b>Local Landscape Designations</b>	Areas of local landscape important, sometimes referred to as Land of Local Landscape Interest (LLLIs), Areas of Great Landscape Value (AGLVs). Identified through Local Plans (and potentially through Neighbourhood Plans). No statutory basis and no specific guidance in the NPPF (which simply references 'valued landscapes' with no clear definition).
<b>Local Nature Reserves (LNRs)</b>	Managed for nature conservation, and to provide opportunities for research and education, and access to nature. Declared by local authorities after consultation with the relevant statutory nature conservation agency. Statutory basis: National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act 1949
<b>Local Wildlife Sites</b>	Areas of local wildlife conservation interest, sometimes referred to as Sites of Nature Conservation Importance (SNCIs). Within Dorset the designation process is undertaken by the Dorset Wildlife Trust. No statutory basis.
<b>National Nature Reserves (NNRs)</b>	Managed to conserve and provide special opportunities for scientific study of some of the most important natural and semi-natural habitats and species represented within them. In addition they may be managed to provide public recreation if compatible with their natural heritage interests. Declared by Natural England. Statutory basis: National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act 1949 / Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981.
<b>Open Access Land</b>	The Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 (CROW Act) gave public right of access to land mapped as 'open country' (mountain, moor, heath and down), subject to certain defined restrictions. Natural England maintain a map showing the areas and restrictions imposed.
<b>Public Rights of Way network</b>	Local highways authorities are required to maintain the definitive map of all public rights of way in their areas. This network includes public footpaths, bridleways (which can also be used for horse riding, cycling and by people using mobility scooters or powered wheelchairs) and byways (either restricted or open to all traffic). A number of these form part of national or locally-identified trails, including (for example) the Coast Path
<b>Regionally Important Geological and Geomorphological Sites (RIGS)</b>	Areas important for their geology / geomorphology, valued for education, scientific study, historical significance or aesthetic qualities Within Dorset the designation process is undertaken by the Dorset's Important Geological Sites Group (DIGS) who are affiliated with the Dorset Wildlife Trust. No statutory basis.
<b>Registered Common Land and Village Greens</b>	Most commons are based on ancient rights – for example relating to stock grazing. Under the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 there is a right of public access to registered common land, subject to certain defined restrictions. A register of Common Land and Village Greens is maintained by the local authority.
<b>Registered Historic Park and Garden</b>	Designed landscapes of national significance, based on their layout and features, its rarity as an example of historic landscape design and the quality of the surviving landscape. The register is managed by Historic England, and although the designation does not have a statutory basis, it is recognised in the NPPF as a nationally important heritage asset.
<b>Scheduled Ancient Monuments (SAMs)</b>	Sites designated for their archaeological importance. To be eligible for scheduling, a monument must be of national importance due to its age / rarity or significance. Designation is managed by Historic England who advises the Secretary of State. Statutory basis: the Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Areas Act 1979

Designation	Description
<b>Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs) and higher European / International designations</b>	Provide statutory protection for the best examples of the UK's flora, fauna and geological features. Some are also included within European or international nature conservation designations - Ramsar sites; Special Areas of Conservation (SAC); Special Protection Areas (SPA) (the latter form the Natura 2000 network). Designation process managed by Natural England. Statutory basis: Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 and Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 (CROW Act).
<b>World Heritage Sites</b>	Sites designated as having "outstanding universal value" having special cultural or physical significance. Designation process based on recommendations of the UK Government to the UNESCO World Heritage Committee. <i>Although as a designation this would normally reflect the cultural heritage importance, in the case of the Dorset and East Devon Coast the designation was based on its outstanding combination of globally significant geological and geomorphological features – and as such is more relevant to natural beauty.</i>

Table 2. Designations – National Park relevance

Designation	Natural Beauty	Cultural Heritage	Wildlife	Recreation
Ancient Woodlands		(✓)	✓	
Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB)	✓	(✓)	(✓)	
Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP) species and habitats			✓	
Conservation Areas		✓		
Country Parks				✓
Green Belt	(✓)	(✓)		
Heritage Coast	✓	(✓)	(✓)	(✓)
Listed Buildings		✓		
Local Green Spaces	(✓)	(✓)	(✓)	(✓)
Local Historic Park and Garden	(✓)	✓		
Local Landscape designations	✓			
Local Nature Reserves (LNRs)			✓	(✓)
Local Wildlife Sites			✓	
National Nature Reserves (NNRs)			✓	(✓)
Open access land				✓
Public Rights of Way network				✓
Regionally Important Geological / Geomorphological Sites (RIGS)	(✓)	(✓)	(✓)	(✓)
Registered Common Land and Village Greens				✓
Registered Historic Park and Garden	(✓)	✓		
Scheduled Ancient Monuments (SAMs)		✓		
Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI)			✓	
World Heritage Sites	✓	(✓)	(✓)	(✓)



## 4. Natural Beauty

### Designation coverage and supporting evidence

4.1. The main designations identified relevant to this criterion are:

- Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty
- Heritage Coast
- Local landscape designations
- World Heritage Sites (this is covered here rather than under cultural heritage due to the geological / geomorphological reason for designating the Dorset and East Devon Coast)

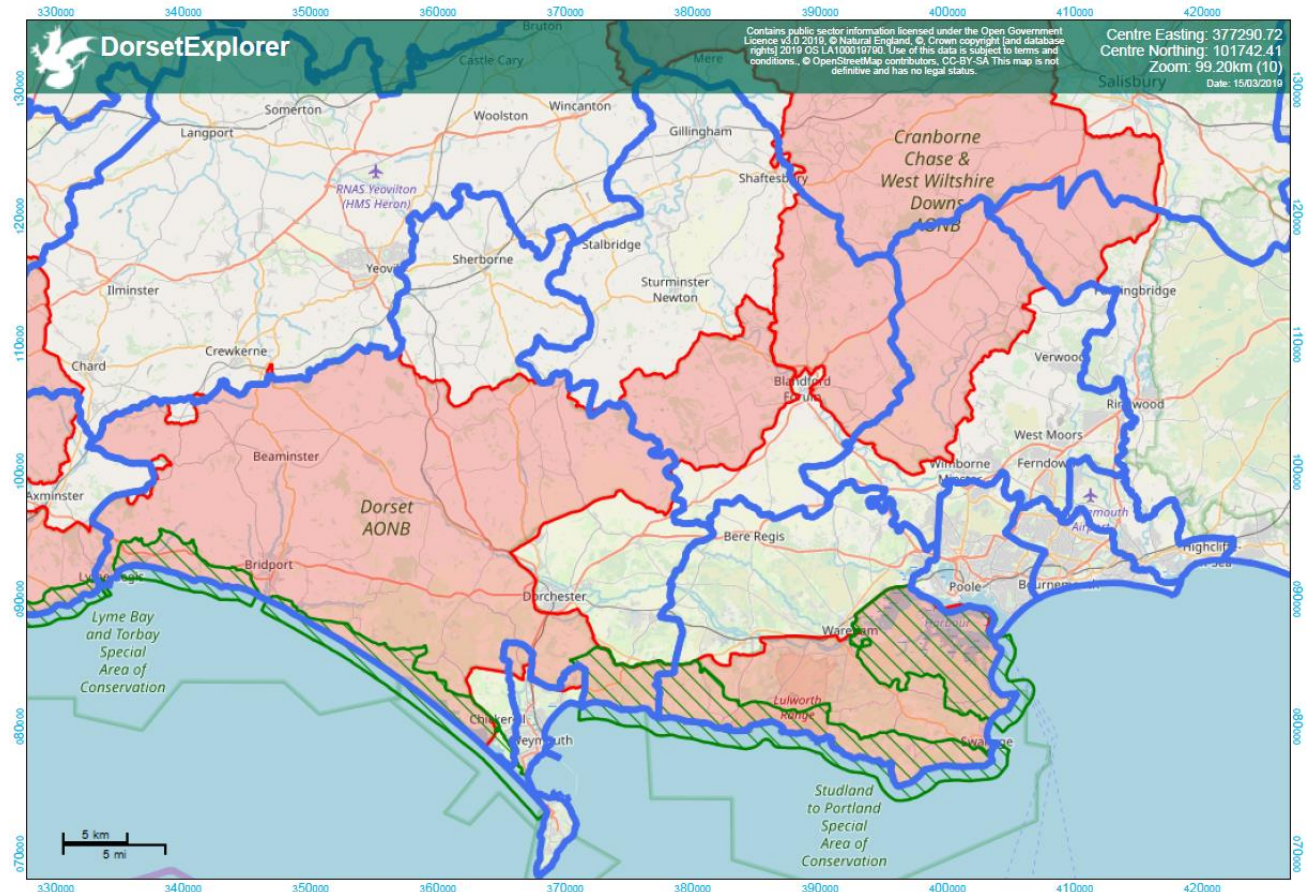
And also potentially:

- Green Belt
- Local Green Spaces (this is covered under recreation)
- Registered and Local Historic Park and Gardens (this is covered under cultural heritage)
- Regionally Important Geological / Geomorphological Sites (RIGS)

#### Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty

4.2. Within Dorset, there are two AONB designations (the Dorset AONB and the Cranborne Chase and West Wiltshire Downs AONB). The Dorset AONB covers 1,129km<sup>2</sup> almost entirely within Dorset, and the Cranborne Chase AONB a further 983km<sup>2</sup>, of which about a third (278km<sup>2</sup>) is in Dorset.

Map showing AONB and Heritage Coast coverage



4.3. These landscapes were designated in 1959 and 1981 respectively, and there is little evidence available regarding their original appraisal and designation. However following the CRoW Act requirement for AONB Management Plans to be put in place and regularly reviewed, the current

evidence base reflecting their significance and landscape character is quite extensive<sup>12</sup>. This varies between the two AONBs (given their different management arrangements) and further information on specific evidence is included in this report.

- 4.4. An AONB Partnership has been established for each of these areas, to assist with the preparation, implementation and review of the required AONB Management Plans. These partnerships are not a statutory consultee nor do they have authority to make decisions on development proposals or strategic plans. They have limited resources to make a significant contribution to planning decisions.
- 4.5. In relation to the two AONBs, their special significance includes many similarities and relates to the following factors:

Table 3. AONB Key characteristics

Designation	Dorset AONB	Cranborne Chase
Dark night skies	✓	✓
Diverse landscape (include chalk downland)	✓	✓
Panoramic views	✓	✓
Opportunities for exploration, relaxation, walking and cycling		✓
Range of habitats and associated species that is unusually rich	✓	✓
Rich historic and built heritage	✓	✓
Rich legacy of cultural associations	✓	✓
Sense of tranquillity and remoteness	✓	✓
Spectacular coastline	✓	
Undeveloped rural character	✓	✓

### Heritage Coast

- 4.6. Within Dorset there are two area of Heritage coastline - the Purbeck Heritage Coast (which includes the south side of Poole Harbour, much of Isle of Purbeck excluding Swanage, and the southern coastline up to the outskirts of Weymouth) and the West Dorset Heritage Coast (which runs from Chesil Beach to the outskirts of Lyme Regis. In places these project inland by 3 to 4km, and cover 127km<sup>2</sup> and 49km<sup>2</sup> respectively.
- 4.7. These were designated in 1981 and 1984 respectively, and there is little evidence available regarding their original appraisal and designation. However there is significant overlap with the Dorset AONB designation, and the Heritage Coast management has been subsumed into the Management Plan for the Dorset AONB.

### Local Landscape designations

- 4.8. Local landscape designations tend to date back to the previous (1990s/2000) Local Plans and in general were not reviewed in the most recent post-2012 Local Plans. but were carried through or given 'saved' status.
- The West Dorset and Weymouth Local Plan preferred options draft (2018) suggests that it will carry forward the existing Land of Local Landscape Importance, Important Open Gaps and the Portland Coastline that were identified in the 2005/6 Local Plans as 'valued landscapes'
  - The North Dorset Local Plan Issues and Options draft (2017) states that it is conducting a comprehensive review of all those areas of land within the District that are designated an IOWA the Important Open or Wooded Areas that were retained from the 2003 North Dorset

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.dorsetaonb.org.uk/>

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.ccwwdaonb.org.uk/>

District-Wide Local Plan, and that it is minded to delete those in the countryside or otherwise protected by other planning policies or legislation

- The East Dorset Plan Review Options Consultation report (2018) is proposing to abandon the use of Areas of Great Landscape Value that were carried forward from the 2002 East Dorset Local Plan, and instead use criteria-based policies. The AGLV designation covered a large area of land (approximately 23% of the District) extending east from the AONB boundary up to Verwood and nearly to Alderholt, as well as an area either side of the A338 south of St Ives.
- The Purbeck Local Plan (2012) does not identify any local landscape designations and there are no changes proposed through its review (which was submitted for its examination in January 2019).

It is clear that there is currently a mixed approach to local landscape designations across the area, and there is little evidence available regarding their original appraisal and designation.

### *World Heritage Sites*

4.9. There is one World Heritage Site within Dorset, which is the Dorset and East Devon Coast. This met the criterion of being an outstanding example representing major stages of earth's history, including the record of life, significant on-going geological processes in the development of landforms, or significant geomorphic or physiographic features<sup>3</sup>. This is England's only natural World Heritage Site.

4.10. The site comprises eight sections along 155km of largely undeveloped coast, covering approximately 25km<sup>2</sup>. It is broadly covered by both the Heritage Coast and AONB designations, but extends around the Isle of Portland. The Charmouth Heritage Coast Centre provides information on the coast including recent fossil finds and their stories of discovery by local collectors and visitors.

### *Green Belt*

4.11. The South East Dorset Green Belt stretches around the Poole, Bournemouth and Christchurch conurbation. The Purbeck and East Dorset Local Plans define the Green Belt boundaries within their respective areas, and were last revised in 2012 and 2014 respectively and cover 245km<sup>2</sup>. Further Green Belt releases are proposed in Purbeck Local Plan as submitted for its examination. There is some overlap with the AONB designations around the Isle of Purbeck / Poole Harbour and Cranborne Chase.

4.12. Green Belt designation is not necessarily reflective of natural beauty. Both Local Plan reviews have considered in detail the extent to which all areas of the Green Belt within their area meet the main national criteria for Green Belt designation, which includes one criterion relating to safeguarding the countryside from encroachment (and the assessments consider as part of this the countryside's intrinsic character). The Purbeck Green Belt Study<sup>4</sup> concluded that 20 of the 38 land parcels assessed were of the highest ranking when assessed against this criterion (i.e. those parcels were considered "open and characterised by agricultural, forestry, or recreational land uses which help to define the countryside's intrinsic character"). A similar review of the East Dorset Green Belt<sup>5</sup> indicated that 51 of the 94 land parcels assessed were of the highest ranking when assessed against this criterion. The conclusions of these two reviews as to the rankings of Green Belt parcels in their areas may not be supported by amenity and conservation organisations.

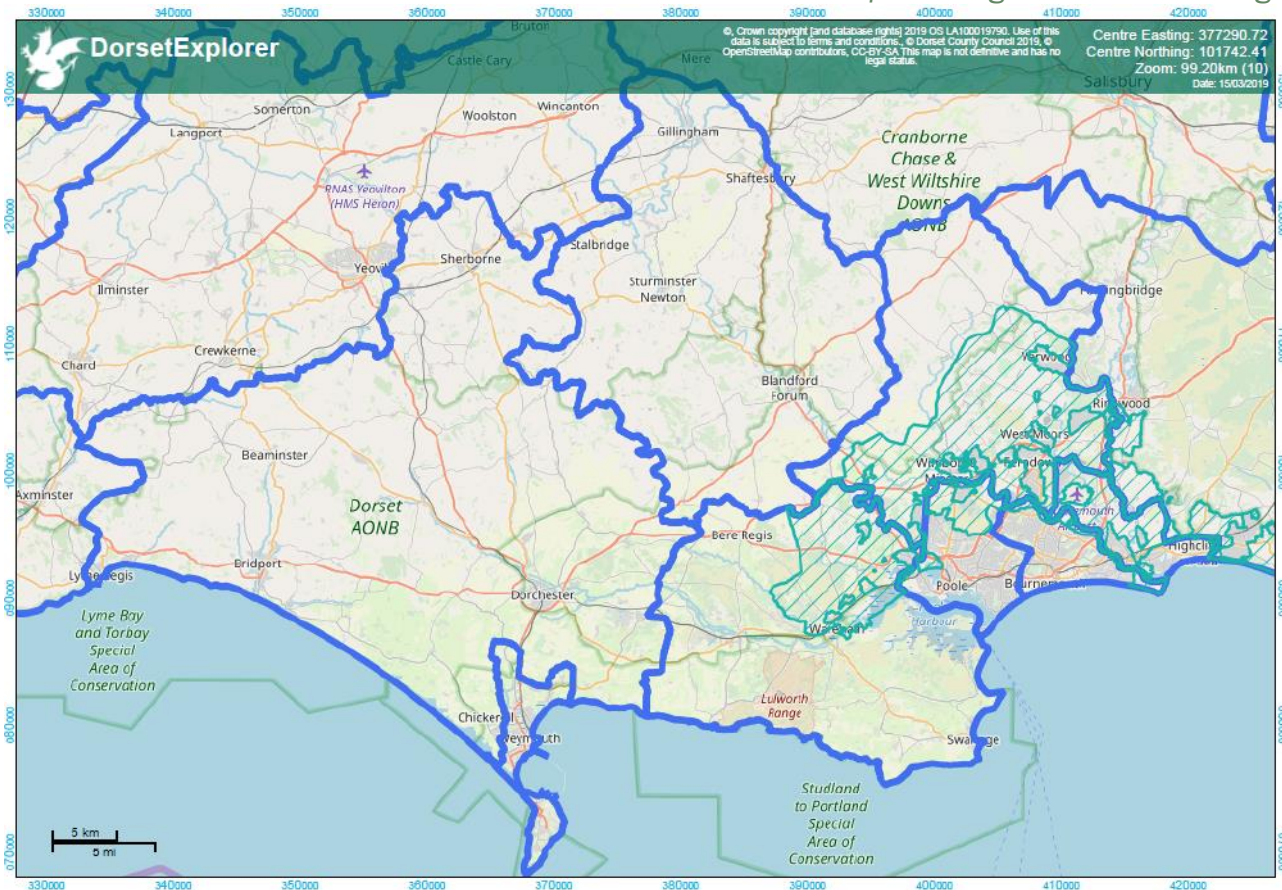
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<sup>3</sup> <https://whc.unesco.org/en/list/1029>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.dorsetforyou.gov.uk/planning-buildings-land/planning-policy/purbeck/local-plan-review-purbeck/pdfs/submission-documents/sd24-2019-01-09-green-belt-study.pdf>

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.dorsetforyou.gov.uk/planning-buildings-land/planning-policy/east-dorset/local-development-framework/evidence-base-studies/christchurch-and-east-dorset-green-belt-assessment.aspx>

Map showing Green Belt coverage



*Registered and Local Historic Park and Gardens*

4.13. See section on cultural heritage.

*Regionally Important Geological / Geomorphological Sites (RIGS)*

4.14. The Dorset DIGS website<sup>6</sup> explains that about 60 sites in Dorset have been identified as Regionally Important Geological and Geomorphological Sites. These are shown on the following map together with the underlying geology.

