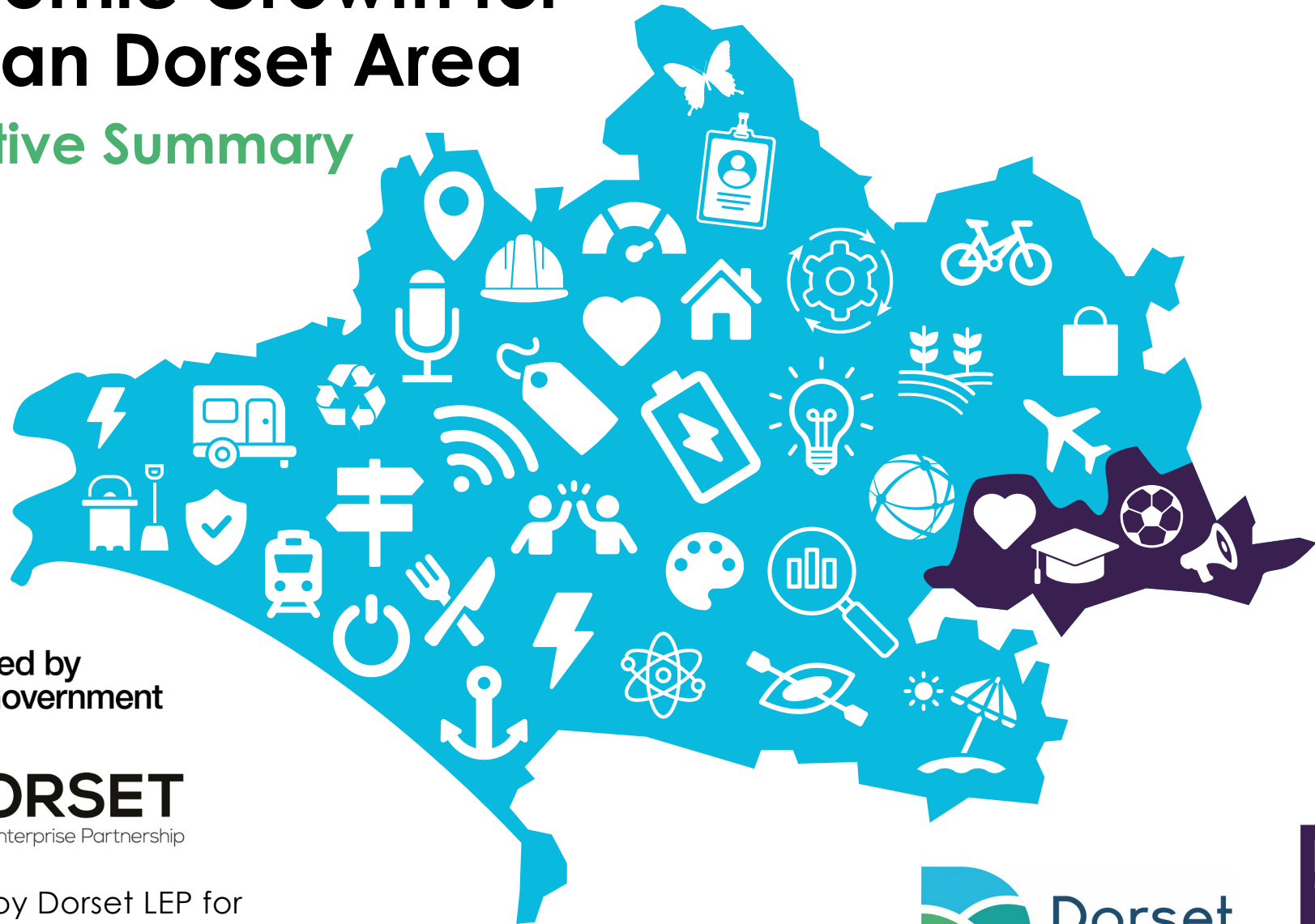




A Framework for Economic Growth for the Pan Dorset Area

Executive Summary



 **Funded by
UK Government**

 **DORSET**
Local Enterprise Partnership

Produced by Dorset LEP for
Dorset Council and Bournemouth,
Christchurch and Poole Council - March 2025

 **Dorset
Council**

**BCP
Council**


Introduction

This framework for growth sets out a plan to stimulate growth and improve prospects for people living in the Pan Dorset area. This covers the Bournemouth Christchurch and Poole Council area and Dorset Council area which reflects the need to make policy on a scale that reflects people's working, commuting and social patterns. However, we also recognise the need to work at a wider regional, national and international level on some issues. The plan therefore provides a wider framework to support Pan Dorset partners as they move forward with Devolution plans on a broader footprint.

Where are we now?

The Pan Dorset area occupies a **prime location** on the South Coast with a unique blend of urban, rural and coastal opportunities. With an output of over **£21.9bn** and over **33,000 businesses** it benefits from a microcosm of international corporations, scale-ups and SMEs.

