

Dorset CPRE Summer Conference - 9th June 2026

The Challenge of meeting development needs whilst protecting and improving the environment

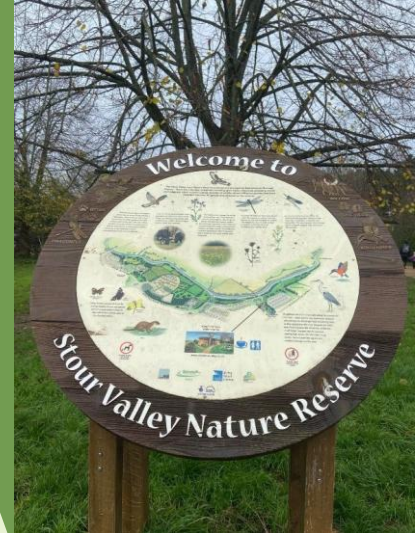
Cllr. Nick Ireland – Leader, Dorset Council

Cllr. Millie Earl – Leader, BCP Council



BCP Council - introduction and context

- The council is responsible for a conurbation with a population of about 410,000
- Home to world-renowned companies, three universities and a high-quality environment
- Climate and Ecological Emergency:
 - Commitment to helping the BCP area become carbon neutral by 2045;
 - adopted the Local Nature recovery Strategy (with Dorset Council and other partners)
- We have internationally important heathland and wetland habitats and protected catchments – limits urban expansion
- BCP includes extremes of wealth and deprivation – we have a duty to plan positively to meet economic and social imperatives, including affordable homes
- Our focus will be on making efficient use of previously developed land, but this will not be enough to meet our housing requirements
- This does not mean losing vital green spaces or community facilities: our strategy will focus on protecting and enhancing vital green infrastructure to support quality of life and biodiversity
- To manage congestion, LTP has a strong focus on public transport, cycling and walking – this will help to create accessible places, support higher densities where appropriate, and manage traffic
- We will continue to work with our Wessex partners to ensure housing delivery meets needs – size, type, location of housing, affordability etc.



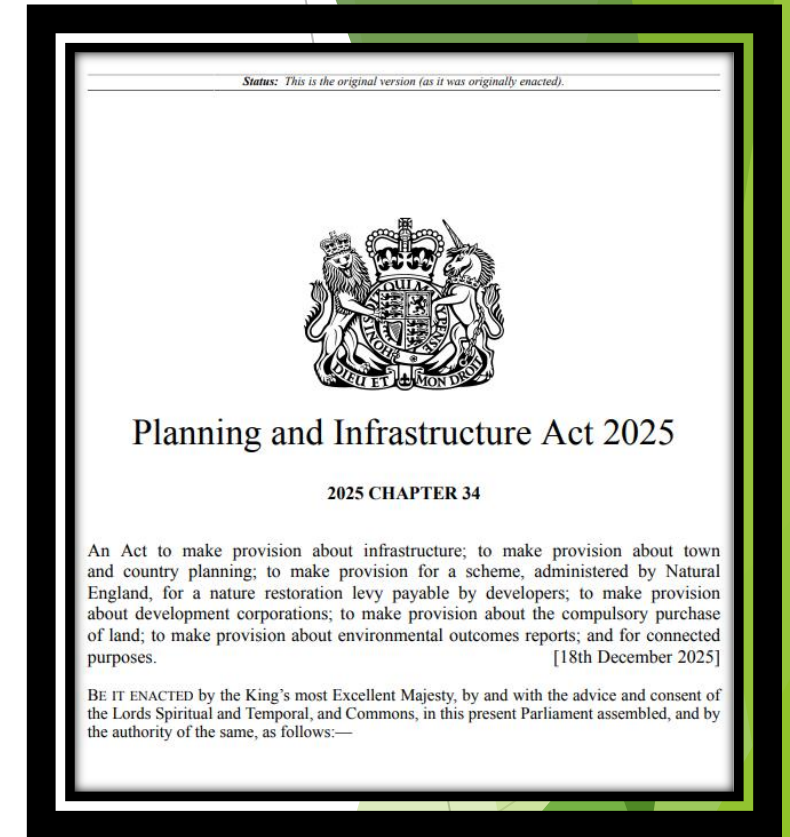
Dorset Council - introduction and context

- Largely rural area with market and coastal towns, two national landscapes, 5 protected catchments, internationally important habitats
- Home to Dorset Innovation Park – an enterprise zone driving economic growth
- The Council is committed to tackling the causes and impacts of climate change
 - Greening our own estate
 - Promoting the super green energy cluster
 - Carbon neutral county by 2045
- Focusing growth in our most sustainable locations
 - regenerating Weymouth and Portland
 - making best use of brownfield land
 - Using our local plan to test options for sustainable growth of our larger settlements and proportionate growth where it's needed
- Initiatives designed to protect and enhance the environment
 - Biodiversity Net Gain
 - Local Nature Recovery Strategy (alongside BCP and other partners)
 - Farming in Protected Landscapes
 - Working with Wessex Water to deliver nature-based solutions to water quality management
- We need to test options for growth in sensitive locations
- BUT: our evidence will be robust to ensure we achieve this in a sustainable way