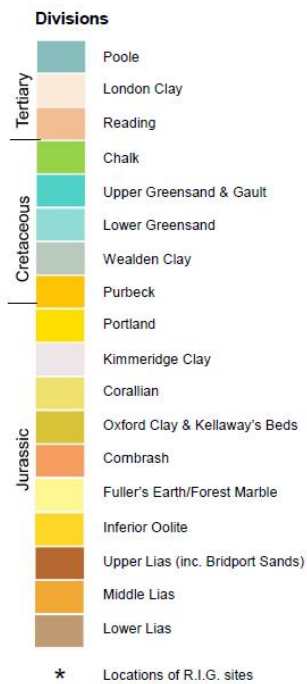
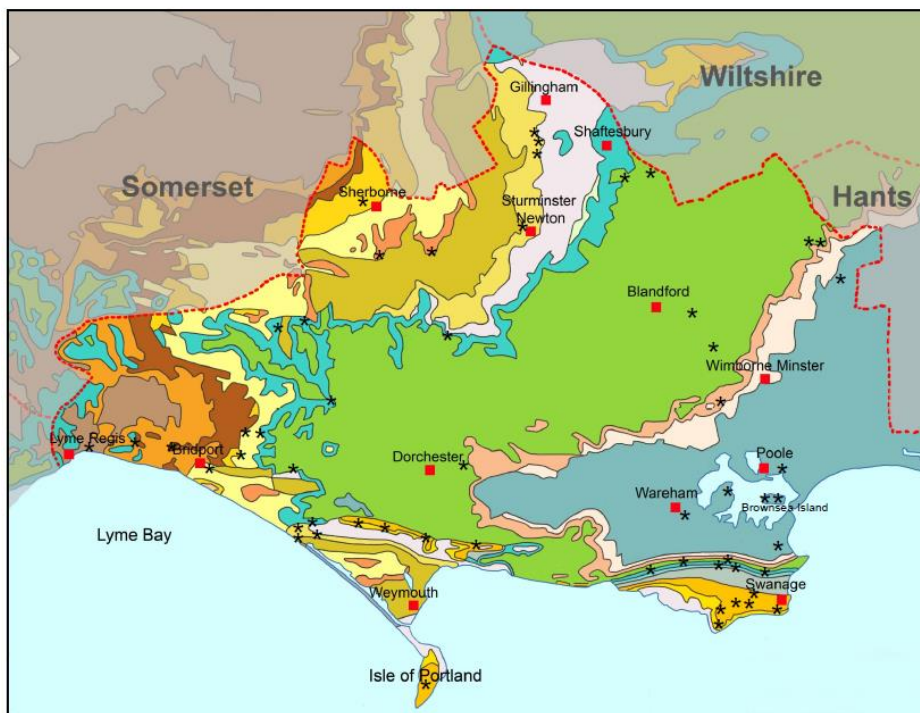
4.15. These were selected from approximately 800 records of sites of geological interest held in the Dorset Environmental Records Centre. The sites were chosen on the basis of their educational value, their historical value in the study of earth sciences, and their aesthetic value in the landscape, especially in promoting public awareness of geology. Their coverage is widespread across the area. Most are not extensive in size as they relate to geological exposures, such as provided through historic quarry sites. The exception to this is the Isle of Portland, which is designated in its entirety.

<sup>6</sup> <https://dorsetrigs.org.uk/rigs-sites-in-dorset/>

Map showing Regionally Important Geological Sites and underlying geology)



## Dorset solid geology and location of Regionally Important Geological Sites



PAS 2010

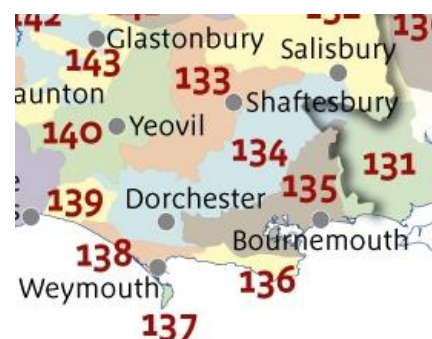
### Other relevant evidence

#### Landscape character assessments

4.16. Landscape character assessments (LCAs) are a well-recognised tool for identifying and describing the combination of elements and features that make landscapes distinctive. They are used to define landscape's character areas, types and characteristics based on desk study and field survey observations.

4.17. At a national level, Natural England have defined and described 159 distinct natural areas across England. For Dorset this includes:

- [133 Blackmoor Vale and Vale of Wardour](#)
- [134 Dorset Downs and Cranborne Chase](#)
- [135 Dorset Heaths](#)
- [136 South Purbeck](#)
- [137 Isle of Portland](#)
- [138 Weymouth Lowlands](#)
- [139 Marshwood and Powerstock Vales](#)
- [140 Yeovil Scarplands](#)

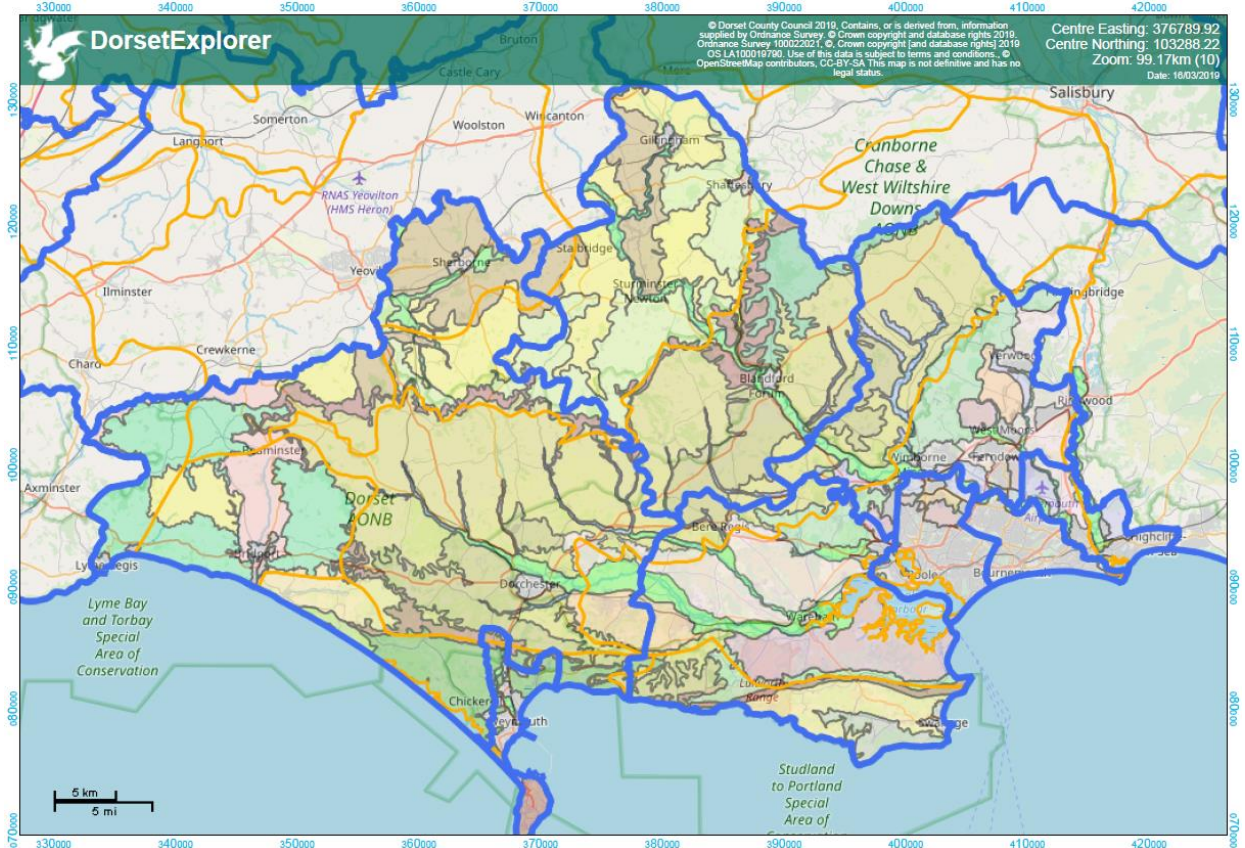


4.18. A more detailed local assessment has been undertaken by the Dorset Councils and the two AONB Partnerships that provides further refinement of these areas. The county-wide assessment<sup>7</sup> identifies 21 different character types. A more detailed assessment has been undertaken by the

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.dorsetforyou.gov.uk/countryside-coast-parks/the-dorset-landscape/landscape-character-assessment-map.aspx>

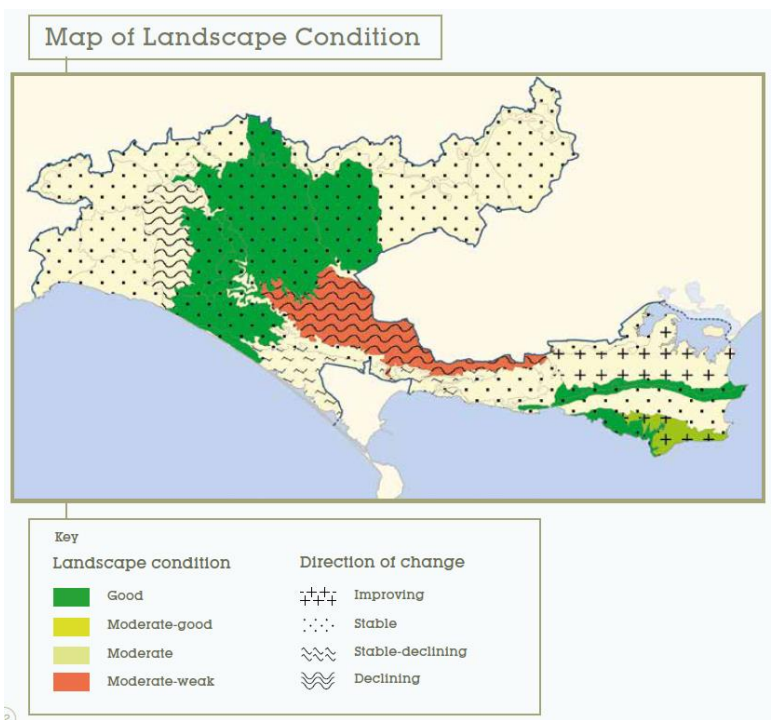
two AONB partnerships<sup>89</sup> which includes a rating of the character of each area (as either strong, medium or weak) as well as their condition. These were both recently updated (2018).

Map showing Landscape Character areas defined within Dorset



4.19. Within the Dorset AONB the majority of the units are considered to be of 'strong' character, with only the South Purbeck Heathlands rated as 'weak' and 9 of the 34 units (26%) rated 'medium'. 29% of the landscape character areas were considered to be in 'good' condition and 71% in 'moderate' condition with none rated as 'poor'. Some 18% were in moderate and declining condition and therefore are at risk of losing their moderate status. This is particularly focused on the area south of Dorchester where there is a project identified to underground high voltage transmission lines (and improve the landscape character around those lines that are to remain).

4.20. The Dorset AONB uses fixed point photography to assess with monitoring the landscape condition, and the Cranborne Chase AONB are proposing to set up a similar fixed-point photography system to monitor future change.



8 <https://www.dorsetaonb.org.uk/our-work/landscapework/landscape-character>  
 9 [http://www.ccwwdaonb.org.uk/uploads/docs/Publications/CCCV\\_LPS\\_Opt.pdf](http://www.ccwwdaonb.org.uk/uploads/docs/Publications/CCCV_LPS_Opt.pdf)

Dark Skies, Tranquillity and Intrusion mapping

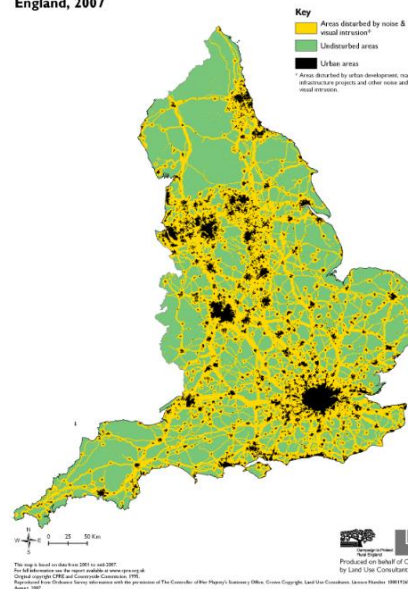
4.21. The CPRE have commissioned a number of national studies into factors such as tranquillity and intrusion (relating to the lack of disturbance from noise and visual intrusion)<sup>10</sup>, and the presence or absence of dark night skies<sup>11</sup>.

4.22. The national scale of the tranquillity and intrusion studies does not enable detailed review of the areas within Dorset, but does highlight that, in terms of areas that are undisturbed by the presence of noise and visual intrusion, some 61.1% of the county (excluding Bournemouth and Poole) was rated as 'undisturbed' - compared to 57.5% across the South West and 50.1% of England.

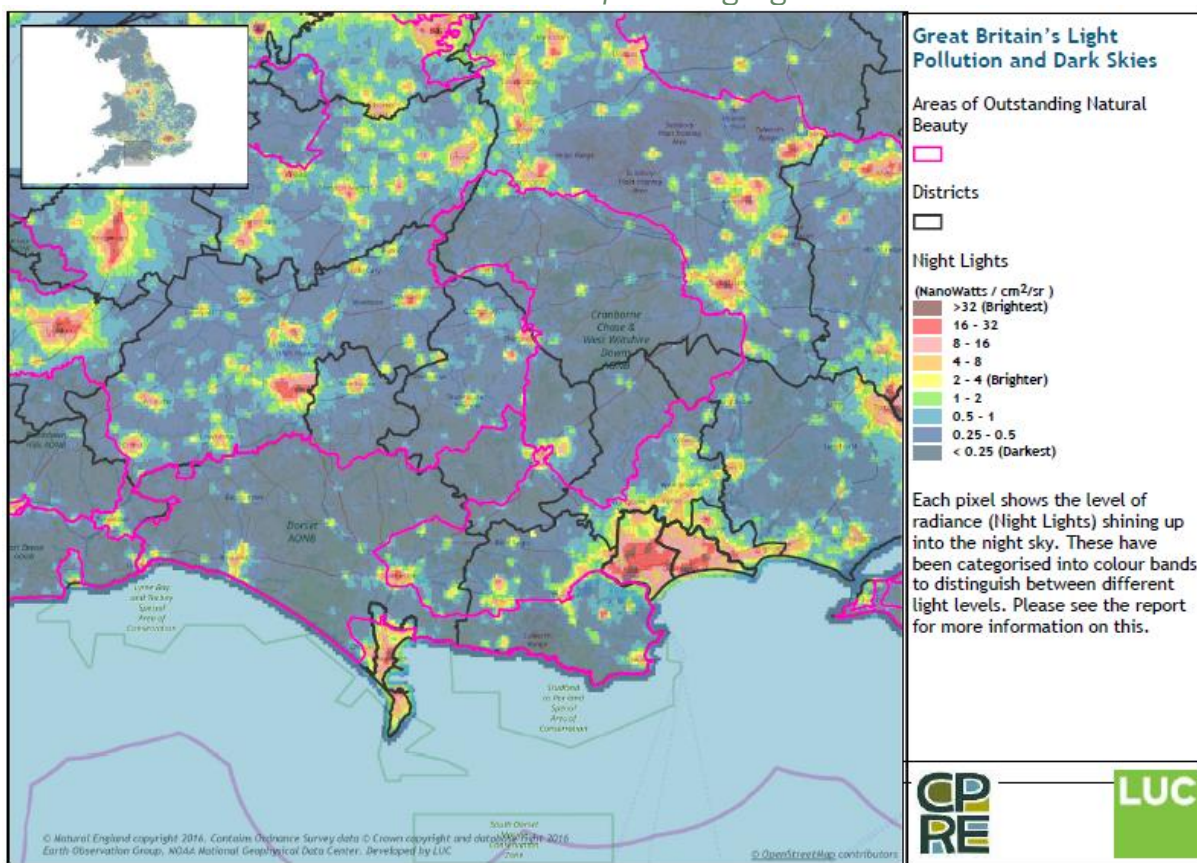
4.23. Following on from this, the Cranborne Chase AONB partnership undertook a more detailed assessment of tranquillity within their area<sup>12</sup> to understand in greater detail the variations across their area and how tranquillity may be enhanced. The Dorset AONB Partnership also commissioned some research to better understand the fundamental determinants of tranquillity<sup>13</sup>.

4.24. West and North Dorset ranked amongst the top 20 darkest districts recorded in the study of dark night skies. The more urbanised areas around Weymouth / Portland and between Ferndown and Ringwood on the edge of the conurbation have much higher levels of light pollution.