We have considerable **untapped energy resources** and the opportunity to develop a **nationally significant clean energy cluster** centred around Portland. Our unique geology means we have potential to:

- Lead decarbonisation in the South of England and Wales through **Carbon, Capture and Storage** in the English Channel
- Expand and accelerate the UK's hydrogen economy through development of the **UK's largest hydrogen storage site** to ensure energy security

Similarly, the identification of **offshore wind sites** in the Channel, as well as the wider Celtic Sea presents opportunities for our ports to develop **manufacturing, integration and assembly capabilities** (such as the Channel Gateway project). At the same time, our long-standing relationship with nuclear energy at Winfrith provides prospects for **small scale modular nuclear reactors** (SMRs).

These nationally significant infrastructure projects will support the **national clean energy mission** and create thousands of well-paid job opportunities across the Pan Dorset area. We also benefit from many growth driving sectors, where we have a clear comparative advantage and can compete in international markets. These include:

- **Advanced manufacturing** (with a particular focus on marine/maritime, aerospace)
- **Defence**
- **Clean energy industries** (capitalising on our unique natural assets)
- **Financial services** (including Fintech)
- **Digital and creative**
- **Health and life sciences**

We are increasingly seeing growth at the **intersections between our sectors** and from businesses utilising **key enabling technologies** such as big data, internet of things, robotics etc.

Our growth driving sectors are **underpinned by our everyday economy** which provides a range of local services that are essential to the effective functioning of our economy and account for over 50% of employment. Improving productivity in these sectors is essential to

bettering the pay and prospects of people in our area, particularly women.

Businesses in the area can also benefit from the expertise available within our **three universities**, which produce almost **7,500 graduates each year**, but graduate retention is low. Similarly, our colleges and other education providers play a vital role in meeting the skills needs of our economy.

Our **town centres, district centres and local centres** form an intrinsic part of our community life and play a vital role in attracting people to the area. However, like many towns across the UK, our high streets have faced a range of challenges in recent years. A concerted effort by a range of partners as well as funding for towns has enabled the green shoots of recovery.

Our area is recognised for its **biodiversity and landscape character**, with 52% of the landscape designated as a National Landscape. Our culture, towns, coast and countryside support a visitor economy which attracts almost 24 million visitors a year who spend over £1.6bn in the local economy. Likewise, our farms make a vital contribution to UK **food security** and the area has an emerging reputation for the development of **agri-tech** and **aquaculture**. As such, our

agricultural sector also provides an opportunity for a proactive response to climate change, improved food security and a new generation of agri-tech which could diversify and strengthen our agricultural roots.

Despite our range of opportunities, there are challenges that hold back our economy.

Our evidence base shows that between 1998 and 2022, economic output increased by only 29% in real terms and that of the 38 enterprise areas in England, **only the Black Country and Cumbria grew more slowly**. This low level of growth is due to a combination of:

- **Lower than average productivity** which is £4.63/hour less than the UK average and growing more slowly than other areas
- **A plateauing working age population** which is ageing 20 years ahead of the national trend

Our labour market is under considerable strain. Businesses are struggling to recruit, and our ageing workforce is expected to exacerbate this issue. Despite our tight labour market, there are **approximately 25,500 workless people in the area who would like to work**. Long-term **sickness and early retirement** are now the most significant reasons for economic inactivity and we have a **higher proportion of**

people working part-time, which may also be constraining growth.

Despite the presence of three universities, the area has a **lower proportion of people with Level 4 or higher qualifications**. This matters, because higher skills levels are a key driver of growth. **High house prices relative to incomes** are constraining the labour market and affecting productivity by limiting the ability of workers to move. There are many factors which affect house prices, but **land constraints** are an important factor here.

Productivity is also affected by a range of **transport challenges** including north/south connectivity, congestion hotspots, poor rail connections and large rural areas which lack public transport and walking/cycling options. Likewise **digital connectivity** is a particular challenge in the Dorset Council area, due to its rural nature.

Finally, both Dorset Council and BCP Council have **declared climate and ecological emergencies** and have set out ambitions for the area to be carbon neutral by 2050 or earlier. Both Councils are working together and with partners to prepare a **local nature recovery strategy** for the area.