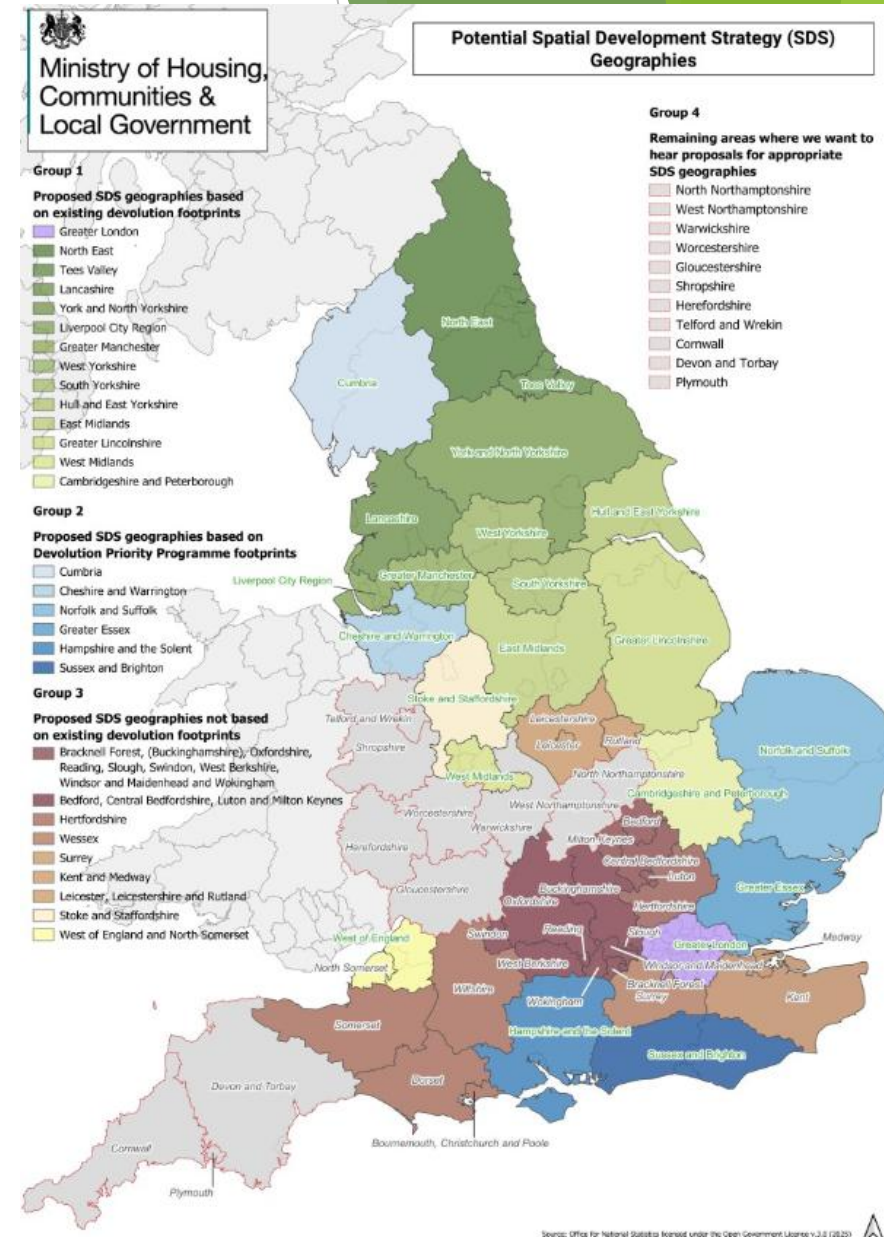
The National Context- Planning and Infrastructure Act 2025

- Central to the government's plan to '**get Britain building again**' and deliver economic growth, including 1.5 million 'safe and decent homes'
- New requirement for **Environmental Delivery Plans** to target specific regional environmental issues: Natural England will be responsible for these
- It establishes a Nature Restoration Fund – this will allow developers to discharge certain environmental responsibilities via a levy to offset impacts
- It (re)introduces strategic planning: a statutory requirement to prepare **Spatial Development Strategies** based on devolved geographies



The National Context - devolved strategic planning

- Strategic Authorities must prepare a **Spatial Development Strategy** for their area.
- **Wessex Partnership**: BCP; Dorset; Wiltshire; Somerset
- SDS to cover 20+ years to:
 - provide a spatial strategy that guides local plans & enables growth;
 - identify key infrastructure requirements needed to implement it;
 - identify strategic locations for development and an indication of the scale of development required – new settlements, major urban extensions, cross-boundary development, and key locations for new homes and jobs;
 - **Identify areas where protection or restoration of the natural environment is required;** and
 - apportion and distribute housing need to the most appropriate locations.