Intrusion Map: England, 2007



Map showing Light Pollution levels as monitored



<sup>10</sup> <https://www.cpre.org.uk/resources/countryside/tranquil-places/item/download/303>

<sup>11</sup> <https://www.nightblight.cpre.org.uk/>

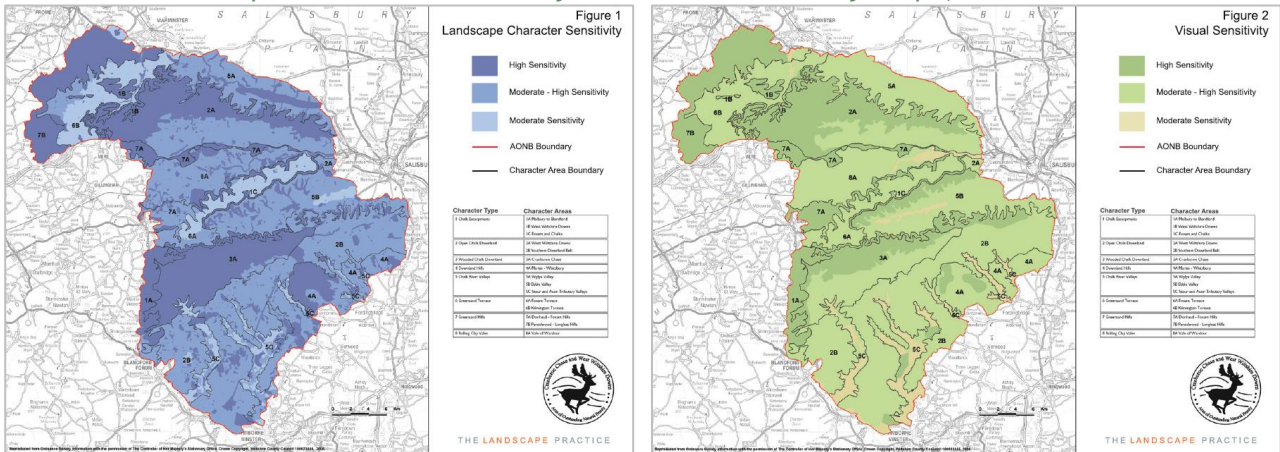
<sup>12</sup> <http://www.ccwwdaonb.org.uk/uploads/docs/Publications/TranquillityReport.pdf>

<sup>13</sup> <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0169204616302328?via%3Dihub>

Landscape sensitivity studies

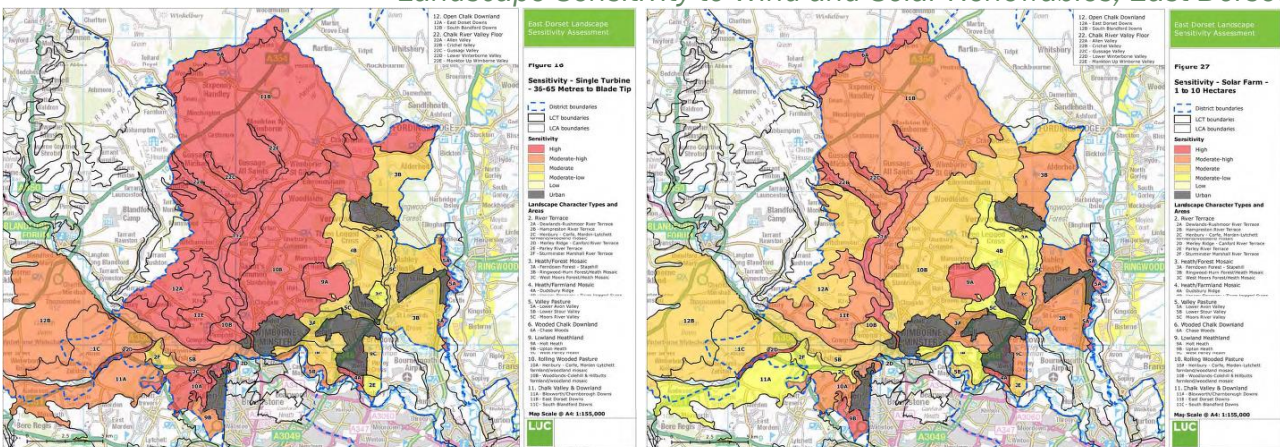
4.25. Landscape sensitivity studies have been undertaken by various organisations across the area, but do not provide complete coverage. The Cranborne Chase and West Wiltshire Downs AONB Landscape Sensitivity Study (2007)<sup>14</sup> is perhaps the most comprehensive. This considered both landscape character sensitivity (based on judgements about the significance and sensitivity of the various natural, cultural and aesthetic factors and landscape quality / condition) and visual sensitivity (based on landform, tree and woodland cover, population and visitor numbers and scope for mitigation). All these factors were ranked to come to an overall score for each character area.

Landscape Character Sensitivity and Visual Sensitivity Maps, Cranborne Chase AONB



4.26. A landscape sensitivity assessment was undertaken for East Dorset and for North Dorset in 2014<sup>15,16</sup> focusing on considering the potential to accommodate wind and solar energy developments. The study considers different scenarios in terms of the scale and number of wind turbines and size of solar farm and scores these accordingly. The assessment process looked at the landscape characteristics which might have a greater susceptibility to change, as well as their landscape value.

Landscape Sensitivity to Wind and Solar Renewables, East Dorset

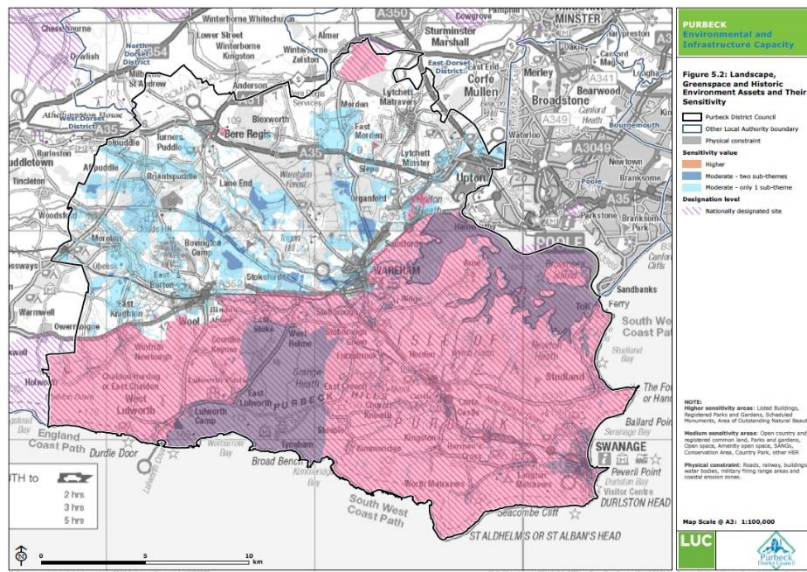


14 <http://www.ccwwdaonb.org.uk/uploads/docs/Publications/LandscapeSensitivityMay2007.pdf>  
 15 <https://www.dorsetforyou.gov.uk/planning-buildings-land/planning-policy/east-dorset/local-development-framework/evidence-base-studies/landscape-sensitivity-to-wind-and-solar-energy-development-in-christchurch-and-east-dorset.aspx>  
 16 <https://www.dorsetforyou.gov.uk/planning-buildings-land/planning-policy/north-dorset/local-plan-part-1/submission/local-plan-evidence-base/north-dorset-local-plan-evidence-base.aspx>



4.27. More recently a Strategic Landscape and Heritage Study has been completed for West Dorset, Weymouth and Portland<sup>17</sup> which broadly assesses the landscape sensitivity in relation to the areas immediately around the main settlements. This does not provide a detailed explanation of the assessment method but appears to consider the topography, field patterns / woodland / settlement cover, landscape and heritage-related designations and then proposes a green / amber / red colour coding depending on whether the area would benefit from further assessment for its development potential.

4.28. In 2017 Purbeck District Council commissioned an Environmental and Infrastructure Capacity Study<sup>18</sup> which considered the sensitivity of various geology, water, wildlife, landscape, greenspace and the heritage constraints as well as factors such as land productivity in order to better understand the constraints on potential housing supply. This pulls all the factors together to demonstrate which areas, in the consultant's view, are the least and most constrained.



4.29. Monitoring of the cumulative impact of development on landscapes is not being clearly covered in the Local Planning Authority annual monitoring reports. For example, the North Dorset Local Plan SEA proposed the monitoring of planning applications approved against AONB Management Board advice as one of its indicators, but this (along with a number of other proposed indicators) isn't currently covered in the monitoring reports. There is no landscape indicator monitored in relation to the effects of the West Dorset and Weymouth Local Plan. In the recently submitted Purbeck Local Plan the SEA does not propose any indicator that directly related to the landscape impact across the area.

*Identification of key views*

4.30. The panoramic views obtained within the Dorset AONB are specifically mentioned in its statement of significance. Although not necessarily comprehensive, and also related to the monitoring of landscape condition, the location of the fixed point photography is mapped and perhaps provides a starting point to understanding this consideration.

4.31. The identification of important views is something that is being picked up through the production of Neighbourhood Plans, although the level of success on this (particularly at examination) means that the coverage is mixed. Specific views have been recorded in the made Neighbourhood Plans of Fontmell Magna<sup>19</sup> and Hazelbury Bryan<sup>20</sup>. Views have been noted in other plans (such as Askerswell, Broadwindsor, Piddle Valley and Sturminster Newtown) but for various reasons the specific views have not made the 'final cut'.

<sup>17</sup> <https://www.dorsetforyou.gov.uk/planning-buildings-land/planning-policy/west-dorset-and-weymouth-portland/local-plan-review/pdf/evidence/stage-1-report-strategic-landscape-and-heritage-assessment-july-2018.pdf>

<sup>18</sup> <https://www.dorsetcouncil.gov.uk/planning-buildings-land/planning-policy/purbeck/local-plan-review-purbeck/purbeck-local-plan-review-consultations.aspx>

<sup>19</sup> <https://www.dorsetforyou.gov.uk/planning-buildings-land/planning-policy/north-dorset/neighbourhood-planning/submitted-plans/fontmell-magna-neighbourhood-plan.aspx>

<sup>20</sup> <https://www.dorsetforyou.gov.uk/planning-buildings-land/planning-policy/north-dorset/neighbourhood-planning/submitted-plans/hazelbury-bryan-neighbourhood-plan.aspx>

### Availability and strength (in terms of coverage, depth and quality) of existing evidence

- 4.32. The existing designations outlined above provide clear evidence of the importance of the landscape and character of the countryside across Dorset. Key characteristics are shared between the two AONBs, supplemented by other studies showing evidence of these characteristics outside of these two designated areas.
- 4.33. The landscape character evidence is relatively comprehensive (albeit focused on the rural areas outside of the main settlements) but makes outside of the two AONBs makes no judgement on the comparable beauty (in terms of the strength of character) of the different areas. The use of topographical, geological, land-use and habitat maps also enables a clearer understanding of these landscapes and their component parts. The AONB partnerships are also monitoring landscape condition through fixed point photography.
- 4.34. Other linked studies (such as tranquillity and the presence of specific features or sites of noted importance) is potentially useful in providing further level of detail in assessing the strength of each area. Similarly the Green Belt assessment is useful but only considers the open and undeveloped nature of the countryside. Although some research has been undertaken in regard to landscape sensitivity the method and focus differs considerably across the area making it more difficult to draw conclusions from these studies.
- 4.35. Links with local groups may also generate more information (such as understanding key views).

## 5. Cultural heritage

### Designation coverage and supporting evidence

5.1. The main designations identified relevant to this criterion are:

- Conservation Areas
- Listed Buildings
- Registered and Local Historic Park and Gardens
- Scheduled Ancient Monuments

And also potentially:

- Ancient Woodlands (this is covered under wildlife)
- Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (this is covered under natural beauty)
- Green Belt
- Heritage Coast (this is covered under natural beauty)
- Local Green Spaces (this is covered under recreation)
- Regionally Important Geological / Geomorphological Sites (RIGS) (this is covered under natural beauty)
- World Heritage Sites (this is covered under natural beauty)

#### *Conservation Areas and Listed Buildings*

5.2. There are over 9,000 Listed Buildings in the Dorset Council area of which over 700 (about 8%) are Grade I or II\*. The Grade I Listed Buildings include the likes of:

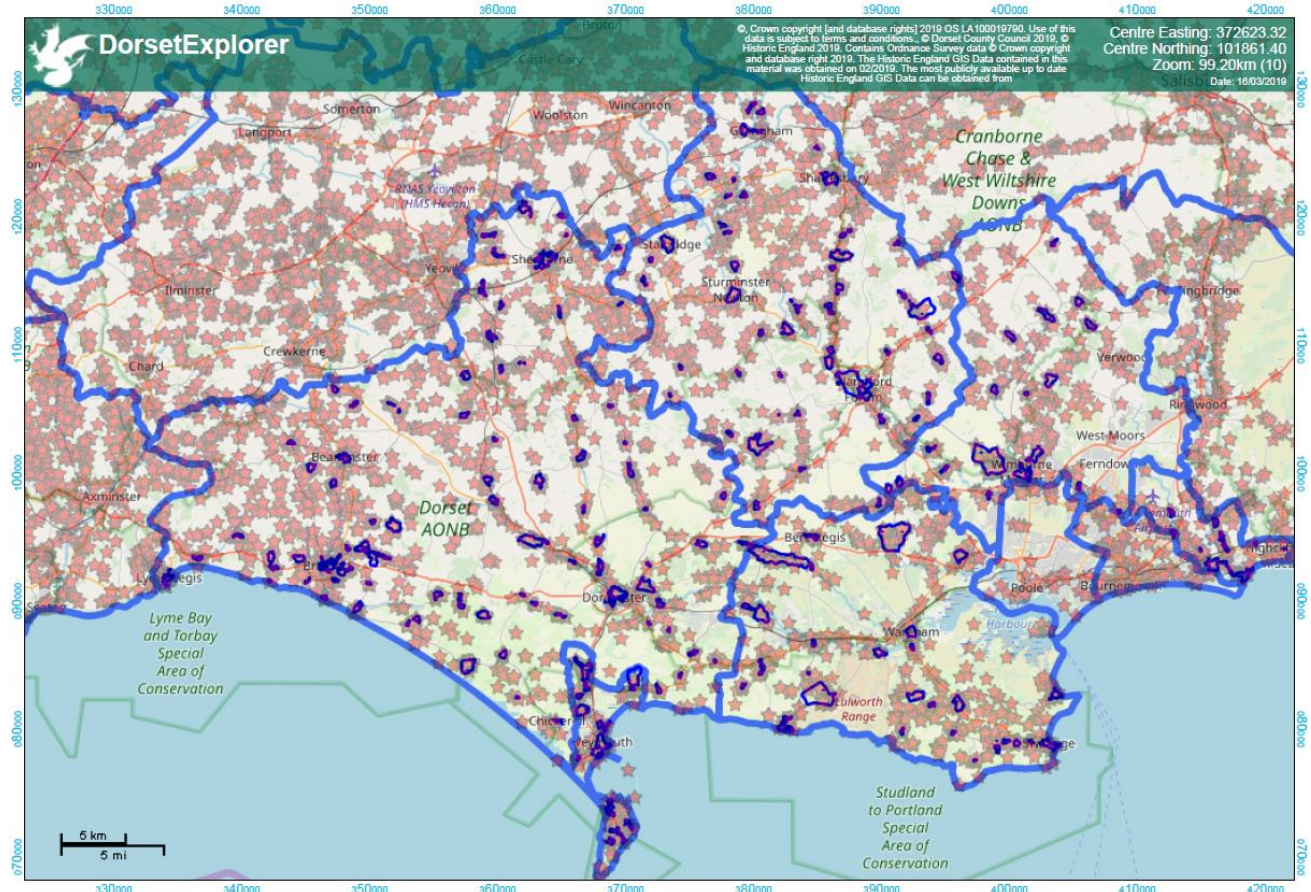
- Abbotsbury Tithe Barn, C14, formerly of Abbotsbury abbey.
- Athelhampton House & Gardens - English manor house begun 1493 by Sir William Martyn
- Corfe Castle - ruins of former royal castle, built on a natural hilltop in a gap in the main Purbeck range. Late C11 origin - possibly on an earlier pre-Conquest site
- Forde Abbey - Country House, formerly Cistercian Abbey, founded 1136
- Kingston Lacey - C17 country designed for Sir Ralph Bankes by Sir Roger Pratt

- Lulworth Castle, originally built as hunting lodge circa 1608 for Henry Howard, and later remodelled
- Mapperton House - C15-17 manor house and grounds
- Sherborne Abbey - a Saxon cathedral (C8-) and then a Benedictine abbey (C11-), before becoming a parish church (C16)
- Sherborne Castle - Country House in grounds, late C16 for Sir Walter Raleigh (and also Sherborne Old Castle built by Roger, bishop of Salisbury 1107-1135, restoration begun by Sir Walter Raleigh in 1592 and soon abandoned)
- The Shire Hall Dorchester where the Tolpuddle Martyrs were sentenced in 1834. Interior retains the court-room virtually as it was when the Tolpuddle Martyrs were tried here

5.3. Some 17 Listed Buildings are on the national heritage at risk register, six of which are Grade I, including Parnham House in Beaminster much of which was destroyed by a catastrophic fire in April 2017.

