Dorset CPRE Responses Dorset Council Local Plan Scoping Consultation Questionnaire
Answers Submitted on 26th October 2026 via Completion of the Online Questionnaire

Question 1: What period do you think the plan should cover?
a) 10 years
b) 15 years
c) Longer than 15 years
d) Other
e) Not sure

Dorset CPRE supports a plan period of a maximum of 10 years from adoption, with a clear longer-term spatial perspective for infrastructure, climate adaptation and nature recovery.

Question 2: Are there any other priorities that should be considered when developing the vision? If so please specify.

a)Yes
b)No
c) Not sure.

The priority categories outlined are broadly representative of the main issues that the vision should cover. However, with regards to **Housing,** Dorset should be aspiring to provide genuinely affordable housing, based on household income rather than discounted market value, not just for young people, but also for families and the elderly.

Whilst chasing economic prosperity and growth is laudable it is essential that this growth is sustainable and that a circular economy within the county is supported and encouraged and this should be included within this key priority.

It is important that the local plan aspires to reduce inequality within the county and seeks to ensure that all residents have access to life's essentials.

Currently **Infrastructure** is incorporated within the key priority area of Economy, in our opinion improving Infrastructure, (transport, water, energy, digital networks, health and education) should be a separate key priority area, as it is essential for the whole county.

Biodiversity and **Climate Change** should not be lumped together under the heading Environment, but should each be a strategic priority area in its own right.

We welcome and support the recognition of the need to protect and enhance the character of Dorset's towns, villages, coastal communities and the countryside.

To ensure the goals set out in the vision are met measurable outcomes should be included.

Question 3: Which of the key priorities should be a focus for the local plan?

a) Housing
b) Economy
c) Environment
d) Movement
e) Health and Wellbeing

f) Design and Character
g) Tourism

These key priorities are equally important and are interdependent. As such they should be given equal attention in the local plan.

Question 4: Do you think the draft vision reflects what Dorset should be like at the end of the local plan period?
a)Yes
b)No
c)Not sure

The health, wealth and wellbeing of Dorset's communities is wholly dependent upon its natural environment, and it is essential that this is reflected in the vision. Biodiversity within the county has declined, an indicator that all is not well with Dorset's natural environment. The local plan should set tangible goals for the preservation and restoration of wildlife habitats and what is required to meet the 30 by 30 targets. Not simply steering development away from our most sensitive locations.

We would like to see more ambitious aspirations for new homes built within the county, with the aim that these are future proofed. They should be designed and built with Net Zero in mind both in terms of operational cand embodied carbon, incorporating technologies that enable them to be efficient to run and a delight for residents to reside in.

The vision should refer to the Climate and Ecological Emergency, which the council declared in 2019 together with its aspirations for the county to reach net zero in terms of carbon emissions by 2050. The vision must go beyond achieving mere climate resilience but require a proactive approach to ensure that planning decisions are made with the aim of meeting this goal in mind.

Question 5: What measurable outcomes should the council use to assess how well the local plan is performing?

- housing delivery rates on brownfield/previously developed land.
- air quality
- river water quality
- biodiversity.
- % tree cover
- Numbers of affordable homes delivered.
- Public Transport Accessibility

Question 6: What factors do you think should be considered when developing the settlement hierarchy for future development?

In developing the settlement hierarchy, it is crucial that environmental constraints (flood risk, landscape sensitivity, proximity to natural habitats) are taken into consideration alongside settlement size, access to facilities (Doctors Surgeries, Schools), proximity to employment hubs and access to public transport. A settlement's Infrastructure capacity (wastewater, road network etc) should also be a consideration in ranking a settlements suitability for further development.

As mentioned in our response to the 2025 consultation we do not support the introduction of a Flexible Settlement Boundary Policy for smaller scales of development as referred to in para 4.3.6. It is essential that community settlement boundaries are retained and that development is focussed within existing settlement boundaries with the re-use of previously developed land prioritised.

Question 7: What links to services and facilities are most important when looking at the sustainability of potential future development locations.

a) Access to public transport
b) Access to safe walking/cycle routes

***c) Distance from towns or places with facilities that serve a wider area*.**
d) Other

Please explain your answer

It is essential that development is focussed on locations that support and encourage a modal shift away from car dependency. To achieve this, they must be served by a reliable and frequent public transport service coupled with easy access to safe walking and cycle routes and in close proximity employment and other essential services. Ideally these should be safely accessible without resorting to the use of a private car.

The NPPF Policy TR1 requires the Connectivity Tool to be used to inform the selection of sites for development. Dorset generally has low connectivity, with weighted average score of 46. In view of the need to build sustainably, significant sites should be selected not to lower that average score overall, so a threshold of 46 should be incorporated as policy.