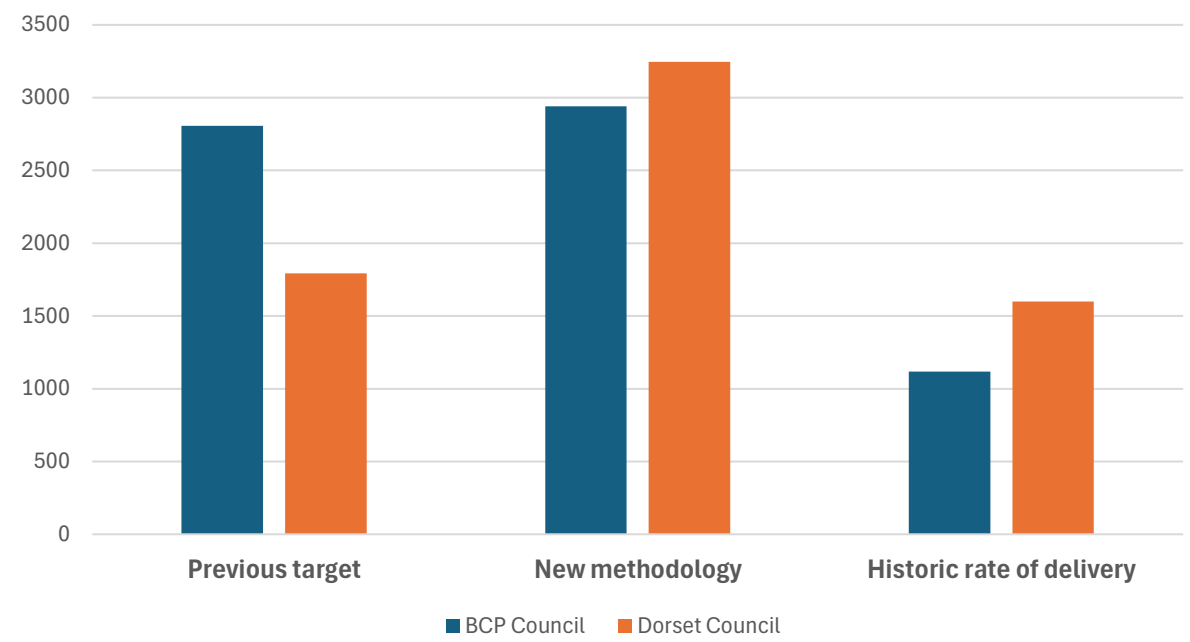


The National Context - National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) and housing

- Planning system needs to deliver more than housing, but the housing numbers are a significant challenge for Dorset and BCP
- **Mandatory Housing Target** through Standard Methodology introduced in current NPPF (December 2024)
- The revised methodology has led to a substantial increase in the housing requirement over previous requirements and past rates of delivery
- A key driver for this uplift is the disparity between house prices and average incomes and the need for affordable homes



Annual Housing Requirement



Housing delivery and viability

- Local Plans must carry out a whole-plan viability assessment
- With such a high uplift in housing, there will be significant infrastructure requirements
- Questions remain over the impact this will have on the viability of housing in more marginal areas of lower market demand
- Other areas of higher demand have high house prices and escalating development costs which also causes problems of viability
- Key infrastructure costs for BCP and Dorset will include:
 - Heathland and nutrient mitigation
 - Flood defences (particularly in coastal areas but also surface water)
 - Transport infrastructure
 - Community infrastructure including schools
 - Biodiversity Net Gain
 - Affordable housing
- We are preparing evidence to show infrastructure requirements and costs and assessing what impact this might have on our ability to deliver the housing requirements



Revised (draft) National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF)

- Significant changes to planning are proposed in latest **draft**

NPPF:

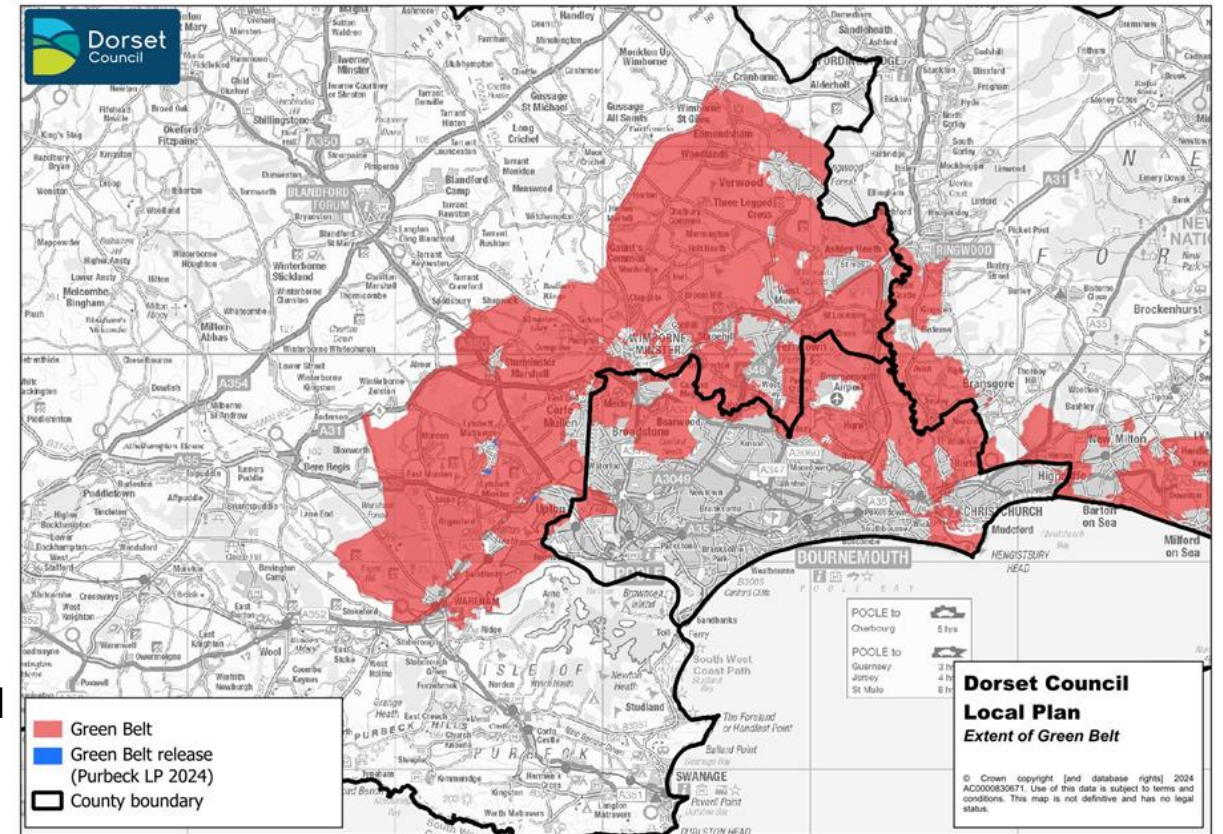
“The purpose of the planning system is to contribute to the achievement of sustainable development, by managing the use and development of land in the long-term public interest”.