Our opportunity map

Dorset & BCP Area

 Dorset Area
 BCP Area

14 Blue flag beaches

National **Sailing Academy** Weymouth

Onshore **renewable energy** across the area

Jurassic Coast UNESCO World Heritage Site, 95 miles of coast representing 185m years of history

£19.5m Levelling-Up funding to support **waterside regeneration in Weymouth**

Dorset Innovation Park: An advanced engineering cluster of excellence with strengths in marine, defence and home to **Battlelab** - a state of the art defence, innovation and collaboration space. Potential for **small modular nuclear reactors**

2 colleges Bournemouth and Poole, and Weymouth and Kingston Maurward

52% of the land area is designated as a **national landscape**

3 universities with 7,500 graduates each year

AFC Bournemouth Premier League football club

£19.9m Levelling up funding to be invested in the BCP seafront to support the **seafront strategy**

Regeneration of **Poole Town Centre** as a sustainable health and vibrant place

£22m **Town deal** to create a 'Better Boscombe'

Bournemouth International Centre investment in the BIC so that it stands amongst the very best event venues in the world

Growing **cruise** destination

Smart City the UK's first open innovation system using full 5G and data platform

Bournemouth International Airport & Aviation Business Park Opportunity to create the UK's newest cargo hub to serve London and the South East. Centre of excellence in Aerospace Maintenance, Repair and Overhaul

Lansdowne Central Business District providing office space and homes

Holes Bay a 16ha former power station for 830 new homes and employment land

Wessex Fields 7.1ha strategic employment site linked to the Royal Bournemouth Hospital for a med-tech science park

Talbot Village Innovation Quarter 4.7ha linked to BU and AUB for health, innovation and incubation space

5 national portfolio organisations and wealth of cultural assets, including Bournemouth Symphony Orchestra

Shared **cultural ambitions** to nurture and retain creative talent, promote tourism and support a year round high quality inclusive arts, heritage and cultural offer

Where do we want to be?

By 2035, the pan Dorset area will be one of the best places in the world in which to live, work, invest and play.

Brimming with optimism and fuelled by dynamic, productive businesses it will be an exemplar of a modern economy in an urban, coastal and rural landscape.

Our quality of life, exciting job opportunities and culture will attract and retain young people and families. At the same time, our integrated health system will ensure everyone who wants to work is able to do so.

Finally, as one of the most biodiverse places in England, we will be an exemplar of a sustainable economy, effectively balancing the needs of today with those of tomorrow, capitalising on our world-class natural resources and supporting nature recovery.



How will we get there?

Our approach to growth is broad based and recognises that whilst we have many opportunities to stimulate growth, we also have challenges that we need to address to create the right conditions for long term, sustainable growth. Our approach therefore recognises:

1. The urgent need to **address skills shortages**. This means taking immediate action to unlock the potential of people already living here by improving skills, health and access to opportunity.

2. The need (in the medium to long term) to **retain and attract young people** to live and work in the area to counteract our ageing demographic.

This means providing a combination of:

- a. vibrant, connected places where people want to live;
- b. affordable homes; and
- c. rewarding job opportunities.

3. The opportunity to **expand our growth driving sectors** at the frontier of our economy, which have the potential to create well-paid rewarding jobs, boost economic output and compete on the international stage. But, at the same time, we must recognise that if we want to improve our productivity and wages, we must **improve the productivity of businesses in the foundation or everyday economy** which accounts for over 50% of employment in the area.

4. The need to shape and inform **nationally significant energy projects** to transform the economy and maximise their benefits for communities and minimise their impacts.

5. That to operate effectively, our economy needs **functional transport and digital infrastructure, an energy grid** that has capacity for new connections and **places for people to work**.

6. That our **natural capital supports our economy**, providing essential eco-system services as well as making the area an attractive place for people to visit and live. Our plans for growth must not erode this asset but look to enhance our natural environment for future generations.

These imperatives form the basis of the six themes and strategic objectives that run through this strategy and are illustrated in our strategic objectives overleaf:

Area of Outstanding Natural Business

Cutting Edge Industries

Growth Driving Sectors

Stimulate, promote and support our high value clusters by:

- Establishing the area as a destination for international investment
- Stimulating inward investment and exporting
- Strengthening R&D, science and innovation investment
- Promoting strong links between businesses, research assets and supply chains
- Attracting and retaining graduates and technical skills

Growth and Opportunities

Everyday Businesses

Improve the productivity, resilience and sustainability of our everyday businesses by:

- Improving technology adoption, innovation and agile thinking
- Improving access to finance
- Supporting start-ups and scale-ups
- Improving energy security and climate adaption

Empowered People

Empower all our residents to access employment and better opportunities throughout our economy by:

- Improving education and skills and preparing our workforce to support our growth driving sectors (including Energy)
- Enabling access to opportunity
- Tackling health related barriers to work and underlying causes of ill-health

Essential Foundations

Working Places

Provide the infrastructure to support growth by:

- Improving transport and digital connectivity
- Improving energy supply, security and grid capacity
- Increasing the availability of employment sites
- Developing construction skills

Vibrant Places

Champion the creation of vibrant places where people and businesses want to be by:

- Increasing the supply of homes and improving energy efficiency
- Investing in town centres
- Supporting culture
- Tackling deprivation and supporting communities

Natural Places

Maximise the potential of our natural resources by:

- Facilitating the development of the Dorset Clean Energy Supercluster and other clean energy opportunities
- Encouraging a one health approach
- Improving food security
- Providing green infrastructure to support health and well-being
- Supporting opportunities for integrated nature recovery and nature-based solutions

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