Question 8: Are there any locally specific climate change issues that are not addressed by national policy and should be considered in the Local Plan?

a) Yes
b) No
c) Not sure

Please explain your answer

Many Dorset farmers experienced significantly below average crop yield as a result of this summer's drought and losses to wildfires, posing a risk to neighbouring properties and the environment. Local plan policy should support and encourage the creation of on farm reservoirs to store water which can be used for crop irrigation and for putting out wildfires.

Virtually all wildfires start as a result of human activity. South East Dorset's internationally important heathlands are particularly vulnerable and this summer saw more than 100 hectares of New Forest Heathland affected by fire and the closure of the A31 as a result. It is essential that the local plan contains policies which seek to protect communities from wildfires and prevent their occurrence through directing development away from the most vulnerable areas and supporting landscape adaptations such as peatland re-wetting/ schemes to hold the water in the landscape, provision of firebreaks etc.

Given that it is predicted that winter rainfall levels are likely to increase as a result of climate change it is essential that not only is development steered away from areas susceptible to flooding as per government policy, but the impact of development on groundwater flooding is taken into consideration. It is imperative that the role that restoring rivers to their original routes (re-wiggling) and allowing flood plains to function should be recognised in policy

Question 9: Are there locally specific housing issues that are not addressed by national policy and should be considered in the Local Plan?

a) Yes
b) No
c) Not sure

Dorset CPRE challenge Dorset Council's assumption that the Standard Method 'must' be used to calculate housing need, which implies a strong obligation, when the wording in Annex D of the NPPF is 'should' which infers advice, or recommendation. In our opinion it is essential that the Local Plan, sets housing targets that accurately reflect the county's needs and are deliverable.

The Baseline Data Report shows an average completion rate of 1667 dwellings per annum between 2021 and 2025. Developers will build to meet demand, indicating that the Government's housing target for of 3,246 dwellings per annum for Dorset, far exceeds the number of dwellings actually required and likely to be delivered.

There should be coherence between housing numbers and household population: both should be planned in a manner consistent with likely population and household growth.

Currently the plan's HNA evidence is based upon over-optimistic housing growth. Without clear causation it is not sound planning or economics to assume that housing alone will give rise to corresponding household numbers and jobs. Whilst the fallacy is national in scope, local planning will experience the fall-out (and blame) of unfulfilled delivery and muddled targets for infrastructure.

It would be sensible to ask MHCLG urgently to attach local population estimates to its local housing targets as a check that the total of local populations corresponds to national estimates. Otherwise local planning risks failure at the most basic business level – a lack of informed market research.

The recently published Housing Needs Assessment has identified that there is a significant requirement in the county for Affordable Housing (45% of the total housing need figure) the majority of which (75%) should be provided as Social Rent. We would like to see this reflected in policy, with 45% of all developments consisting of affordable housing, with three quarters being designated as Social Housing.

A study carried out by Opinion Research Services for Dorset CPRE in 2020 (Dorset Housing Needs Evidence Report) found that most of the new homes being delivered in the county were unaffordable for young households. It also identified a requirement for appropriately located affordable housing suitable for occupation by young families. We would like to see policies included in the local plan that ensure that housing is delivered to meet the needs of these groups. It is essential that the affordable housing delivered is genuinely affordable for occupants based on household income.

Community Land Trusts play an important role in delivering affordable housing and it is important that the local plan contains policies that support and encourage the delivery of homes by CLTs

Question 10: Are there locally specific economic issues that are not addressed by national policy and should be considered in the Local Plan.

a) Yes
b) No
c) Not sure

Please explain your answer

Dorset's economy requires a place-based strategy addressing low wages, seasonal employment, the needs of rural enterprises and the regeneration of town centres, including Weymouth. Employment allocations should be based on demonstrable demand, accessibility and infrastructure capacity, while safeguarding productive agricultural land and supporting local supply chains, skills and year-round jobs**.**

Question 11: Are there locally specific town centre issues that are not addressed by national policy and should be considered in the Local Plan?

a) Yes
b) No
c) Not sure

Please explain your answer
Town-centre policies should prioritise the reuse of vacant premises and upper floors, improvements to public spaces and walking and cycling access, and a balanced mix of shops, services, employment and homes. Regeneration should support the distinctive character of market and coastal towns and avoid out-of-centre development that weakens their vitality.

Question 12: Are there locally specific water and energy issues that are not addressed by national policy and should be considered in the Local Plan?

a) Yes
b) No
c) Not sure

Please explain your answer

Water is a major strategic planning issue for Dorset and BCP. Significant housing growth will increase pressure on water supply, sewerage and drainage infrastructure at a time when climate change is increasing the risks of drought, groundwater, surface-water and coastal flooding.