- Organised into plan-making policies and decision-making policies
- Sets out purpose and content of Spatial Development Strategies
- Local Plans must set out a clear spatial strategy
- NPPF includes decision-making policies which should not be changed or duplicated in local plans
- Local Plans should not set their own standards for matters already covered in Building Regulations or elsewhere (e.g. energy performance or internal layout)



Green Belt

- Draft NPPF retains commitment to Green Belt **but** allows for changes under specific circumstances
- Alterations to Green Belt boundaries should be made through local plans and where:
 - It would enable development in or around stations; or
 - There are exceptional circumstances
- In defining their Green Belt boundaries, Local Plans should only:
 - include land necessary to keep it permanently open
 - Demonstrate the boundary is consistent with the spatial strategy
- Any alterations needed to promote sustainable patterns of development should:
 - Give priority to the release of previously developed land within the Green Belt,
 - then to grey belt which is not previously developed,
 - then other Green Belt locations so long as these promote sustainable patterns of development



Protecting and improving the environment

- Draft NPPF emphasizes the importance of conserving and enhancing the natural environment
 - *“The objective ...is to influence the design and location of new development to help drive nature’s recovery and contribute to wider environmental outcomes, safeguarding our most important habitats, species and landscapes and recognising the centrality of natural capital to delivering sustainable growth”.*
- Local Plans are expected to safeguard and enhance the natural environment - they should use Local Nature Recovery Strategies and Protected Landscape Management Plans (among other strategies)
- Major development in National Landscapes should only be supported in exceptional circumstances -
- Planning should deliver 10% biodiversity net gain
- Local Plans to set standards for green infrastructure
- New streets should be tree-lined
- Continued commitment to protecting the best quality agricultural land

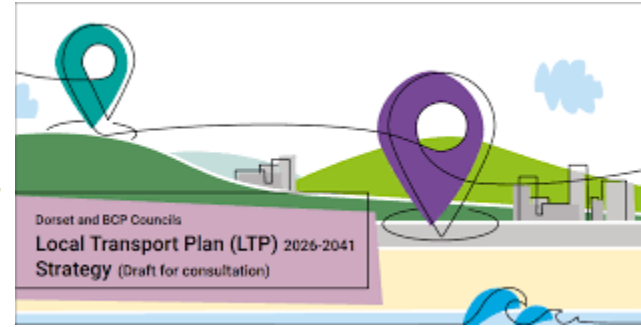


What are the challenges and opportunities for Dorset and BCP?

Both councils have a strong track record of collaborative working

- Local Transport Plan 2026-2041 – currently being prepared

“Dorset Council and BCP Council have been working together on a new joint local transport plan to ensure our transport systems meets the expectations of everyone, and to identify the most important issues to prioritise future investment”.
- In preparation for our local plans, both councils have jointly commissioned evidence
 - Housing Needs Assessment – considering the type, size and affordability
 - Green Belt Review
 - Employment Needs Assessment
 - Playing Pitches and Built Facilities Strategy
- We are part of the Dorset Heaths Partnership – mitigating impacts upon protected heaths
- Working together to mitigate nutrient impacts on protected catchments: Poole Harbour and River Avon catchments
- Partners in preparing the Local Nature Recovery Strategy



What does this tell us about striking the right balance between development and environmental protection?

- We are in a strong position – Dorset and BCP have a good reputation and track record in delivering environmental enhancements and mitigation of impacts
- We have already adopted our Local Nature Recovery Strategy
- We have two recently adopted National Landscape Management Plans (Dorset and Cranbourne Chase)
- BCP Council and Dorset Council are both preparing new local plans which will provide statutory policy framework for sustainable development across our area (as are Somerset and Wiltshire – our Wessex partners)
- Our evidence will give us a robust basis to test the deliverability and viability of growth while establishing environmental priorities
- BCP, Dorset and our other Wessex partners are already looking ahead to the preparation of a Spatial Development Strategy for Wessex



A focus on...

Dorset Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS)

In the next decade Dorset can choose decline or recovery. The LNRS is about how we tip the balance...



Photo credit: Marsh fritillary - Steve Masters

Dorset Local Nature Recovery Strategy 2025



dorsetcouncil.gov.uk/nature-recovery-strategy

What is the Dorset LNRS?