5.4. There are also approximately 200 Conservation Areas designated. The coverage is widespread but unsurprisingly clustered in the main settlements and along the main transport routes, with far fewer designations in the more remote and less intensively farmed areas. Five of these (Blandford Forum, Gillingham, Lytchett Minster, Swanage and Weymouth Town Centre) are on the national heritage at risk register

Map showing Listed Buildings (pale red stars) and conservation area (blue) designations



5.5. There is mixed coverage in terms of Conservation Area Appraisals. All of the East Dorset and Purbeck Conservation Areas have been appraised<sup>21,22</sup>. However some of this work has not been recently reviewed, as (for example) a number of the East Dorset appraisals are based on work carried out in 1994 to define the special qualities of the Conservation Area, and others in the

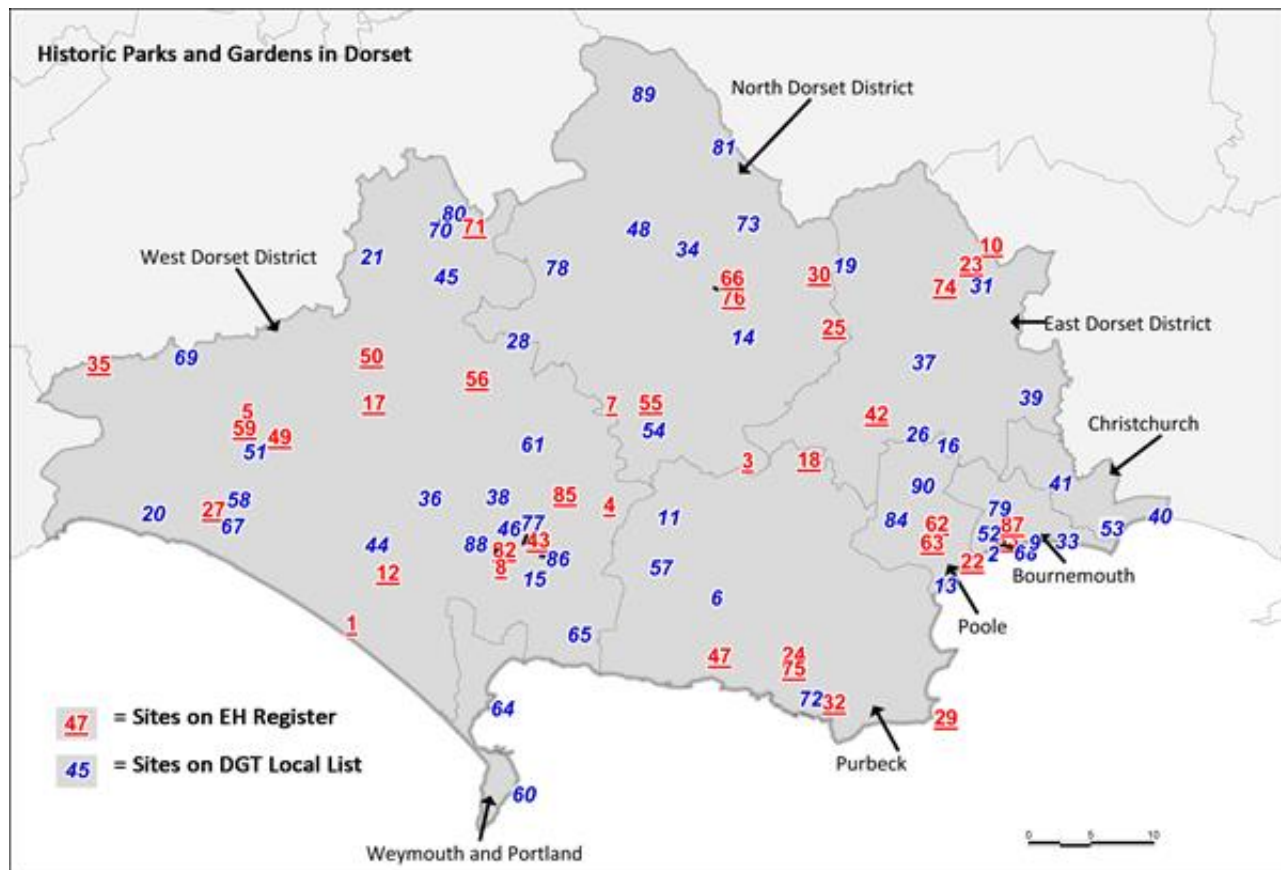
<sup>21</sup> <https://www.dorsetforyou.gov.uk/planning-buildings-land/planning/planning-constraints/conservation-areas/east-dorset/conservation-areas-east-dorset.aspx>

<sup>22</sup> <https://www.dorsetforyou.gov.uk/planning-buildings-land/planning/planning-constraints/conservation-areas/purbeck/purbeck-district-council-adopted-conservation-area-appraisals.aspx>

period between 2006 and 2010 to inform the Local Plan review. Some (such as Morden, Piddle Valley and East Creech in Purbeck) were more recently completed in 2018. The majority of Conservation areas in West Dorset were appraised in the early 2000s<sup>23</sup>, but about a quarter (the smaller more remote settlements) have yet to be undertaken. A high-level appraisal of the Weymouth and Portland Conservation Areas was undertaken for the 2005 Local Plan appendices, with more detailed appraisals since carried out just for Weymouth Town Centre and for Portland<sup>24</sup>. Just 8 of the 47 Conservation Area in North Dorset have been appraised<sup>25</sup>, and in many cases the original reports proposing their designation are no longer available.

*Registered and Local Historic Park and Gardens*

5.6. There are 33 Registered Historic Park and Gardens within Dorset and a further 40 sites identified by the Dorset Garden Trust as being of local importance.



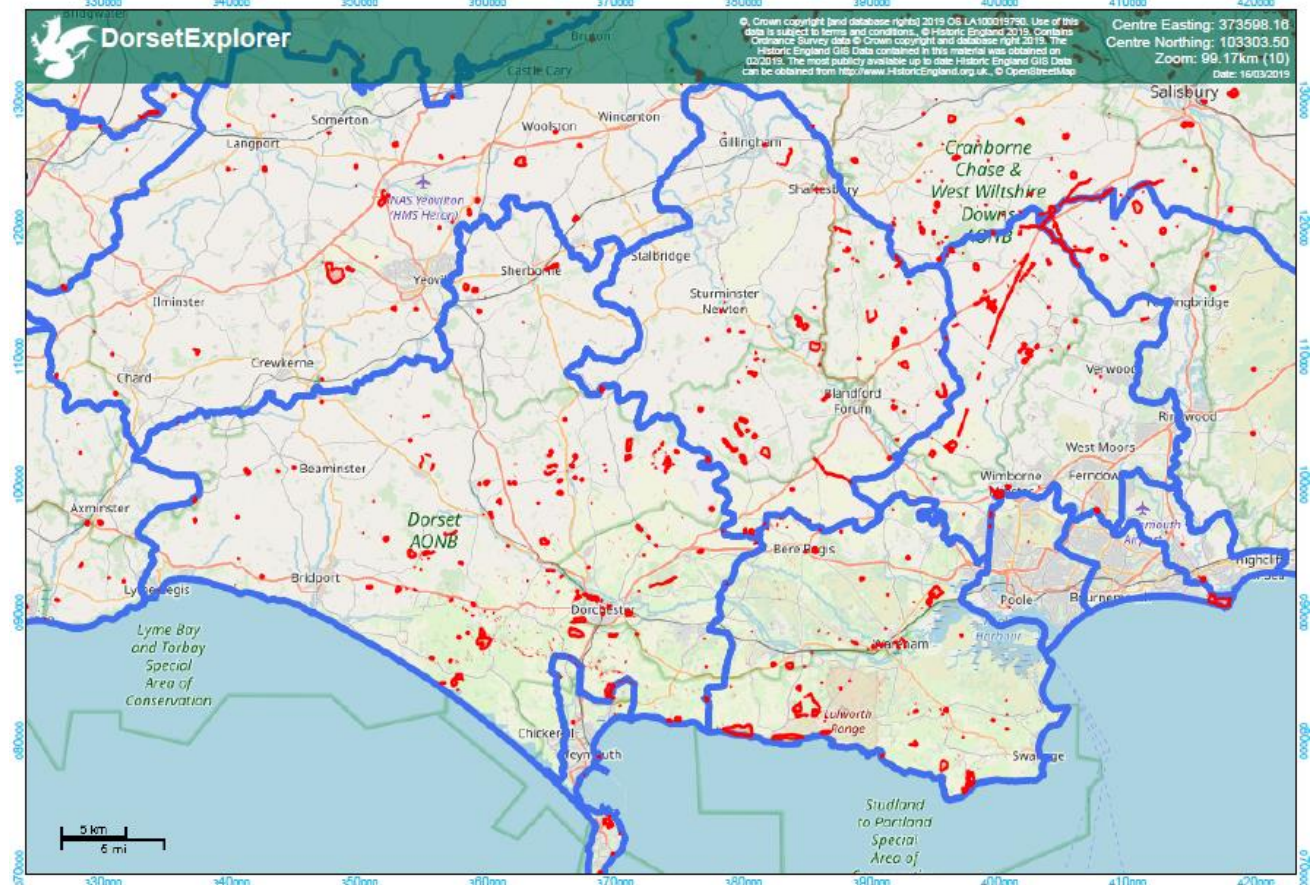
5.7. These are described in a gazetteer of parks and gardens of historic interest produced by the Trust in October 2014, which has been shared with the relevant local planning authorities and is available on request.

*Scheduled Ancient Monuments*

5.8. There are about 1,000 Scheduled Monuments in the Dorset Council area, detailed in the National Heritage List. The county of Dorset (including Christchurch) has 5% of the nationally protected ancient monuments, whilst making up only 2% of the land area of England. A significant number (over 200) are on the national heritage at risk register, with common causes being down to arable ploughing, animal burrowing and scrub / tree growth.

<sup>23</sup> <https://www.dorsetforyou.gov.uk/planning-buildings-land/planning/planning-constraints/conservation-areas/west-dorset/conservation-areas-west-dorset.aspx>  
<sup>24</sup> <https://www.dorsetforyou.gov.uk/planning-buildings-land/planning/planning-constraints/conservation-areas/weymouth-and-portland/conservation-areas-weymouth-and-portland.aspx>  
<sup>25</sup> <https://www.dorsetforyou.gov.uk/planning-buildings-land/planning/planning-constraints/conservation-areas/north-dorset/conservation-areas-north-dorset.aspx>

Map showing Scheduled Monuments across Dorset



*Green Belt*

5.9. Green Belt designation includes a criterion on preserving the setting and special character of historic towns. Both the Purbeck and East Local Plan reviews have considered in detail the extent to which their Green Belt areas meet this national criterion. The Purbeck Green Belt Study<sup>26</sup> concluded that only 1 of the 38 land parcels assessed was of the highest ranking when assessed against this criterion (the parcel adjoining Wareham). A similar review of the East Dorset Green Belt<sup>27</sup> indicated that 2 of the 94 land parcels were of the highest ranking when assessed against this criterion (relating to the two parcels adjoining Wimborne). Local amenity and conservation organisations do not necessarily accept these assessments.

**Other relevant evidence**

*Historic landscape characterisation*

5.10. Historic landscape characterisation can be used to identify and describe the differing history and archaeology of the various landscapes. No comprehensive characterisation has been undertaken for Dorset, but a study was undertaken in relation to the Cranborne Chase AONB<sup>28</sup>. This highlighted the importance of the hunting preserve of the Cranborne Chase (much of this being within Dorset) which helps explain the amount of ancient woodland, the comparatively high number of lodges and large estates, and impact of the late enclosure of open chalk downland on the field systems (and the higher concentration of more regular field boundaries).

<sup>26</sup> <https://www.dorsetforyou.gov.uk/planning-buildings-land/planning-policy/purbeck/local-plan-review-purbeck/pdfs/submission-documents/sd24-2019-01-09-green-belt-study.pdf>

<sup>27</sup> <https://www.dorsetforyou.gov.uk/planning-buildings-land/planning-policy/east-dorset/local-development-framework/evidence-base-studies/christchurch-and-east-dorset-green-belt-assessment.aspx>

<sup>28</sup> [http://www.historiclandscape.co.uk/conserving\\_hlc.html](http://www.historiclandscape.co.uk/conserving_hlc.html)

5.11. The Strategic Landscape and Heritage Study for West Dorset, Weymouth and Portland<sup>29</sup> broadly assesses the heritage sensitivity in relation to the areas immediately around the main settlements. At the first stage it appears to simply record the presence or absence of designated heritage assets and historic landscape features within each zone and on this basis justifies whether that zone should be scoped out (in terms of any further assessment regarding development potential) or taken through to Stage 2 for assessment, and whether any significant heritage sensitivities may nevertheless exist that would need further consideration. As such Stage 1 does not add significantly to the existing knowledge base. It is understood that a similar study has been commissioned in relation to North Dorset.

### *Dorset Historic Towns Survey*

5.12. The Dorset Historic Towns Survey<sup>30</sup> has analysed the historic character of 19 of the study area's towns and villages, as well as an area of Studland which was previously a town (Newtown) but is now countryside. There does not appear to be a specific basis on which settlements were selected for the survey.

- |                   |                    |                                  |
|-------------------|--------------------|----------------------------------|
| → Abbotsbury      | → Cranborne        | → Stalbridge                     |
| → Beaminster      | → Gillingham       | → Sturminster Newton             |
| → Blandford Forum | → Lyme Regis       | → Swanage                        |
| → Bridport        | → Milton Abbas     | → Wareham                        |
| → Cerne Abbas     | → Newton, Studland | → Weymouth and<br>Melcombe Regis |
| → Charmouth       | → Shaftesbury      | → Wimborne Minster               |
| → Corfe Castle    | → Sherborne        |                                  |

5.13. These reports summarise and map evidence relating to the development of each settlement to provide an understanding of its overall development from the earliest beginnings to the present day, how its past has influenced the modern townscape. They consider aspects such as the morphology of the settlement, its built character, its landscape setting and also highlights areas of further research in order to better understand their historical development. The reports also usefully evidence the bibliography which is extensive.

### *Dorset Historic Environment Record*

5.14. The Council manages a database that contains more than 35,000 records of heritage assets . This includes designated assets but also many undesignated heritage assets, information on archaeological finds, and historic events. The data is not a complete record of all historic information, but provides a useful starting base for further research. Some, but not all, of the records are shown on the Council's web-based mapping system. Inclusion in the HER is not based on criteria which relate to significance or importance. Any such research can be supplemented by information held on PastScape<sup>31</sup> (the National Record of the Historic Environment) and also in the Dorset History Centre which houses Dorset's local archives.

5.15. Notable historic books on Dorset include the very descriptive Highways and Byways in Dorset by Frederick Treves (1906)<sup>32</sup> and The History and Antiquities of the County of Dorset (1861-73) by John Hutchins<sup>33</sup>

### *South Dorset Ridgeway project and other archaeological information*

5.16. The South Dorset Ridgeway project has provided further insight into the history of this area including the many known and previously unrecorded archaeological sites. This area covers the ridge of high land between Weymouth and Dorchester running parallel with the coast, and is

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<sup>29</sup> <https://www.dorsetforyou.gov.uk/planning-buildings-land/planning-policy/west-dorset-and-weymouth-portland/local-plan-review/pdf/evidence/stage-1-report-strategic-landscape-and-heritage-assessment-july-2018.pdf>

<sup>30</sup> <https://www.dorsetforyou.gov.uk/libraries-history-culture/local-history-heritage/historic-towns/historic-towns.aspx>

<sup>31</sup> <https://www.pastscape.org.uk>

<sup>32</sup> <https://archive.org/details/highwaysandbywa00trevgooog/page/n28>

<sup>33</sup> <https://www.bl.uk/collection-items/the-history-and-antiquities-of-the-county-of-dorset>

considered by many experts to be as important as Stonehenge and Avebury for revealing the lives of our ancestors. The project indicates that there are potentially many further sites as yet undiscovered, as the mapping project resulted in an 85% increase in the number of archaeological records for this area. The resulting evidence also includes a series of reports for some of the villages in the South Dorset Ridgeway area<sup>34</sup>.

5.17. The National Park Team’s paper on Archaeology and Built Heritage (2013)<sup>35</sup> provides a useful overview of the key historic periods and principal archaeological sites in Dorset (focusing on those areas within the Dorset AONB and Egdon Heath). This was followed up in 2018 with a focused look at the Isle of Purbeck as a case study<sup>36</sup>.

*Industrial, Railway and Military Heritage*

5.18. The history of the area is not limited to the medieval and earlier periods, as evidenced in the case study on Industrial, Railway and Military Heritage<sup>37</sup>, which was produced as part of the 2013 series of papers to support the National Park proposal. For example, the railways and their subsequent closures have shaped the settlement pattern across Dorset, and today the Swanage Railway is one of the top tourist attractions in the area and one of the busiest Heritage Railways in the UK, carrying over 200,000 passengers a year.

*Thomas Hardy and other cultural and literary connections*

5.19. Thomas Hardy is perhaps one of the most famous person linked to Dorset. He lived and worked for most of his life in Dorset, and many of his novels were inspired by persons, folklore and places in the county. The following list is by no means exhaustive.

*Table 4. Thomas Hardy locations<sup>38</sup>*

Location	Thomas Hardy’s Wessex Name / Connection
Abbotsbury	Abbotsea
Aldershot	Quartershot
Beaminster	Emminster
Bere Regis	Kingsbere
Bridport	Port Bredy
Cerne Abbas	Abbot's-Cernel
Cranborne	Chaseborough
Dorchester	Casterbridge (also Thomas Hardy’s main home)
Evershot	Evershead
Fortuneswell	Street of Wells
Isle of Portland	Isle of Slingers
Lulworth Cove	Lulwind Cove
Maiden Newton	Chalk Newton
Marnhull	Marlott
Milton Abbas	Middleton
Portesham	Po'sham
Puddletown	Weatherbury
Shaftesbury	Shaston
Sherborne	Sherton Abbas
Stinsford and Bockhampton	Mellstock (also Thomas Hardy’s birthplace)

<sup>34</sup> <https://www.dorsetaonb.org.uk/south-dorset-ridgeway-partnership/explore-sdr/discovering-the-villages>

<sup>35</sup> [https://docs.wixstatic.com/ugd/635081\\_2cee9187d8ed42498524821dbd16b171.pdf](https://docs.wixstatic.com/ugd/635081_2cee9187d8ed42498524821dbd16b171.pdf)

<sup>36</sup> [https://docs.wixstatic.com/ugd/853df9\\_4b2aa99443b74d5a9e3daed176dd87d4.pdf](https://docs.wixstatic.com/ugd/853df9_4b2aa99443b74d5a9e3daed176dd87d4.pdf)

<sup>37</sup> [https://docs.wixstatic.com/ugd/635081\\_59d3c3fa978841fca7d31de21c312eff.pdf](https://docs.wixstatic.com/ugd/635081_59d3c3fa978841fca7d31de21c312eff.pdf)

<sup>38</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Thomas\\_Hardy%27s\\_Wessex](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Thomas_Hardy%27s_Wessex)

Location	Thomas Hardy's Wessex Name / Connection
Sturminster Newton	Thomas Hardy's home for a short time (1876 to 1878)
Sutton Poyntz	Overcombe
Swange	Knollsea
Wareham	Anglebury
Weymouth / Melcombe Regis	Budmouth / Budmouth Regis (also Thomas Hardy's home for a short time on his return from London)
Wool	Wellbridge

5.20. The areas of moorland chiefly east of Dorchester and north-west of Wareham, north of the Dorchester-Wareham road and south of the Dorchester-Wimborne road are considered to be the basis for Egdon Heath, which is the setting of *The Return of the Native* and also features in *The Mayor of Casterbridge*. Blackmore Vale similar features in *The Woodlanders* and is the opening backdrop for *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*.

Map of the Wessex of the Novels and Poems



5.21. A case study<sup>39</sup> by the Thomas Hardy Society examined the Thomas Hardy connections in the original suggested National Park area. There would be value in a complementary study which examines the wider Dorset connections outlined above. There would be value in a complementary study which examines the wider Dorset connections outlined above. Various maps have been created that show the fictional Wessex, including the Map of the Wessex of the Novels and Poems reproduced in the Wessex Edition by Macmillan (1912). There are many more reference books on Thomas Hardy and his writings with regard to Dorset. The Thomas Hardy Society<sup>40</sup>, based in Dorchester, organises regular lectures, concerts, poetry readings and guided walks through Hardy's Wessex. The Wessex Museums Partnership are planning to deliver a major exhibition on the life and work of Thomas Hardy in the summer of 2021.