There are significant problems of groundwater infiltration of the sewage system resulting in discharge of polluted water into our rivers. In addition, many areas are at risk of flooding including Dorchester, Weymouth, Poole and Christchurch. There is also a need to protect our sensitive riparian environments such as the Rivers Frome, Piddle, Stour, Avon and Poole Harbour.

Dorset CPRE therefore considers that water availability, wastewater capacity, flood risk and environmental limits should be treated as fundamental considerations in determining the location and scale of future development in Dorset and BCP. Development should be directed to locations where adequate infrastructure and environmental capacity can be demonstrated. We are particularly concerned about the impact of development schemes on Dorset's Chalk aquifers which are relied on to provide a ready supply of clean drinking water throughout the county and require protection.

We are concerned that Dorset Council considers Dorset, with its National Landscapes, Heritage Coast and internationally important wildlife habitats, to be a suitable location for data centres. Not only do data centres require significant quantities of water to cool the processors but also create heat islands and require significant areas of land. In our opinion Dorset, is not a suitable location for the siting of data centres. We acknowledge that National Planning Policy requires Dorset Council to plan for data centres and we ask that local plan policies set a high bar in terms of the criteria they must meet to ensure that they are situated so as to do the least harm to the environment and Dorset's precious landscapes. National CPRE has called for a pause on Data Centres until the government comes up with a proper, strategic plan.

Question 13: Are there locally specific issues to do with making effective use of land that are not addressed by national policy and should be considered in the Local Plan?

a) Yes
b) No
c) Not sure

There is increasing pressure on the county's undeveloped land, it is important that decisions relating to its use are made with the future in mind and that it is not squandered. Our green spaces and countryside are valuable not just for the joy that they bring communities and visitors, but also for their ability to feed us, fight climate change, and as a home for nature to name but a few.

We were pleased to see the emphasis in the new NPPF of accommodating as much of an area's development needs as possible on Previously Developed/ Brownfield Land. It would be good to see this policy translated into actual re-use of Brownfield Land with development prioritised on previously developed land rather than precious green fields. Where Previously Developed Land is not suitable for residential development it should be considered and allocated for alternative uses such as renewable energy generation &/restoration for nature. To ensure previously developed land is re-used it is imperative that the Brownfield Register is kept up to date.

Solar schemes should be encouraged on rooftops, over carparks and other developed land in preference to agricultural land whose use for crop production and ecosystem services must be prioritised.

Policy should support and encourage empty residential buildings to be brought back into use, and alternative uses for commercial buildings where their current use is no longer required.

Question 14: Are there locally specific Green Belt issues that are not addressed by national policy and should be considered in the Local Plan?

a) Yes
b) No
c) Not sure

To re-iterate our response to the 2025 consultation, the South East Dorset Green Belt is unique in that it incorporates internationally important heathlands, borders the New Forest National Park and overlaps in areas with the Dorset National Landscape and as such is vital for nature recovery in the county. The South East Dorset Green Belt is valued by Dorset's residents, not only for its role in preventing urban sprawl, but also for the access to the countryside and nature it provides for Urban residents. It also has a critical role to play in mitigating climate change. This role could be further enhanced and recognised by the designation of the Green Belt as a Regional Park. We do not support the release of land from the Green Belt, which will erode its statutory function of preventing urban sprawl and of serving its five purposes as set out in the NPPF.

Question 15: Are there locally specific design issues that are not addressed by national policy and should be considered in the Local Plan?

a) Yes
b) No
c) Not sure

A Dorset-wide design framework should require locally distinctive, durable and energy-efficient buildings, appropriate densities, high-quality public realm, green infrastructure, accessible homes and climate-resilient design. Major proposals should demonstrate how they respond to settlement character, landscape setting, water efficiency and whole-life environmental impacts.

Question 16: Are there locally specific transport issues that are not addressed by national policy and should be considered in the Local Plan?

a) Yes
b) No
c) Not sure

Dorset's transport infrastructure is struggling to meet its current requirements with major roads such as the A31 at capacity at peak hours with significant traffic queues and bus services that are insufficiently frequent in many areas to make them a realistic choice over car use for residents. It is essential that these issues are addressed in advance of any planned for growth in the county.

Question 17: Are there locally specific health and wellbeing issues that are not addressed by national policy and should be considered in the Local Plan?

a) Yes
b) No
c) Not sure

Please explain your answer

Health and wellbeing should be embedded in site selection and infrastructure planning. The plan should assess access to GPs, hospitals, schools, green space and community facilities; secure safe walking routes and inclusive design; and address air quality, overheating, social isolation and the needs of an ageing population. Health infrastructure requirements should be agreed early with relevant providers and linked to development phasing.