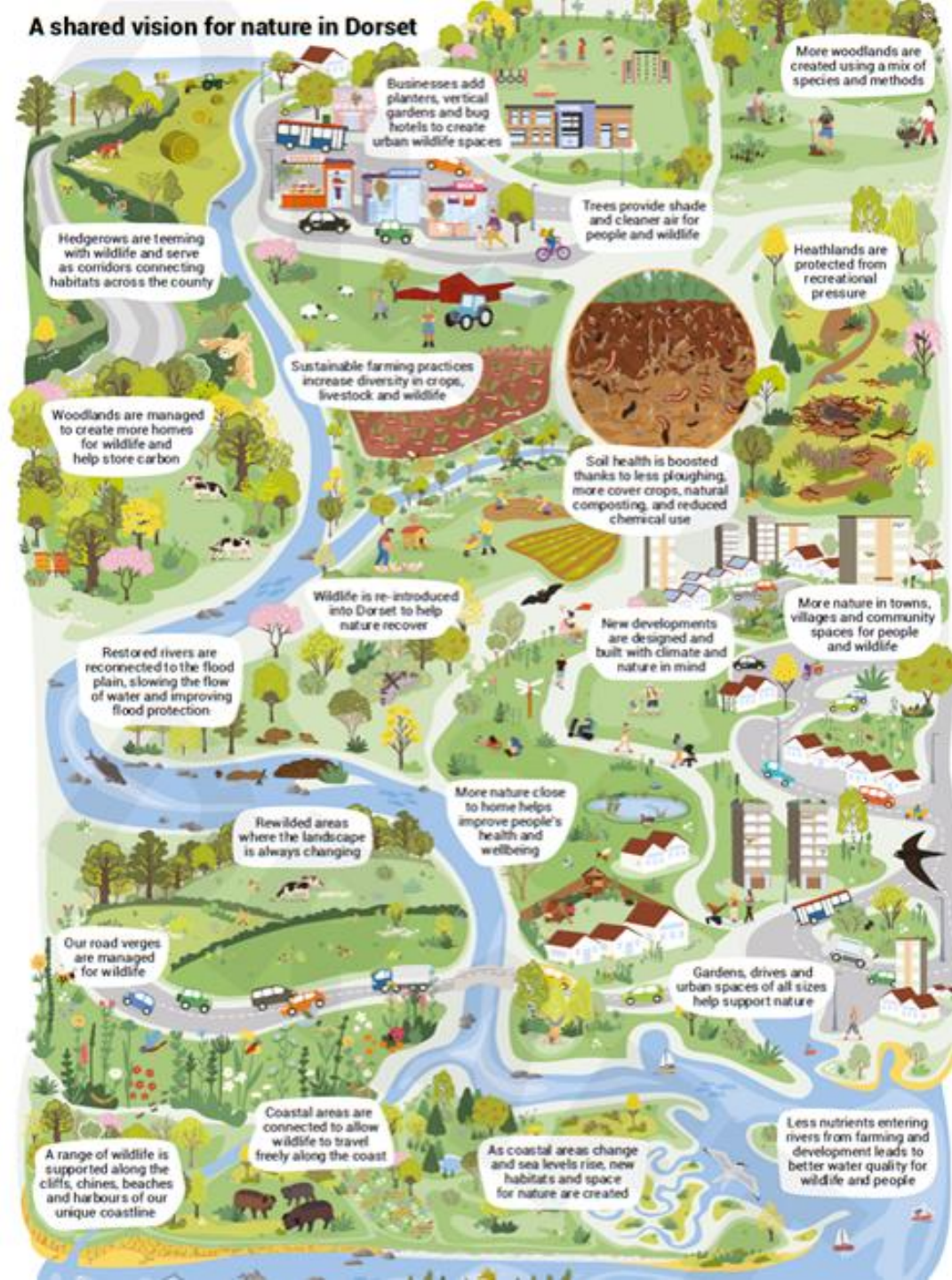


Shared vision: Nature in Dorset is recovering, thriving, resilient and connected across our landscapes. Everyone in Dorset is able to access nature and be involved in nature recovery.

Joint mission: Work together to meet the urgent need to address the climate and nature emergencies through nature recovery, bringing benefits for our wellbeing and communities.



A shared vision for nature in Dorset



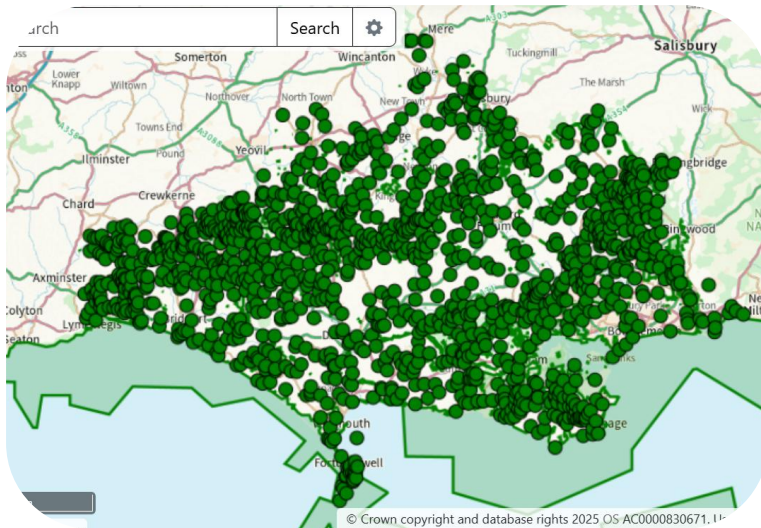
13 Priorities

1. Grasslands
2. Woodlands
3. Heathlands
4. Rivers, lakes and wetlands
5. Coastal
6. Hedgerows
7. Urban
8. Farming
9. Natural processes
10. Nature-based solutions
11. Nature connection
12. Species abundance and diversity
13. Priority species