<sup>39</sup> [https://docs.wixstatic.com/ugd/853df9\\_c0747d6edb22435396ad79de85bbe34d.pdf](https://docs.wixstatic.com/ugd/853df9_c0747d6edb22435396ad79de85bbe34d.pdf)

<sup>40</sup> <https://www.hardysociety.org/>



5.22. There are many other literary connections some of which are in another Case Study<sup>41</sup> prepared by the National Park Team, that should be evidenced with further research. Some of the most notable include:

- **Jane Austen** spent time in Lyme Regis – and adaptations of her novels have been filmed in Dorset including “Mansfield Park” set in Purbeck, “Emma” filmed in Evershot and Dorchester, and “Persuasion” filmed in Lyme Regis
- **William Barnes** famous for his poems lived all his life in 19<sup>th</sup> century Dorset
- **Enid Blyton** visited the area frequently - Whispering Island is based on Brownsea Island, and Corfe Castle became Kirrin Castle in the stories.
- **John Meade Falkner**, perhaps best known for his thrilling story Moonfleet, was based around the small coastal village of Fleet
- **Ian Fleming**, author of the James Bond novels, attended school in Langton Matravers, Dorset. It is thought that his inspiration for James Bond was the Bond family of Tyneham in Dorset, whose family motto is “The world is not enough.”
- **T. E. Lawrence** (Lawrence of Arabia) chose the cottage of Cloud’s Hill near Bovington army camp as his retreat in the years after the First World War, and is buried at the nearby village of Moreton

5.23. The 2013 series of papers supporting the National Park proposals includes a paper on Artistic Heritage and Activity, Writers and Literary Heritage and Film and TV Locations<sup>42</sup>. The Dorset AONB Partnership led a Drawing Inspiration Project, funded by the Heritage Lottery Fund, which celebrated the works by artists such as JMW Turner, Francis Newbury, William Daniell, Stanley Royle, Paul Nash and Charles Rennie Macintosh who were inspired by the Dorset Landscapes. This in turn provided inspiration for a series of trails with associated information leaflets describing the artists and artwork these areas inspired<sup>43</sup>. It also provided inspiration for local artists to create new artwork inspired from the land around them. There are various sites where Dorset-based artwork is exhibited locally, both in an outdoor setting (such as Elizabeth Frink’s ‘The Martyrs’ located on South Walks in Dorchester, and Simon Gudgeon’s ‘Sculpture by the Lakes’ at Tinctleton) as well as the local museums.

### *Gillingham Royal Forest Project and other medieval parklands*

5.24. Although not complete or published, information has been compiled by the Local History Society on all sites within the Gillingham Royal Forest area, which was a former hunting ground of King John. Evidence of its historical importance still survives in various forms in the landscape, and a project has been mooted to explore and celebrate this connection further.

5.25. There are many other medieval deer parks in the area, and information on those within the Cranborne Chase AONB has also been compiled as part of that historic land characterisation work<sup>44</sup>. This lists Blagdon Park at Bokerley Dyke, Harbin’s Park at Tarrant Gunville, Edmonsham, Tarrant Rushton Park and Witchampton Park. This notes the clear correlation between these historic landscapes and the distribution of woodlands.

5.26. There are references to the remains of park pales and boundary features in a number of scheduled monuments, including at Alderholt, Cerne Abbas, East Lulworth, Rampisham and Tarrant Rushton.

### **Availability and strength (in terms of coverage, depth and quality) of existing evidence**

5.27. In terms of cultural heritage, there is an abundance of sites and historic or cultural associations across the county (both for the settlements and wider countryside). Most of the heritage-specific designations are limited in size as they relate to discrete buildings, structures or landholdings, but they are in their 1,000s. The condition of the various heritage assets, where monitored, shows

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<sup>41</sup> [https://docs.wixstatic.com/ugd/635081\\_4447bad1566b47b0b127796c7e24a4ce.pdf](https://docs.wixstatic.com/ugd/635081_4447bad1566b47b0b127796c7e24a4ce.pdf)

<sup>42</sup> [https://docs.wixstatic.com/ugd/635081\\_4447bad1566b47b0b127796c7e24a4ce.pdf](https://docs.wixstatic.com/ugd/635081_4447bad1566b47b0b127796c7e24a4ce.pdf)

<sup>43</sup> <https://www.dorsetaonb.org.uk/our-work/drawing-inspiration/local-trails>

<sup>44</sup> [http://www.ccwwdaonb.org.uk/uploads/docs/Publications/DeerParkReport\\_KBarker\\_2006.pdf](http://www.ccwwdaonb.org.uk/uploads/docs/Publications/DeerParkReport_KBarker_2006.pdf)

that changes in farming and forestry practices, recreational pressures and lack of local knowledge, skills and resources can all impact on the long-term conservation of the area's heritage.

- 5.28. The lack of resources to carry out Conservation Area appraisals by the Local Planning Authorities has made such coverage patchy, and it is notable that local communities are playing a greater role in driving this forward (as evidenced by the most recent appraisals undertaken for Fontmell Magna and other settlements in North Dorset). The Historic Town Surveys provide a more comprehensive assessment of a number of settlements but are similarly not complete in their coverage. It is also clear that there are many more sites of potential historic importance which are not as yet identified.
- 5.29. In terms of cultural associations, the Thomas Hardy connection is particularly notable in its coverage of Dorset, but there are many other cultural and literary associations which should be explored further.
- 5.30. The absence of a historic landscape characterisation at a strategic level is an obvious evidence gap. There is an obvious role for local groups working with the Local History Centre and museums to compile a more comprehensive place- and theme-based database of the historic and cultural interest of Dorset, thereby mapping the various cultural and literary associations.

## 6. Wildlife importance

### Designation coverage and supporting evidence

6.1. The main designations identified relevant to this criterion are:

- Ancient Woodlands
- Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP) species and habitats
- National and Local Nature Reserves
- Local Wildlife Sites
- Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs) and higher European / International designations

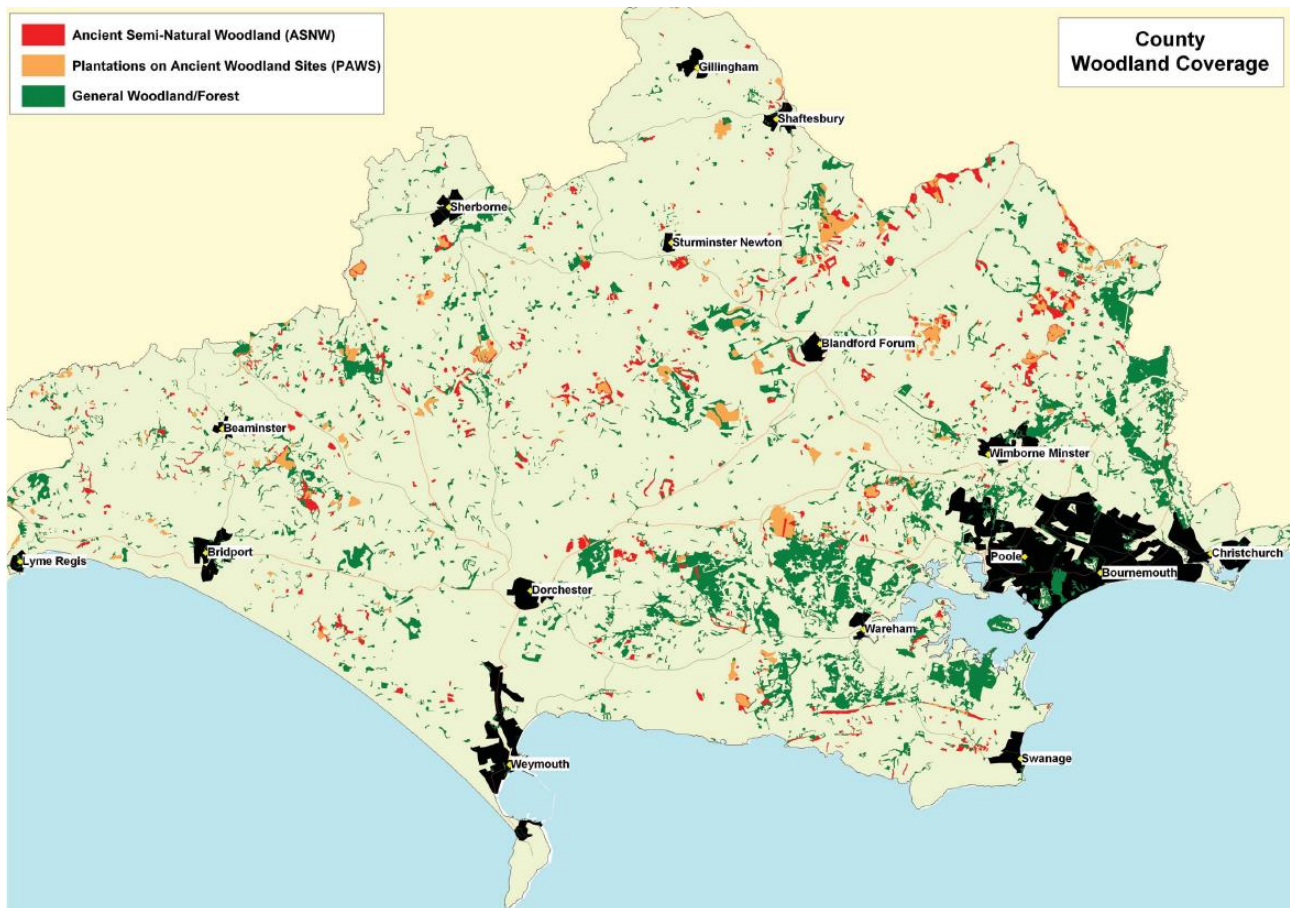
And also potentially:

- Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (this is covered under natural beauty)
- Heritage Coast (this is covered under natural beauty)
- Local Green Spaces (this is covered under recreation)
- Regionally Important Geological / Geomorphological Sites (RIGS) (this is covered under natural beauty)
- World Heritage Sites (this is covered under natural beauty)

#### *Ancient Woodlands*

6.2. The national inventory of Ancient Woodlands identifies over 52,000 ancient woodland sites in England. Within the Dorset Council area there is about 7.5km<sup>2</sup> of this habitat mapped.

Map showing ancient and general woodland coverage in Dorset



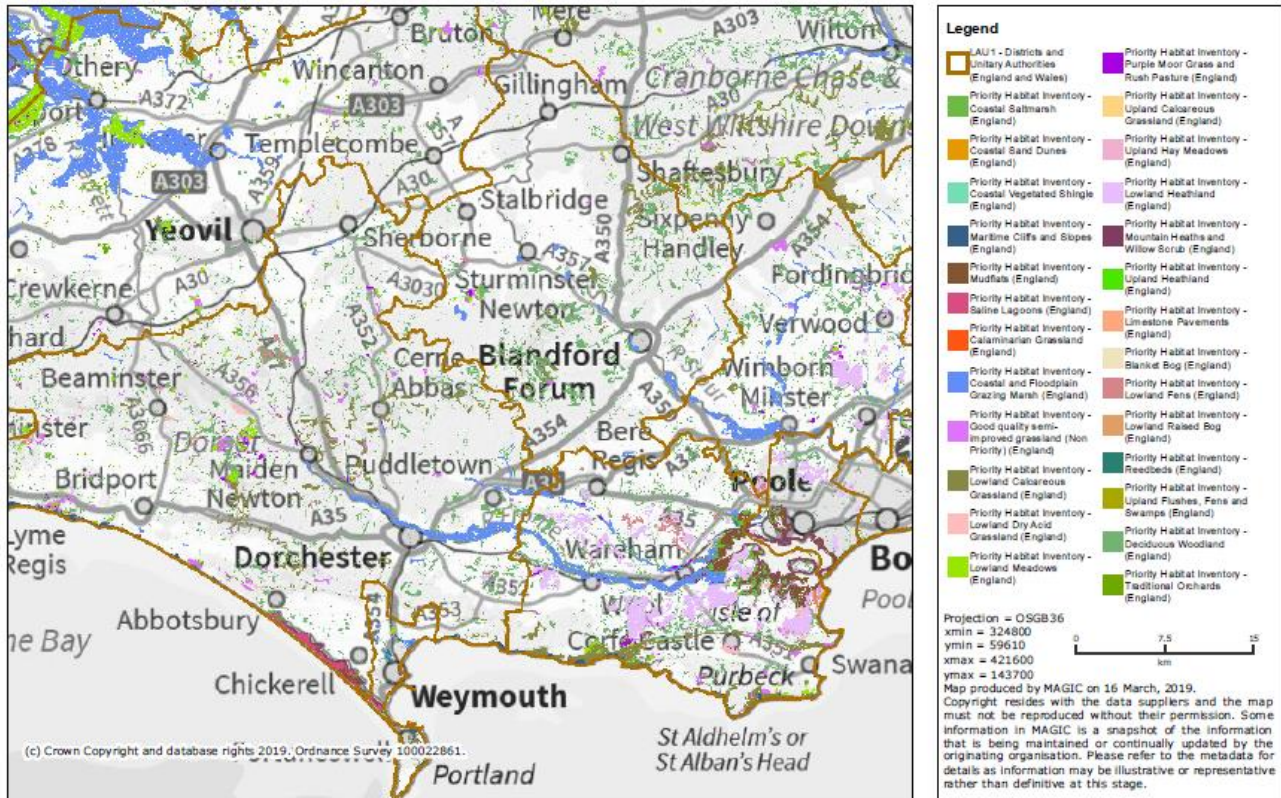
- 6.3. There is more recent woodland planting evidence in the area around the conurbation.
- 6.4. There is no clear correlation between ancient woodland coverage and landscape character types or other designations. However there is an obvious link between archaeological monuments related to historic woodland management practices (such as charcoal hearths and limekilns) and these ancient woodlands.
- 6.5. The Dorset Trees, Woods and Forest Strategy<sup>45</sup> refers to the loss of ancient woodland (through poor management and lack of perceived economic value) during the latter half of the C20, though woodland coverage per se has not significantly changed. It reports that, between 1995 and 2005, over 2,190 hectares were planted with trees in Dorset, with over 1000 hectares being 'new' woodland planting, a significant increase of approximately 4% of woodland cover over the county. One of the recommendations in the report was for improved understanding on the condition of Dorset's trees, woods and forests through appropriate survey work.

*Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP) species and habitats*

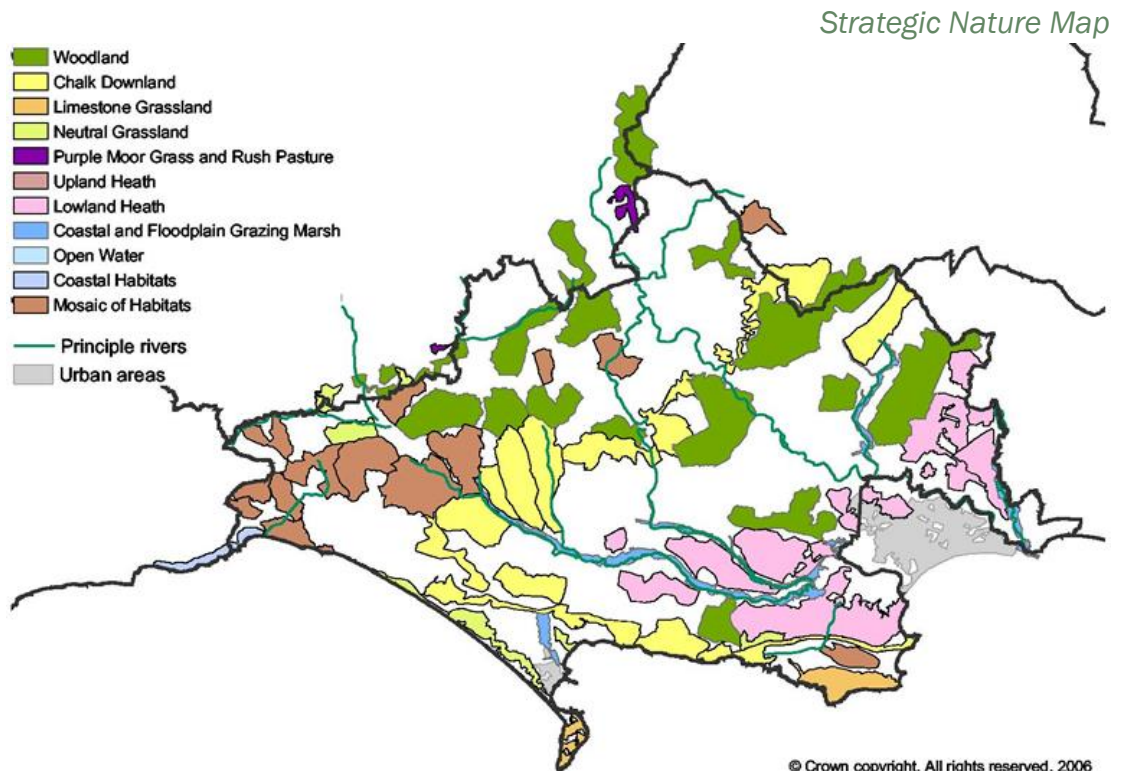
- 6.6. The map of the various priority habitats across Dorset is a much more complex one.

<sup>45</sup> [https://www.dorsetaonb.org.uk/assets/downloads/Woodlink\\_strategy/Woodland\\_Strategy.pdf](https://www.dorsetaonb.org.uk/assets/downloads/Woodlink_strategy/Woodland_Strategy.pdf)

MAGIC Map showing Dorset Priority Habitats



6.7. This is more simply expressed through a “strategic nature map” produced by the former SW Biodiversity Partnership that shows the areas which may offer the greatest potential to maintain and expand terrestrial wildlife habitats at a landscape scale. This highlights the importance of woodland in the north of the county, the lowland heaths around the conurbations, chalk downland in the central and southern areas, limestone grasslands along the coast, and the importance of the mosaic of habitats in the west of the county<sup>46</sup>.