Question 18: Are there locally specific pollution, public protection and security issues that are not addressed by national policy and should be considered in the Local Plan?

a) Yes
b) No
c) Not sure

Please explain your answer

Dorset is home to globally rare chalk rivers and streams such as the Frome and Tarrant, which support critically endangered and nationally scarce invertebrates and fish species. It is essential for their protection from pollution that a development buffer of 100 metres along riparian corridors of chalk streams is introduced, to protect them from direct and indirect harm, as recommended by Natural England in their guidance for vulnerable habitats.

A great concern is the frequent discharge of sewage into Dorset's precious chalk streams and waterways this is not only an environmental issue but also a health issue for recreational users of waterways. It is essential that improvements to the existing wastewater infrastructure to create additional capacity prior to adding the burden of additional households to the network.

We are concerned about the siting of waste incinerators (Portland Incinerator) in extremely environmentally sensitive areas and in close proximity to residential areas. It is essential that local plan policies ensure that such facilities are not located near residential areas, or, areas of ecological importance.

Question 19: Are there locally specific flood risk and coastal issues that are not addressed by national policy and should be considered in the Local Plan?

a) Yes
b) No
c) Not sure

Please explain your answer

Despite National Planning Policies to ensure that development is managed to minimise the risk of flooding to people and property too many homes are being built, and are planned to be built in areas where they will not only exacerbate flooding but are likely to be flooded This is not only an environmental issue but also for future homeowners who will be potentially lumbered with homes that are stressful to live in, un-saleable and un-mortgageable. Whilst Environment Agency data is relied on for decision making and the application of the sequential test this information does not always give a true reading of local conditions. With winter rainfall levels expecting to rise and the more severe flooding predicted it is essential that the local plan ensures that homes are not built where they will both increase flooding both locally and further downstream. In particular we are concerned that proposed development around Dorchester will further increase water levels in the Lower River Frome and its tributaries, which already flood, not only entering homes but also making local roads impassable.

Question 20: Are there locally specific natural environment issues that are not addressed by national policy and should be considered in the Local Plan.

We are pleased that Dorset's natural environment is recognised as the area's greatest assets. Indeed, Dorset's environment, countryside, landscape and cultural heritage are all fundamental to thriving, sustainable, successful communities.

Nature cannot survive in isolation, if Dorset is to achieve its ambition of contributing to helping the nation meet its 30by30 target, it is essential to pursue landscape scale sustainable management guided by the Lawton principles, complemented by a system of 'green corridors' is protected, maintained and created throughout the county linking habitat sites and enabling the movement of organisms.

Soils must not be forgotten about and. Our soils are also a natural habitat (often overlooked) in their own right and support many ecosystem services (carbon sequestration, water retention, support green infrastructure,

food production etc). It is vital to consider the impact of development on soils, ensuring that disturbance is minimised and soil is protected from damage including compaction and erosion.

Question 21: Are there locally specific historic environment issues that are not addressed by national policy and should be considered in the Local Plan.

Dorset's rich cultural and historical environments make a significant contribution to the county's thriving economy and our communities, be that its prehistoric barrows and hill forts, medieval manors, WW2 armaments or links to Thomas Hardy. These are all high value attractors which need to be valued, respected and enhanced.

It is important that areas within the county with strong cultural or historical links must be protected from development and preserved for future generations. For example, Dorset's links to the author, Thomas Hardy, draws tourists to the county from far and wide, with inspiration for his books rooted in Dorset's landscapes. The rolling chalk downland surrounding Dorchester are of particular significance. Areas as such these areas should be recognised within the local plan with development steered away from these landscapes so that they can be appreciated and understood not only for their innate beauty but also for their historical and cultural significance.

Question 22: Should the local plan identify land for local waste facilities, including household recycling centres and depots?

a) Yes
b) No
c) Not sure

Please explain your answer

The local plan should identify land for **local** waste facilities ensuring that they are suitably located away from environmentally sensitive areas. In our opinion Dorset should not be handling waste that is generated outside of the county as this is damaging to Dorset's sensitive environment.

Question 23: are there any other topic areas that the Dorset Council Local Plan should cover?

a) Yes
b) No
c) Not sure.
Please explain your answer

Question 24: Do you think any additional evidence should be gathered to inform the preparation of the local plan

a) Yes
b) No
c) Not Sure

Please explain your answer

The local plan should also be informed by a Health Impact Assessment.

Question 25: Is there any existing evidence that you think should be updated

The Brownfield Register