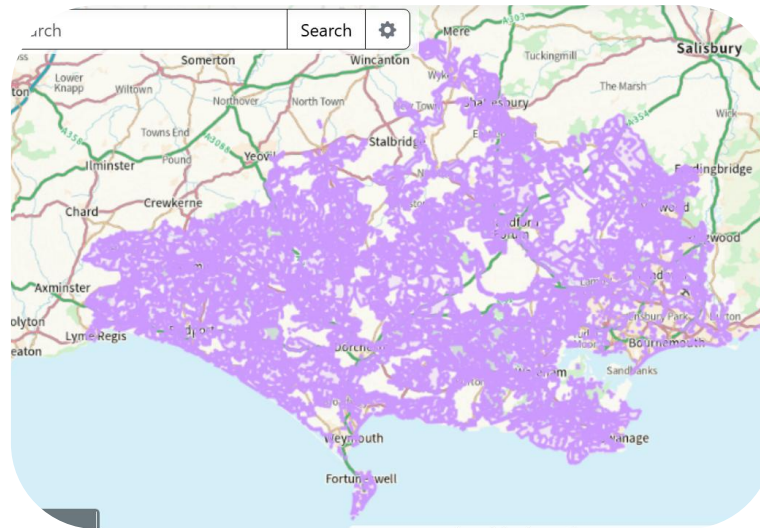


Local Habitat Map

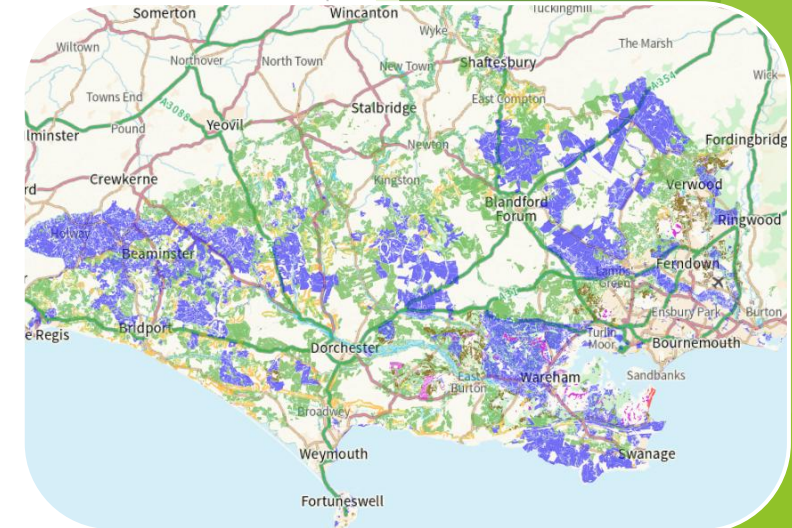
[Dorset's nature recovery maps - Dorset Council](#)



1. Nature areas of national importance



2. High opportunity nature areas



3. Potential activities

How to use the strategy and maps

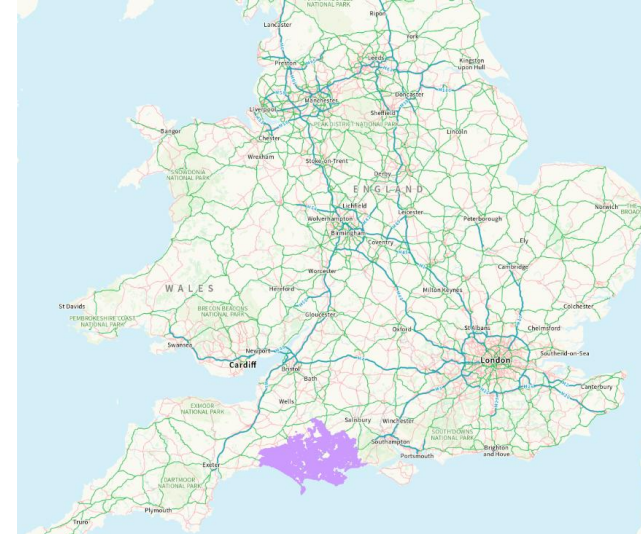
This is Dorset's strategy – everyone can use it to enable change, increase consistency and be part of national nature recovery goals

- **Strengthen existing action**

- Show alignment with the county's shared priorities and local habitat map to strengthen support or funding bids
- Check for ways to deliver a few more potential activities
- Use the maps to check how your work joins up with others
- Help create a shared picture of progress for Dorset

- **Support new action**

- Find potential activities you could do
- Use the local habitat map to identify opportunities in your area
- Encourage others to get involved in a county-wide effort



**Farmers, Foresters,
Landowners & Land
Managers**



**Communities &
Individuals**



**Businesses, Industry
& Economy**



Public Bodies



**Nature & Environment
Sector**




**Partnerships &
Connectors**

The Dorset Council is actively involved in various mitigation projects to address recreational pressures on the Dorset Heathland and Special Protection Areas (SPAs)

The Bird And Recreation Initiative, also known as BARI (pronounced Barry!), has been set up to protect important bird species and their habitats. The area spans the whole harbour from Studland to Sandbanks and provides these precious habitats and species with some much needed protection.

With a growing population living in Poole Harbour, there is a growing pressure on their habitats, but it also means there are more people to champion wildlife-friendly adventures and help harbour birds thrive, not just survive. We all help to make a difference!



SANDWICH TERN
Thalasseus sandvicensis

COMES FROM
West Africa.

JOURNEY LENGTH
4,000 miles.

FUN FACTS
Oldest bird ringed was some 31 years old! There is an important breeding colony at Brownsea Island, Poole.

LOOK OUT FOR
Yellow tip on long black bill and a black cap.

DIET
Fish.

BLACK TAILED GODWIT
Limosa limosa


COMES FROM
Iceland

JOURNEY LENGTH
1,000 miles.

FUN FACTS
Pairs can last for 25 years! Every year, they arrive at their breeding grounds within three days of each other. They probe their beaks into the sand up to 36 times a minute in search of insects, worms, and snails.

LOOK OUT FOR
Long bill with dark tip and long legs.

DIET
Insects and worms.