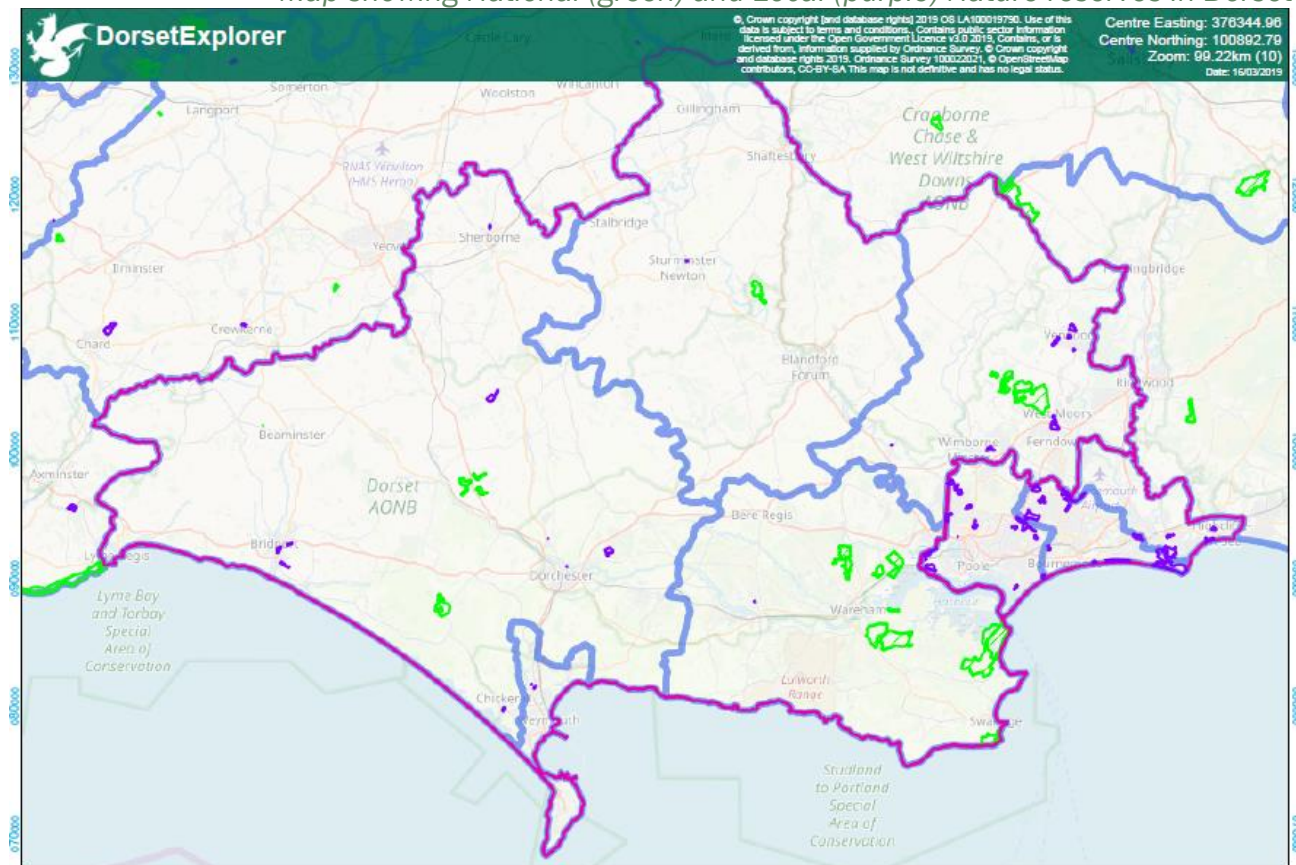


<sup>46</sup> <https://dorsetnp.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/natural-value-report-1.pdf>

National and Local Nature Reserves

6.8. There are some 12 National Nature Reserves in the Dorset Council area covering approximately 2.2km<sup>2</sup> of land in total.

Map showing National (green) and Local (purple) Nature reserves in Dorset



6.9. These range in size up to 620 hectares (Studland and Godlingston Heath). Most of these overlap with SSSI designations. There are a further 21 Local Nature Reserves, these are much smaller in size (all are less than 25ha) and tend to be focused around the towns.

**NNRs**

- Arne Reedbeds
- Durlston
- Hambledon Hill
- Hartland Moor
- Hog Cliff
- Holt Heath
- Holton Heath
- Horn Park Quarry
- Morden Bog
- Stoborough Heath
- Studland and Godlingston Heath
- Valley of Stones

**LNRs**

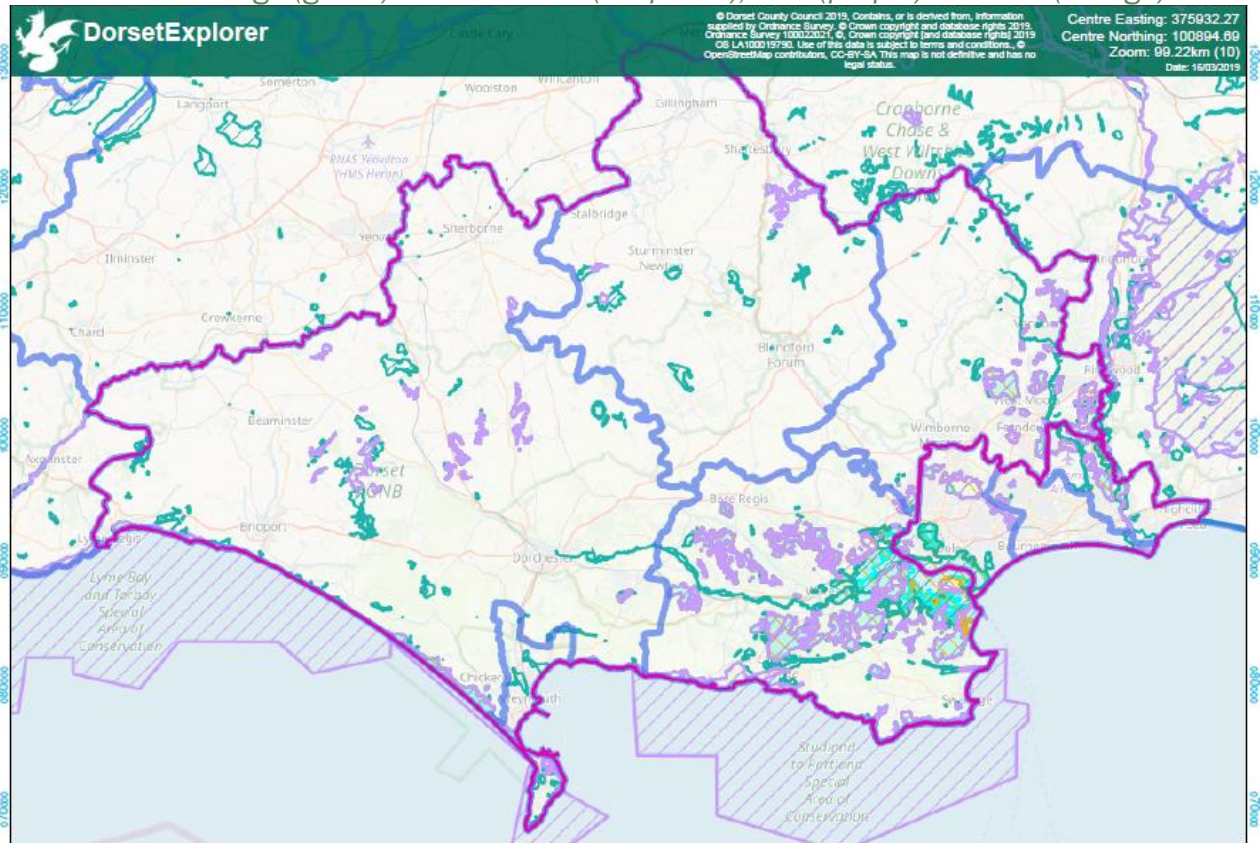
- Asker's Meadow
- Bothenhampton NR
- Bugdens Copse
- Butts Pond Meadows
- Crookhill Brickpits
- Dewlands Common
- Dorchester Riverside
- Eight Acre Wood
- Hilfield Hill
- Jellyfields, Walditch
- Leigh Common
- Pennington's Copse
- Potterne Hill
- Prince's Plot
- Radipole Community Woodland
- Radipole School
- Slop Bog
- Stephens Castle
- The Quarr
- Thorncombe Wood
- Walnut Tree Field

Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs) and higher European / International designations

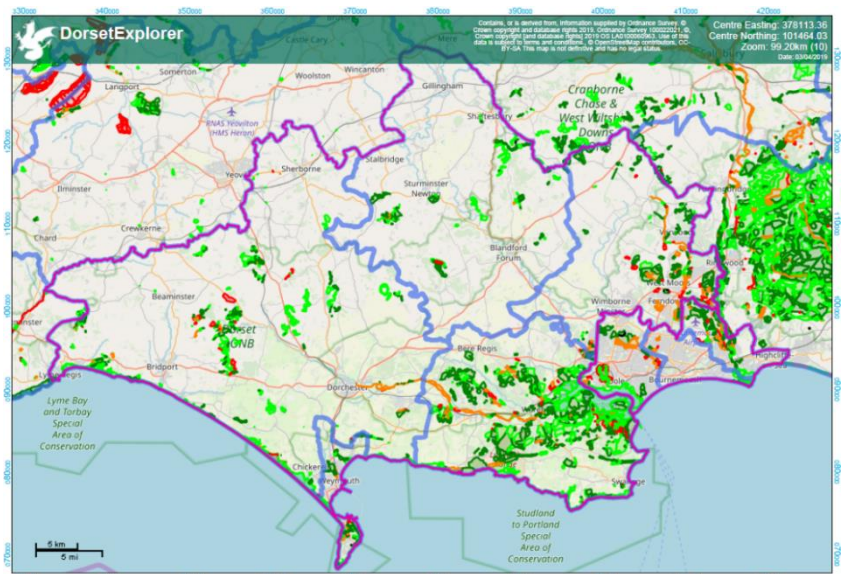
6.10. There are about 140 Sites of Special Scientific Interest in the Dorset council area, covering approximately 17.6km<sup>2</sup> of land (approximately 7% of the land area). These are particularly concentrated within Purbeck, although there is also a concentration within Weymouth and Portland. These sites are of particularly high importance, with over 80% of them designated as

either Ramsar sites; Special Areas of Conservation (SAC); Special Protection Areas (SPA) (or sometimes a combination of these). Information on their reasons for designation and current management and condition is overseen by Natural England<sup>47</sup>.

SSSI coverage (green) with RAMSAR (turquoise), SAC (purple) and SPA (orange) status



6.11. The sites are assessed periodically in terms of their general condition, with each unit within the SSSI judged against strict criteria to ascertain if it is in favourable condition, and if not whether it is declining, stable or improving in condition or has been partly or wholly destroyed<sup>48</sup>. For example, within Portland there are some 46 SSSI units, one of which is recorded as destroyed, a further four as unfavourable declining, three as unfavourable but in a stable condition, and 21 as unfavourable but recovering, with the remaining 17 units (about 47% of the total land area covered by SSSI designation) in a favourable condition. Reasons for poor condition vary but are primarily due to inappropriate agricultural practices, lack of scrub control, water pollution and public access / disturbance.



<sup>47</sup> <https://designatedsites.naturalengland.org.uk/>

<sup>48</sup> <https://designatedsites.naturalengland.org.uk/ReportUnitCondition.aspx?Export=True&SiteType=ALL&countyCode=12&ReportTitle=DORSET>

### Local Wildlife Sites

6.12. The inventory of local wildlife sites is kept by the Dorset Wildlife Trust, but is not published. However the sites are made known to the local planning authorities (following agreement with the landowners) and many of these are identified on the individual Local Plans. There are over 1,000 such sites identified in Dorset, covering approximately 11.6km<sup>2</sup> of land (approximately 5% of the land area). These are distributed broadly evenly between the different districts. The State of Dorset's Environment Report<sup>49</sup> published in 2014 notes that the lack of positive management has been the main cause for the full or partial loss of some 76 of these sites (183 hectares).

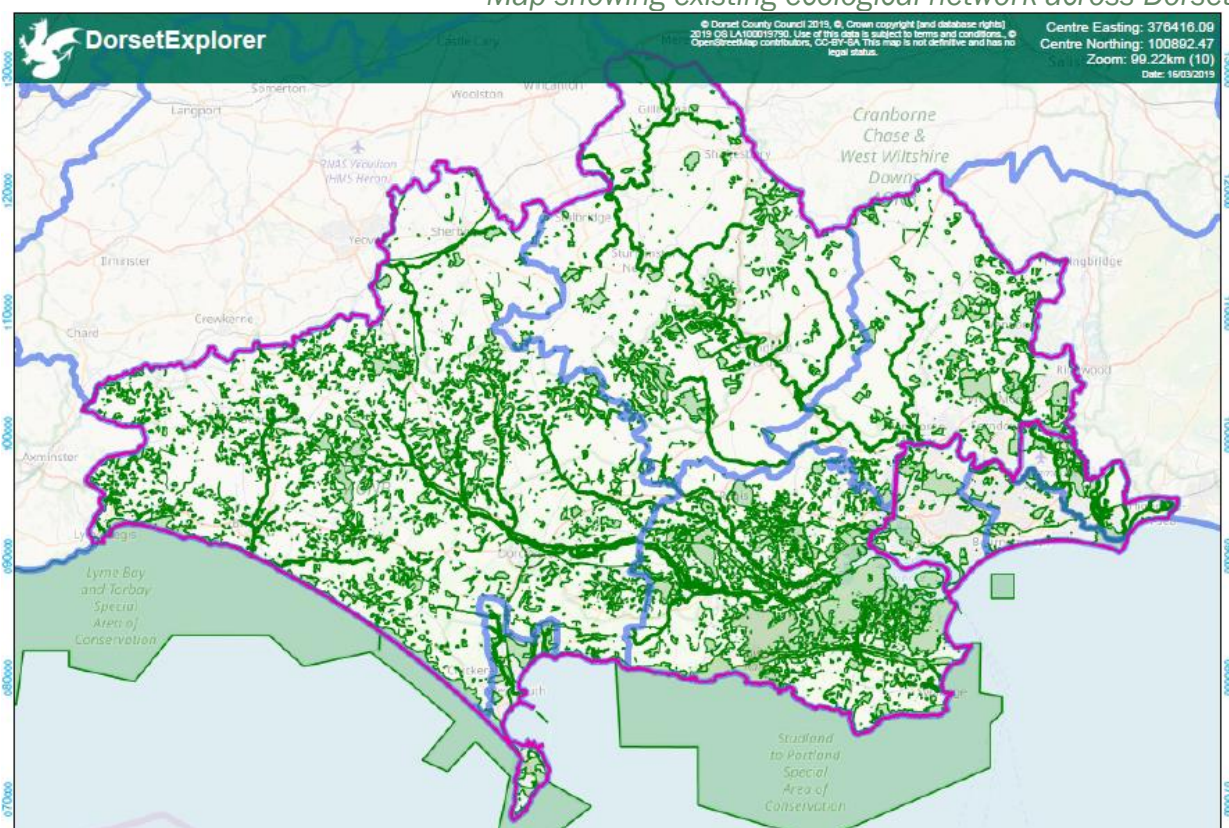
### Other relevant evidence

#### Dorset ecological network

6.13. The Local Nature Partnership has worked with the Dorset Environmental Records Centre to produce maps of the ecological network across Dorset<sup>50</sup>. This includes all of the local and national designated wildlife sites, but does not include every priority habitat. This provides a useful overview of nature conservation sites in the area. It has also identified areas of ecological potential.

6.14. The Dorset Environmental Records Centre holds the most comprehensive record of protected species sightings. The centre has previously provided an estimate of the geographic spread of protected species, based on these recorded findings (see map). A more recent national study on the Population and Conservation Status of British Mammals<sup>51</sup> which was undertaken in liaison with the various local records centres highlights the importance of Dorset for wildlife. From this it was shown that Dorset has four of the best five 10kms grid squares for biodiversity in Great Britain, including the best (in the Wareham / Studland area of Purbeck).

Map showing existing ecological network across Dorset

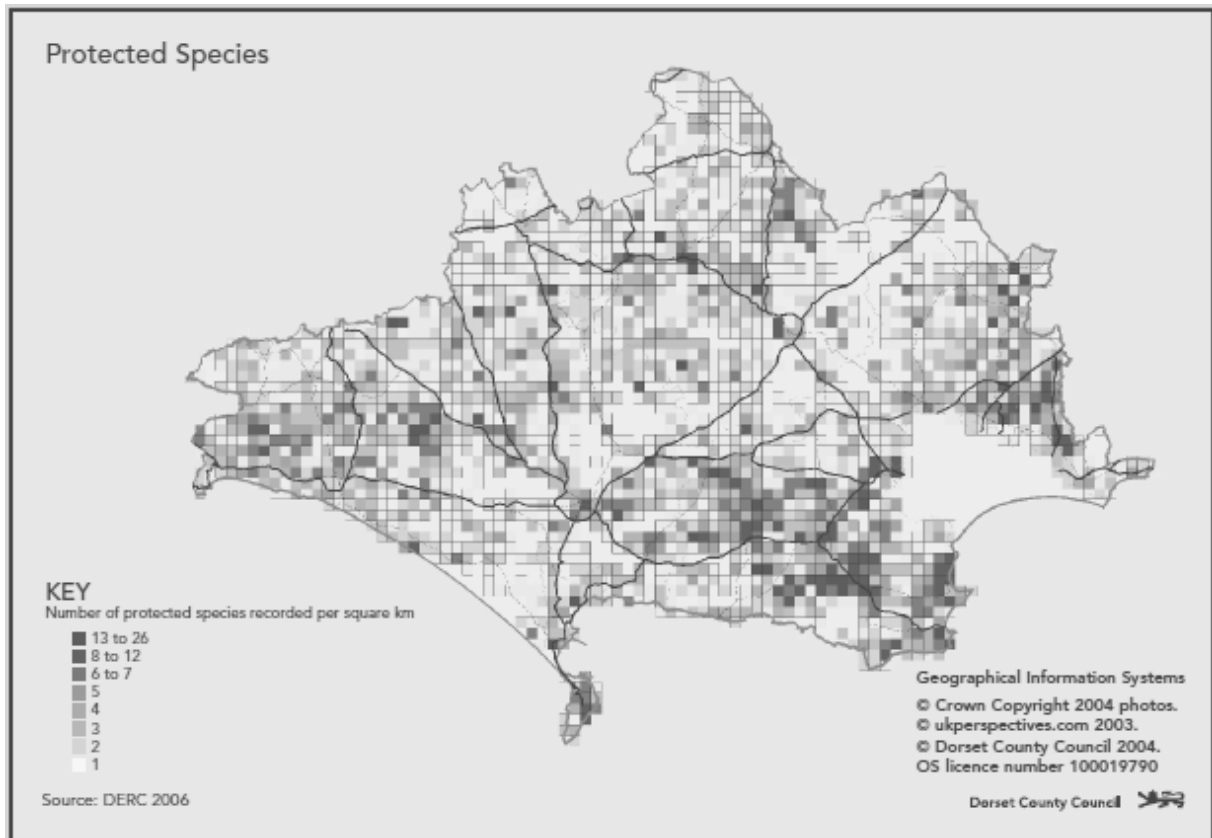


49 <https://dorsetlnp.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/natural-value-report-1.pdf>

50 <https://dorsetlnp.org.uk/dorsets-ecological-networks/>

51 <https://www.mammal.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/MAMMALS-Technical-Summary-FINALNE-Version-FM2.pdf>

Map showing concentration of protected species (as recorded) by square kilometre



6.15. The State of Dorset’s Environment Report references a study published in 2012 that looked at soil data and historical maps from the 1930s and compared this to the UK Land Cover Map of 2000. This research highlighted the huge increase in (agriculturally) improved grasslands (and consequential loss of more biodiverse landscapes).