Working with the National Trust on a recreation mitigation project at Studland

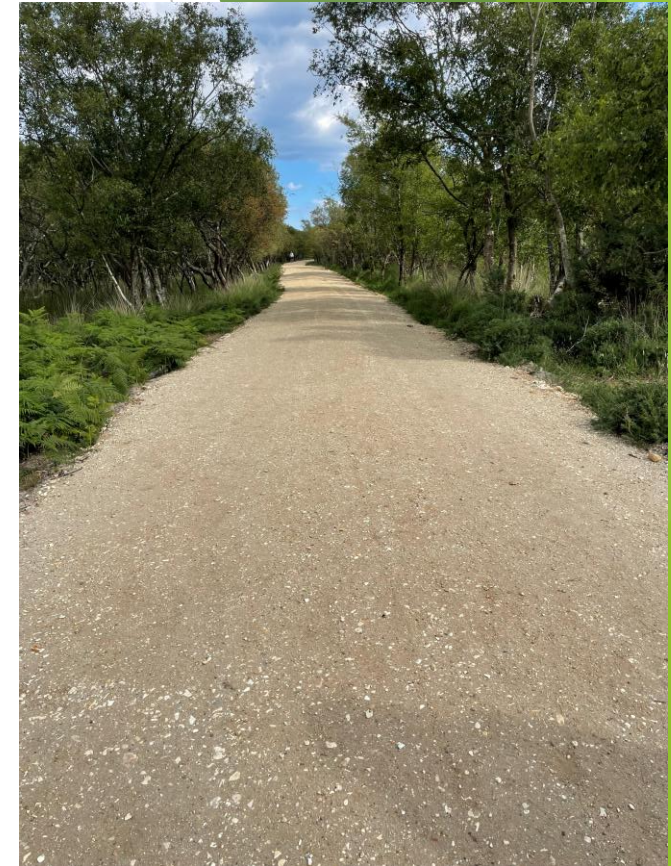
Walkers now have a reliable, wildlife-sensitive route for exploring the Studland peninsula in winter.

The National Trust project has improved 1.5km track from Ferry Road to the beach with support from Poole Harbour's Bird and Recreation Initiative (DC and BCP Council) who contributed £80,000. The project has reinstated culverts, replaced degraded boardwalks, installed new drainage infrastructure, and resurfaced worn sections.

It now forms part of a clearly signposted circular route that guides visitors away from ecologically sensitive areas of Brand's Bay, reducing disturbance to overwintering bird species such as turnstones, avocets, brent geese, black-tailed godwits and oystercatchers.



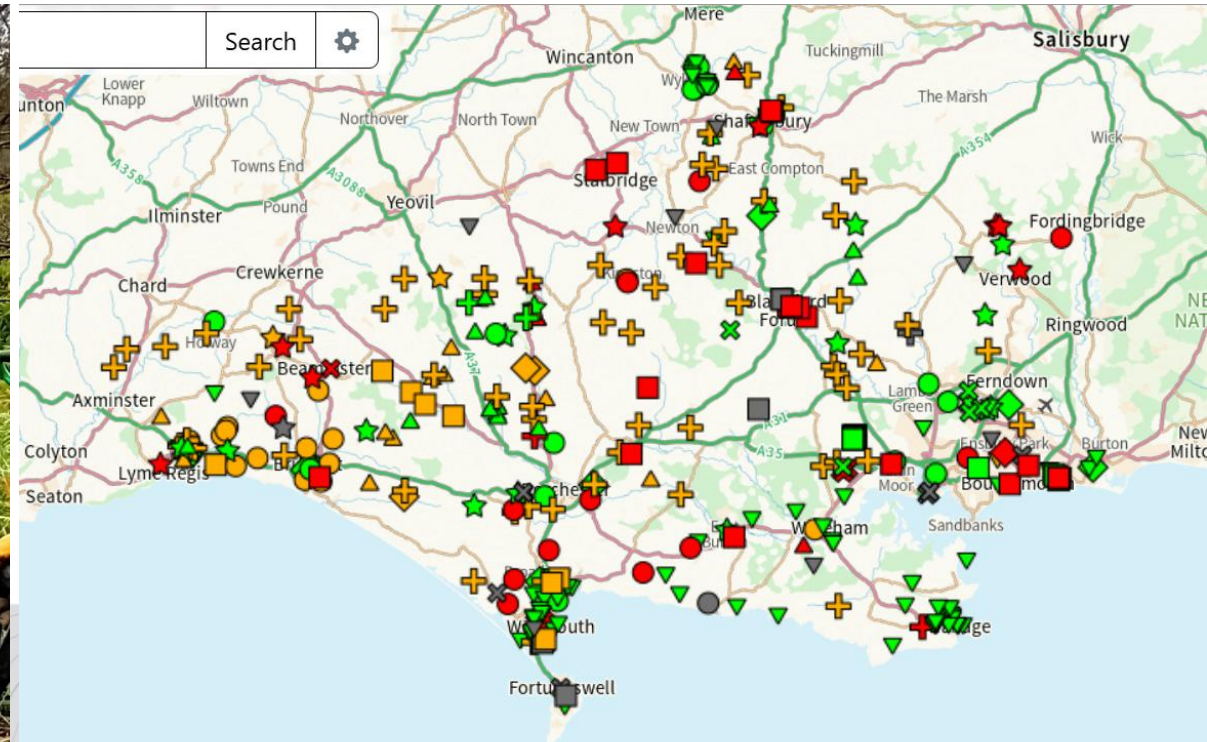
Before



After

Nature Recovery Dorset

A growing network of individuals, farmers, landowners, schools, businesses and local groups all working to help restore and protect nature in Dorset.