*The National Trust Cyril Diver Project and other case studies*

6.16. Although only covering part of Studland and Godlingston Heath National Nature Reserve in Purbeck, the National Trust Cyril Diver Project<sup>52</sup> (2013-2015) provided an incredibly in-depth study of the ecological interest of this area (using an estimated 3,500 volunteer days of survey work, many of which were skilled or experts in this field) and was able to compare this to a similar ground-breaking study undertaken in the 1930s to see how the area had changed over 80 years. The study highlighted the huge benefits of survey and monitoring work in understanding the condition of ecological sites (and even identified two species not previously recorded in the UK), and has informed the management of the area to support a range of habitats at different successional stages to benefit the widest range of species possible.

6.17. Other case studies undertaken as part of the National Park evidence base include information on the Purbeck heathlands<sup>53</sup>, and the birds of Poole Harbour<sup>54</sup>.

6.18. Bournemouth University will shortly be concluding their three-year project on Tipping Points in Lowland Agricultural Landscapes<sup>55</sup>, which analyses and charts changes in Dorset’s landscapes, biodiversity and natural capital over the decades from the 1930s. One of the project outputs from this will be a spatial database incorporating measures of natural asset condition, ecosystem services and benefit values for Dorset.

<sup>52</sup> [https://docs.wixstatic.com/ugd/853df9\\_7c1077e05bdd4f7c998b6bf0df6ccbdc.pdf](https://docs.wixstatic.com/ugd/853df9_7c1077e05bdd4f7c998b6bf0df6ccbdc.pdf)

<sup>53</sup> [https://docs.wixstatic.com/ugd/853df9\\_240b099556b14e25a3898fd93168f519.pdf](https://docs.wixstatic.com/ugd/853df9_240b099556b14e25a3898fd93168f519.pdf)

<sup>54</sup> [https://docs.wixstatic.com/ugd/853df9\\_d6ccd29fd0e74ae3b87f3c8071d7690e.pdf](https://docs.wixstatic.com/ugd/853df9_d6ccd29fd0e74ae3b87f3c8071d7690e.pdf)

<sup>55</sup> <https://www.tpalvaluing-nature.co.uk/>



### Availability and strength (in terms of coverage, depth and quality) of existing evidence

- 6.19. In terms of wildlife and nature conservation, the Strategic Nature Map provides a very useful overview of the broad coverage across the area. There is a clear concentration of internationally important sites within Purbeck and close to the Hampshire border. However records of protected species show wide distribution across rural Dorset.
- 6.20. The State of Dorset's Environment Report flags that although designation helps prevent site destruction; it is less reliable as protection when considering the wider environmental benefits of those sites. Also, whilst Dorset comparatively high levels of biodiversity (relative to other parts of England) this needs to be seen alongside the major decline and fragmentation of wildlife habitats and species over the last century, and "As a result, Dorset's environment may lack the necessary resilience to deal with future change."
- 6.21. Further discussion with the key agencies would be useful in understanding what, if any, further evidence could be included in this report.

## 7. Recreational opportunities and potential

### Designation coverage and supporting evidence

7.1. The main designations identified relevant to this criterion are:

- Country Parks
- Local Green Spaces
- Open Access Land
- Public Rights of Way network
- Registered Common Land and Village Greens

And also potentially:

- Heritage Coast (this is covered under natural beauty)
- Local and National Nature Reserves (this is covered under wildlife)
- Regionally Important Geological / Geomorphological Sites (RIGS) (this is covered under natural beauty)
- World Heritage Sites (this is covered under natural beauty)

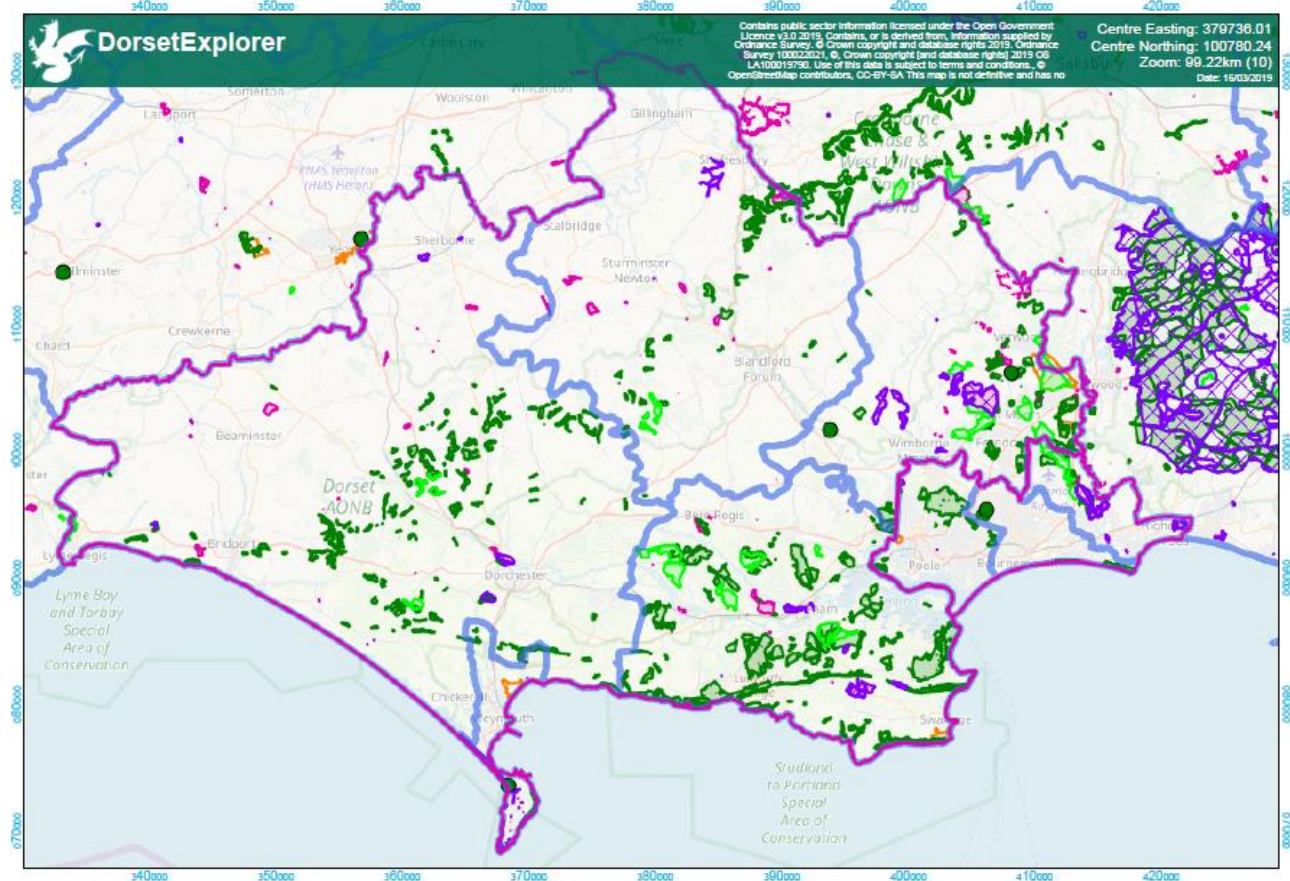
#### *Country Parks*

7.2. There are four country parks owned and managed by the local authorities within the Dorset Council area - Durlston near Swanage in Purbeck, Lodmoor in Weymouth, and Avon Heath and Moors Valley in East Dorset<sup>56</sup>.

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<sup>56</sup> <https://www.dorsetforyou.gov.uk/countryside-coast-parks/countryside-coast-and-parks.aspx?folderIds=5538,34129>

Map showing Registered Commonland (pink), other CROW Act or similar access land (dark green, light green and purple) and country parks (orange)



### Local Green Spaces

7.3. Local Green Space designation is a relatively recent concept and at the current time is only contained in made Neighbourhood Plans, there is sporadic coverage in Dorset. Due to the requirement that these are not extensive tracts of land they are also limited in terms of their coverage within those plans.

### Open Access Land, Registered Common Land and Village Greens

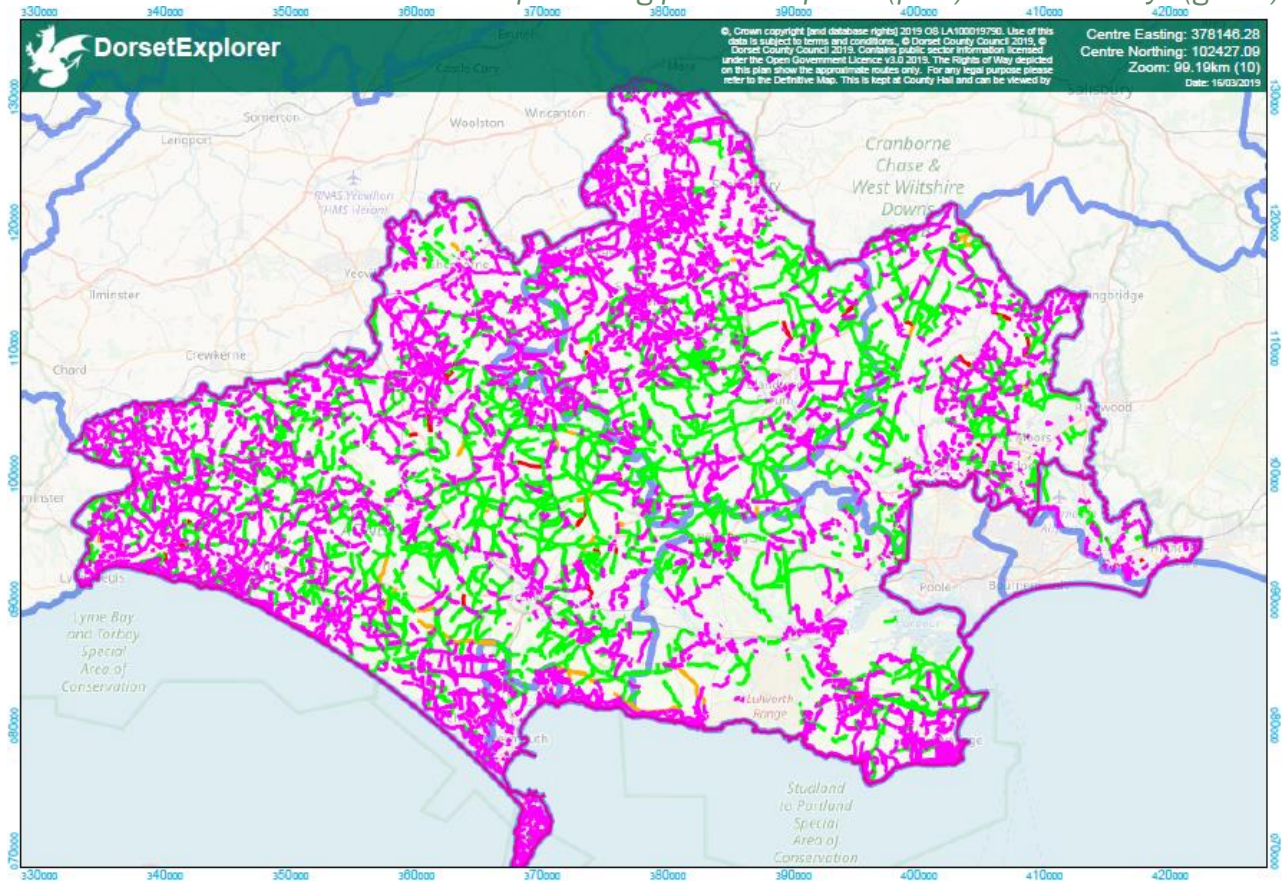
7.4. There are over 800 parcels of open access land in the area, primarily within the chalk and heathland landscapes and coastal strips. They are relatively limited in size, with the largest areas being the heathland areas on the Isle of Purbeck. Collectively there are over 9km<sup>2</sup> of access land and 2km<sup>2</sup> of registered common land.

### Public Rights of Way network

7.5. The Dorset Rights of Way Improvement Plan (RoWIP) 2011-2021<sup>57</sup> records over 2,800km of public footpaths and over 1,700km of bridleways across Dorset (including Christchurch). The map highlights the higher potential for cycling and horse riding where the bridleways are concentrated, which covers the more central parts of the area.

<sup>57</sup> <https://www.dorsetforyou.gov.uk/countryside-coast-parks/rights-of-way/pdfs/the-dorset-rights-of-way-improvement-plan-2011-2021.pdf>

Map showing public footpaths (pink) and bridleways (green)



7.6. There are many promoted routes and trailways. These include:

- Brit Valley Trail - which runs from West Bay along the meandering River Brit to Beaminster
- Castleman Trailway - following much of the old Southampton to Dorchester railway line and connecting a string of settlements between Ringwood and Poole
- Frome Valley Trail - starting at Evershot, running close to the River Frome via Charminster and Dorchester towards Poole Harbour
- Hardy Way - starts at Higher Bockhampton, where Hardy was born, and finishes at Stinsford churchyard, where Hardy's heart lies buried. It passes through Dorset and takes in along the route such villages and towns as Bere Regis, Lulworth Cove, Corfe Castle, Shaftesbury, Evershot and the county town, Dorchester
- Jubilee Trail - running across Dorset from Forde Abbey on the Somerset border to Bokerley Dyke on the Hampshire border, created by the Dorset Area Ramblers' Association in 1995 to celebrate sixty years of its founding
- Lawrence of Arabia Trail - a 7 mile walk devised by the T.E. Lawrence Society, starting at the Bovington Tank Museum, on to the River Frome and Moreton Cemetery and then to Clouds Hill, before returning to Bovington.
- Macmillan Way - a long-distance footpath in England that links Boston, Lincolnshire to Abbotsbury in Dorset.
- Monarch's Way - a long-distance footpath that approximates the escape route taken by King Charles II in 1651 after being defeated in the Battle of Worcester, which skirts Dorset but includes sections north of Sherborne and around Blackdown and ending in Charmouth
- North Dorset Trailway - running along the route of the old Somerset and Dorset Railway line and takes you through some picturesque villages of the Blackmore vale
- Purbeck Way - running from Wareham to the South West Coast Path via Corfe Castle, with a further route running west to Lulworth
- South West Coast Path - a national trail running from Studland in Dorset to Minehead in Somerset
- Stour Valley Way - running along the River Stour

- Wareham Forest Way - running from Wareham to Sturminster Marshall
- Wessex Ridgeway Trail - a magnificent ridge-top route crossing Dorset's rural heartland
- White Hart Link - a relatively new trail linking the five Towns of North Dorset, Gillingham, Stalbridge, Sturminster Newton, Blandford Forum and Shaftesbury

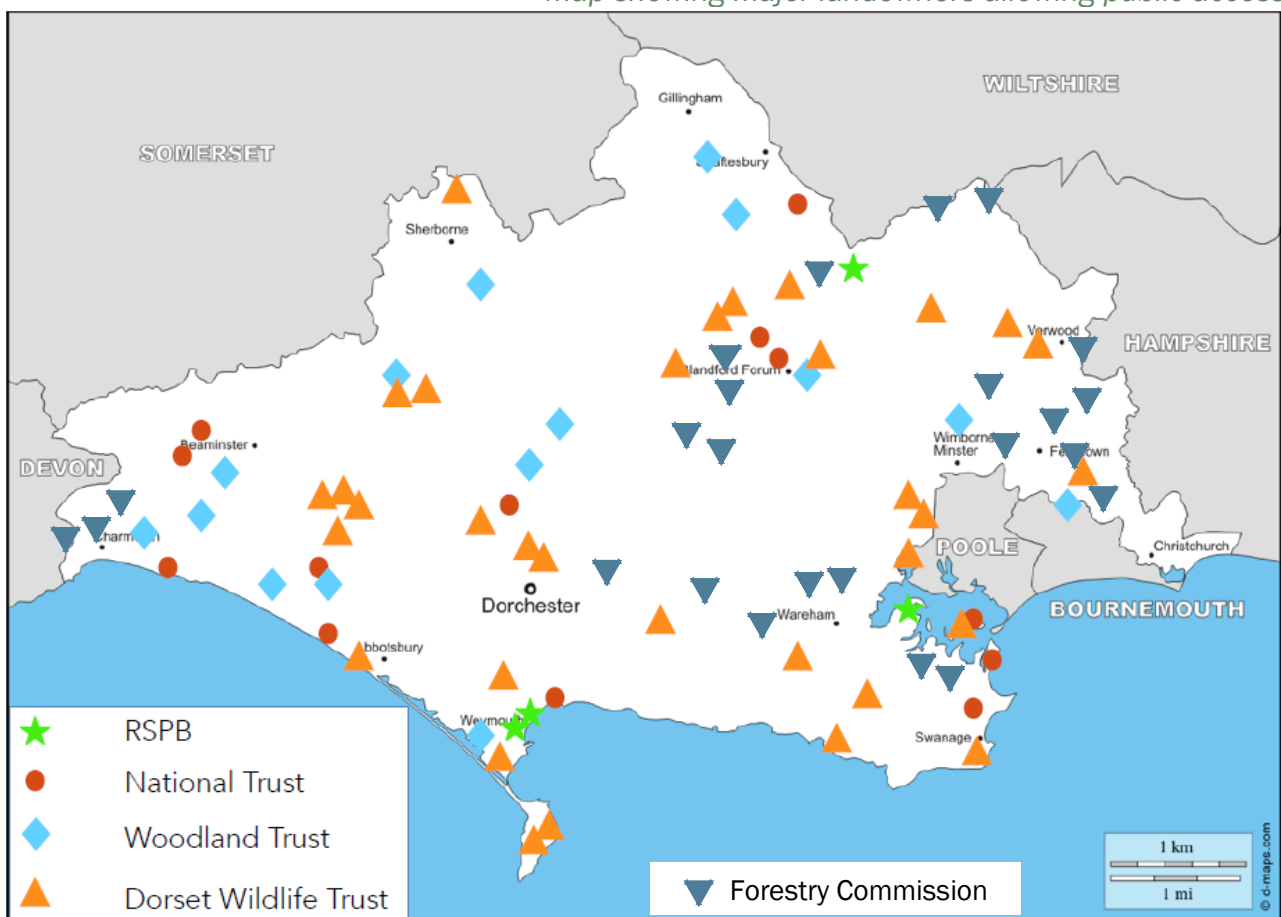
There are also various short walks such as those identified by the Dorset AONB Partnership<sup>58</sup> and the National Trust<sup>59</sup>, and promoted through websites such as <https://www.visit-dorset.com/>.