Example projects / What shows on the map

Nature Recovery Dorset Network

Glenmoor and Winton Academies
School

How they are making space for nature:

Hello, We have received about 100 natives trees from the Woodland Trust and we are planting them on the edged of the school field to help with wildlife and climate change.

How much space for nature: Under half a hectare

Visitors Access Permitted? No

Email:

mverreck@glenmoorandwinton.org.uk

[Zoom to feature](#)

[About this layer](#)

Nature Recovery Dorset Network

Your Eco Gardener
Business

How they are making space for nature:

Completed at least three actions to contribute to help Nature Recovery as part of the Sustainable Business Award (with Litter Free Dorset). Your ECO Gardener is redefining the standards in gardening. We get your outside space looking beautiful but also working with nature. We use emission-free tools, biodegradable strimmer cord and bamboo gloves.

Visitors Access Permitted? Not Answered

[About this layer](#)

Nature Recovery Dorset Network

Merley Nature Group

Community Group
Community group

How they are making space for nature:

Merley Nature Group is a small group of residents passionate about our local wildlife. Our aim is to get the community involved in managing wildlife habitats around them, help enhance and protect wildlife habitats, meet like-minded people and at the same time improve their wellbeing by being outdoors.

How much space for nature: Between 0.5 hectare and 8 hectares

Visitors Access Permitted? Yes – by prior booking or joining as a volunteer or following visitor information

Other Contact Details:

<https://www.facebook.com/MerleyNatureGroup>

[Zoom to feature](#)

[About this layer](#)

Nature Recovery Dorset Network

Member of the public

How they are making space for nature: I care for different central areas of village with a view to increasing habitats for nature. Keen to increase biodiversity + protection whilst offering educational opportunities for wider public awareness of importance of nature. Paths + parking nearby offer accessible areas for bird + nature watching + general enjoyment for all.

How much space for nature: Between 0.5 hectare and 8 hectares

Visitors Access Permitted? Yes – by prior booking or joining as a volunteer or following visitor information

[About this layer](#)

[Back to list of results](#)

Call to action

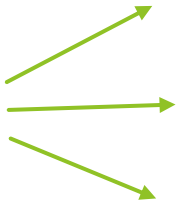
- Sign up to the Nature Recovery Dorset network
dorsetcouncil.gov.uk/nrd-network
 and tell us...
 - About **yourself** or the **organisation / group**
 - How you are making space for nature (even it's a small action)
- Look at the different priorities to inspire you



 Farmers, Foresters, Landowners & Land Managers	 Businesses, Industry & Economy	 Nature & Environment Sector
 Communities & Individuals	 Public bodies	 Partnerships & Connectors

Potential activity

Use wildlife-friendly gardening practices in homes, businesses, community growing projects, churchyards and similar spaces	   
Adapt mowing and maintenance regimes in green spaces such as parks, sports fields, and grounds of hospitals, schools or businesses. Create wild patches and meadows, and areas for insects to overwinter	 
Create sustainable drainage systems (SuDS) features in towns and villages, such as rain gardens, swales, street trees and ponds to slow water and provide wetland or boggy habitat	 
Increase other kinds of urban greening such as living walls and green roofs, on both existing and new buildings, or other infrastructure such as bus shelters	  
Create more nature-rich spaces in nurseries, schools, colleges and universities. For example, gardens or allotments for students to grow plants and food, and wildflower strips around sports fields	 
Create more nature-rich spaces on golf courses, or consider changing land-use where these facilities are underused or provided for people to enjoy elsewhere	
Sustainably manage existing trees in towns and villages, replacing these where they are removed or lost due to age or disease	 
Increase tree canopy cover by establishing and maintaining more trees in gardens, parks, and along streets, focusing on areas that have the lowest tree equity scores. For Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole, follow the guiding principles outlined in BCP Urban Forest Strategy	   
In new developments, keep as many existing trees on site as possible and if trees are lost, carry out new tree planting, with numbers greater than those removed. Favour local and native species, or new species that provide a similar ecological function if more resilient or suited to the urban environment	
Maintain and establish new fruit trees and orchards within public spaces. And establish related community groups and ways for people to use the fruit and care for the trees	  



Dorset Council doing our bit for nature

Dorset Council Dorset Biodiversity Report - [Dorset Council Biodiversity Report 2023-25.pdf](#) brings together actions from 28 teams and shows how biodiversity is embedded in day-to-day council operations – from land management and planning to education, highways and social care.

Key achievements include over the last 2 years:

- Nearly 5,000 trees planted across council land
- Over 6,000m of new hedgerow grown
- 345,702m² of wildflower areas created
- 160,140m² of invasive species removed
- 25 natural flood management projects installed
- 62% of urban verges now managed specifically for wildlife
- 40% reduction in glyphosate use on the highway network
- More than £9 million invested in nature recovery through grants and stewardship schemes



Dorset Council
Biodiversity Report 2023-2025

BCP Council doing our bit for nature

BCP Council Biodiversity Report - [BCP Biodiversity Report 2022 to 2025](#) brings together actions from multiple Council teams and partner/community groups. Shows how biodiversity is embedded in day-to-day council operations and partnership working.

Key achievements include over the last 3 years:

- 6,500 trees planted
- 670m of new hedgerow planted
- 230 swift boxes/bricks installed
- 28 ha of Suitable Alternative Natural Green Space (SANG) created
- 39.8% Reduction in use of Glyphosate usage for highways weed treatment
- BCP - the first Nature Towns to be accredited with Foundation status in the UK. Recognition of a range of nature and greening strategies and initiatives.