### Other relevant evidence

#### Major landholdings with public access

7.7. There are a number of other major landowners within Dorset that allow public access to their sites. These include the National Trust, Forestry Commission, RSPB and Woodland Trust.

Map showing major landowners allowing public access



#### Open Space, Sport and Recreation Assessments

7.8. Previous versions of national planning guidance set out a requirement for local planning authorities to produce open space, sport and recreation assessments for their areas, to better understand this subject and provide clear evidence to underpin related local plan requirements. There is therefore reasonable coverage of this topic area dating back about 10 – 15 years. Purbeck have undertaken a more recent re-fresh of the study<sup>60</sup> but focusing on built facilities.

<sup>58</sup> <https://www.dorsetaonb.org.uk/our-work/drawing-inspiration/local-trails>

<sup>59</sup> <https://www.nationaltrust.org.uk/lists/spring-walks-in-dorset>

<sup>60</sup> <https://www.dorsetforyou.gov.uk/planning-buildings-land/planning-policy/purbeck/local-plan-review-purbeck/pdfs/submission-documents/sd30-purbeck-sport-and-leisure-facilities-needs-assessment.pdf>

Similarly a review of commercial leisure needs<sup>61</sup> has been undertaken to inform the North Dorset, West Dorset and Weymouth Local Plans and this identifies the key cultural venues in the area. This concludes that the range of venues and facilities of cultural interest are numerous and varied across the study area, and this contributes significantly to the broad visitor economy of the area.

- 7.9. The Dorset Heathlands Planning Framework<sup>62</sup> seeks to safeguard the heathlands around the conurbation that are being damaged by increased recreational use and disturbance by humans and their pets. In addition to prohibiting residential development within 400m of these sensitive sites, and residential development within 5km of a European designated heathland it expected to provide appropriate mitigation, primarily through the provision of suitable accessible natural greenspaces. There are no readily available published maps of the SANGs (although the Purbeck Infrastructure and Capacity Study maps these at Swanage, Stoborough, Slepe and Upton), and projects incorporated into the framework also include Woolslope Farm at West Moors (15.5ha provided) and Upton Common, Corfe Mullen (4ha extension to improve access proposed).

### *Visitor perceptions and statistics*

- 7.10. The South West Research Company Ltd has undertaken a number of research projects to better understand the underlying reasons for visitors coming to Dorset and the impact of their trips on the local economy and environment<sup>63</sup>.

- 7.11. The research highlights that “Dorset is a cultural hot-spot, with some major venues, a large number of events and festivals (sporting, artistic, food, heritage etc.), historic literary connections and resident artists of all sorts and has been the location for a large number of international films.” It also recognises that “The County has a growing reputation for its food offer, including local producers, markets, retail outlets, personalities, festivals, and some excellent restaurants.” As part of the brand research undertaken, the top 5 attributes were:

- Beautiful/scenic 70%
- Cottages 67%
- Quaint villages 67%
- Good countryside 67%
- Good places to walk 64%

The varied landscape offers a range of experiences for recreation and learning, both inland and along the Jurassic Coast World Heritage Site. The AONB includes coastal and market towns, attractive villages and a wide range of natural and cultural heritage assets, with key sites such as Corfe Castle, Studland, Maiden Castle and Durdle Door. Away from these key 'honey-pot' sites, visitors and local communities can experience tranquillity in less well known but equally beautiful countryside and coastal locations.

- 7.12. Key attributes are identified as: the dramatic coast and unspoilt 'traditional' countryside; superb beaches and water-based activities; heritage towns; food and drink; and arts and culture.

- 7.13. The Dorset Destination Management Plan 2014-2018<sup>64</sup>, suggests that the County brand appears to be stronger than any single Dorset destination – as a Google analysis reveals more searches are conducted using the term “Dorset” than other destination names within the county. The report goes on to states that “there is a perceived need for strategic direction and greater commitment from stakeholders to destination management, particularly the promotion of Dorset as a complementary brand.”

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<sup>61</sup> <https://www.dorsetforyou.gov.uk/planning-buildings-land/planning-policy/north-dorset/local-plan-review/pdfs/north-dorset-local-plan-review/evidence-base/final-report-20.03.18-v2.pdf>

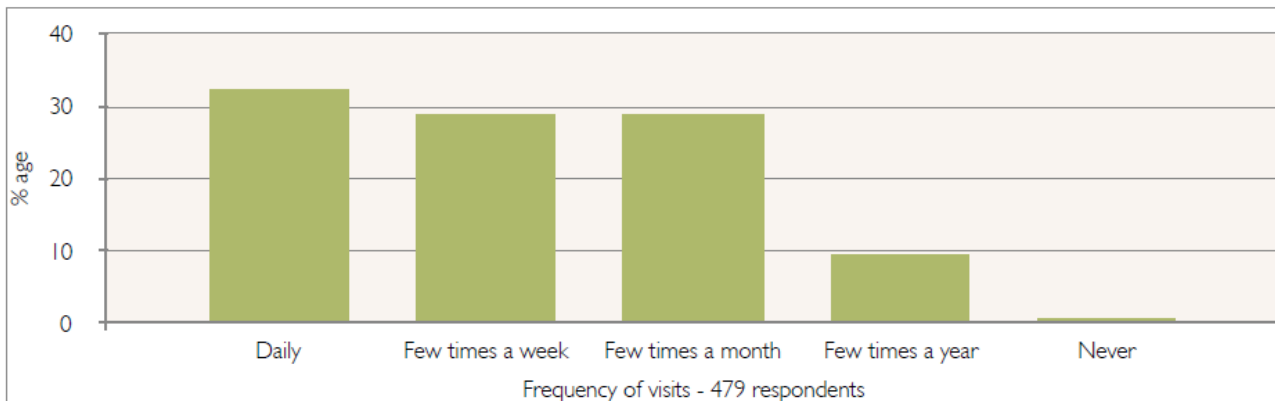
<sup>62</sup> <https://www.dorsetforyou.gov.uk/planning-buildings-land/planning-policy/joint-planning-policy-work/pdfs/heathlands/dorset-heathlands-planning-framework-supplementary-planning-document-2015-2020.pdf>

<sup>63</sup> <https://www.visit-dorset.com/trade/research/industry>

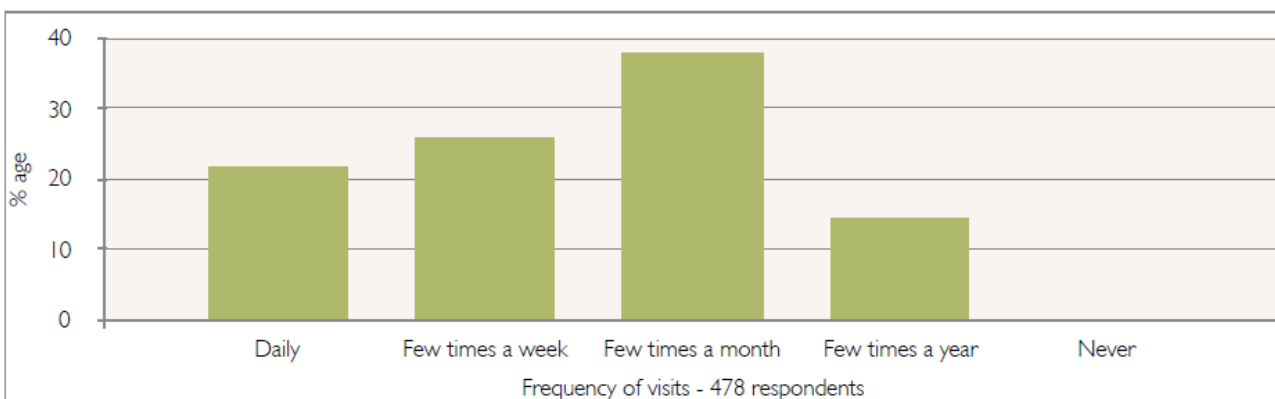
<sup>64</sup> [https://dorsetlep.s3.amazonaws.com/Documents/Dorset\\_DMP\\_Final\\_Draft\\_100714.pdf](https://dorsetlep.s3.amazonaws.com/Documents/Dorset_DMP_Final_Draft_100714.pdf)

7.14. The 2015 report on Dorset’s Environmental Economy<sup>65</sup> includes data from a resident’s survey. This indicates the frequency of visits to the countryside and to the coast – with many accessing the countryside a few times a week if not daily.

Frequency of visits to the countryside



Frequency of visits to the coast



7.15. The report also highlights that Dorset’s environmental economy is worth approximately £1.5 billion per annum; and supports approximately 30,000 jobs in the economy (about 8%-10% of Dorset’s overall economy each year).

7.16. There is also a growing awareness of the links between access to nature and health and well-being. The Dorset Local Nature Partnership has published a position paper<sup>66</sup> that recommends a closer working relationship between the health and social care and the environment sectors in developing projects and commissioning services to improve the health of Dorset’s residents, and for more funding to be invested in maintaining and enhancing the natural environment to ensure that there is a place where natural health activities can be undertaken as well as investment in the activities themselves. The paper cites a number of research findings and case studies to back up its recommendations.

7.17. Livewell Dorset is funded by Public Health Dorset and its Natural Choices activities grew from an initiative piloted by the Local Nature Partnership in Weymouth and Portland. It oversees a wide range of activities across Dorset<sup>67</sup> – examples include:

- Alzheimer’s Society, Step Outside – Allotment Gardening Group, Wimborne
- Free outdoor family yoga at Lodmoor Country Park, Weymouth
- Nordic Walking, Stalbridge
- Practical volunteer work party with Dorset Wildlife Trust, undertaking task such as scrub clearance and hedge laying across Dorset Wildlife Trusts West Dorset Reserves

<sup>65</sup> <https://dorsetlnp.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/Dorset-Environmental-Economy-2015.pdf>

<sup>66</sup> <https://dorsetlnp.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/Natural-Health-Position-Paper2.pdf>

<sup>67</sup> <https://dorsetlnp.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/Natural-Choices-Activities-May-2018.pdf>

- Running coaching with Ucan Fitness - outdoors and sometimes training at places such as Dancing Ledge, Swanage Bay
- Weekly Nature Walk, Lorton Meadows Weymouth
- Wildlife Walks across Dorset

### *Other recreational opportunities - Portland and other case studies*

7.18. As part of the 2013 evidence base supporting the National Park proposal, a brief review of recreational opportunities<sup>68</sup> was undertaken identifying a wide range of outdoor sport and recreation opportunities, including:

- abseiling
- ball sports such as rugby, football, cricket, bowls and croquet
- bird / nature watching (for example at Arne RSPB reserve and Brownsea Island)
- camping - including Scout, Sea-Scout and Guide Camps
- canoeing / kayaking / rowing
- cycling – particularly on the area's many local and national cycling routes and trails
- fishing
- fossil collecting
- orienteering
- paintballing
- painting / drawing / sculpting (wildlife, landscapes, seascapes etc) – also the biennial Dorset Art Weeks which is one of the largest in open studio events in the country.
- pony trekking and horse riding
- rock climbing
- swimming, snorkelling
- tennis
- walking
- windsurfing / kitesurfing

7.19. A more detailed appraisal of opportunities in Portland was undertaken in 2018<sup>69</sup>, which reported that of the 123 possible recreation activities identified, more than half were possible on the island.

7.20. Another case study provided as part of the 2018 evidence submission was in respect of Dorset's importance for climbing<sup>70</sup>.

7.21. However as evidenced by the condition monitoring of nature conservation sites and heritage assets at risk, public disturbance can also be a cause of a decline in the very condition of the places people come to enjoy. Purbeck District Council, in their evaluation of the Dorset National Park proposal, identified a National Park's ability to manage such visitor pressures and impacts as one key attraction of the proposal.

### **Availability and strength (in terms of coverage, depth and quality) of existing evidence**

7.22. The evidence shows that there are many recreation opportunities throughout the Dorset area, given access via public open land, national and local trails. The lack of footpaths and bridleways in some areas is not necessarily an indication of limited access, when overlain with the public access areas maps. For example, the Lulworth Ranges (MoD land) are largely devoid of public rights of way but include larger areas of Open Access Land.

7.23. There is also clear evidence of a range of organised opportunities that are available and the importance of recreational opportunities to local residents and visitors alike. There is scope for

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<sup>68</sup> [https://docs.wixstatic.com/ugd/635081\\_8167f2a07cd74f8baefc4ad70e3ec821.pdf](https://docs.wixstatic.com/ugd/635081_8167f2a07cd74f8baefc4ad70e3ec821.pdf)

<sup>69</sup> [https://docs.wixstatic.com/ugd/853df9\\_c6d2a0b0cd444f02b340c7852236edc3.xlsx?dn=Portland%20Recreational%20Activities.xlsx](https://docs.wixstatic.com/ugd/853df9_c6d2a0b0cd444f02b340c7852236edc3.xlsx?dn=Portland%20Recreational%20Activities.xlsx)

<sup>70</sup> [https://docs.wixstatic.com/ugd/853df9\\_a9174370e7d149a39dca15adcf1e2d3c.pdf](https://docs.wixstatic.com/ugd/853df9_a9174370e7d149a39dca15adcf1e2d3c.pdf)

such opportunities to increase further as the health benefits are better understood – most importantly in terms of reducing the costs of more conventional health services.

- 7.24. What is apparent from this research is the lack of any clear strategic overview or comprehensive database that picks up on all these factors. There are obvious benefits in both providing better public information (although websites such as <https://www.visit-dorset.com/> have a wealth of information) and better coordination in terms of the recreational offer and management of visitor pressure on sensitive sites.

## 8. Conclusions and Next Steps

- 8.1. It is clear from this study that there is extensive evidence that can be called upon to consider the four key attributes that would underpin a potential case for a National Park for rural Dorset (its natural beauty, breadth of cultural heritage, wildlife importance and recreational opportunities). These attributes are in no way limited to the two Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty or coastal areas.
- 8.2. However, the coverage and scope of this evidence is variable and incomplete, and unsurprisingly there is less evidence and monitoring outside of the AONBs and outside of the national wildlife and heritage designations.
- 8.3. For example, even though there are landscape character assessments across Dorset, these fall short of making clear judgements on the comparable qualities of the landscapes outside of the AONBs (there are limited judgements to inform decisions on possible changes to the Green Belt and out-dated and patchy local landscape designations). Similarly the limited public sector resources covering the historic environment are evident through, for example, the patchy coverage of appraisals and the incomplete mapping of the local monument record, although much progress has nonetheless been made across a number of areas. There is obvious potential to harness local volunteer support to extend and flesh out some of this evidence, provided there is adequate guidance and a way to pull together the disparate strands that could otherwise result. In particular, there are many cultural and literary associations which could be explored further. The absence of a historic landscape character study is another obvious gap in the evidence, but likely to be more appropriate for a strategic partnership to coordinate and produce.
- 8.4. There is an understandable focus on evidence to deal with development pressures (particularly for more housing) and this is concentrated around the main settlements, but does not generally look much further than the existing statutory designations and consideration of landform and settlement characteristics. The monitoring of the impact of development (particularly cumulative impact over time) on aspects such as the landscape is largely absent.
- 8.5. There is also growing recognition of the potential value of having a strategic approach to recreation and tourism management which a National Park would be well-placed to coordinate and provide. Many of the resources are there – many different types of countryside with public access, local and national trails and multiple layers of interest, whether for walking, cycling, rowing, horse-riding, painting, drawing, fishing or some other activity. This could have significant benefits for the local economy, health and well-being as well as better directing recreational / visitor pressures so that they don't inadvertently harm the very attributes that people come to enjoy.
- 8.6. With the Local Government Organisation now complete and the new Dorset Council established as a unitary authority, there is a unique opportunity to review what evidence is collected across the various departments and how (including cooperative working with the Local Enterprise Partnership and Local Nature Partnership). This is even more important because of the need to produce a comprehensive Local Plan for the area by 2024.
- 8.7. Recommendations that the Dorset CPRE and others may wish to consider would include:



- inviting the key agencies (Dorset Council, Local Nature Partnership, Local Enterprise Partnership and Dorset Tourism Association Board) to identify what, if any, further evidence could be added to this report
- opening up the evidence-gathering process and inviting communities, local societies / groups and individuals to contribute their knowledge and expertise to expanding the evidence base for rural Dorset. Consideration should first be given the type of database to be used and how this can be updated. The database ideally should be web-based, be readily searchable by location and by theme relevant to the potential National Park status (including appropriate sub-themes), it should be map-based and compatible with the Dorset Council chosen GIS system, it should allow web-links and uploads of relevant evidence sources, and ideally be self-regulating to enable the community to upload, review and edit articles (potentially using a “Wikipedia” type process).
- encouraging the commissioning of a Dorset-wide historic landscape characterisation from which to produce Historic Landscape Character Areas (HLCAs), each with their own characteristics and historical trajectory. The main characteristics, historical and archaeological features, and historic trajectories of the landscape should then be clearly described, the strength of that character understood, and guidance provided on their appropriate management.
- encouraging the review of the landscape character assessments outside of the AONB to bring them on a par with those assessments, and roll out the fixed point photography across the whole of rural Dorset as part of a project to establish a more robust manner in which to monitor landscape change over time.
- raising the potential prospect of creating a Local Heritage Partnership to oversee and take a strategic view of the opportunities and resources available to manage Dorset’s heritage for the benefit of the heritage assets and cultural associations, the communities and wider economy. The National Park proposal is warmly supported by various heritage bodies - from all aspects of archaeology through buildings of all ages to cultural heritage, including the Thomas Hardy Society, William Barnes Society, T E Lawrence Society, many of whom have said that they would welcome more conservation expertise and support than is currently the case. There is clear potential for a Dorset National Park to take the lead in establishing and providing expert support and resources for such a group.
- engaging with the Dorset Tourism Association Board to ensure consideration is given to commissioning research into Dorset’s recreational opportunities and potential and any related capacity and access issues, as well as to help optimise the benefits to communities, businesses and other organisations throughout rural Dorset. There is clear potential for a Dorset National Park to engage in such a way in the future.

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