

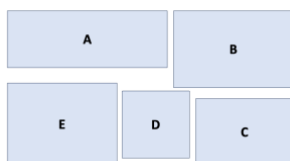
TOPIC PAPER – BUSINESS AND ECONOMY



<https://neighbourhoodplan.puncknowle-swyre-pc.gov.uk>

Document Record

Date	Issue	Description
23.12.24	Draft	Issue first draft to Amy Burnett for comment.
06.01.25	Draft, Rev.1 (6 January 2025)	Revised draft issued to Evidence Working Group and Amy Burnett. Rev.1 takes account of feedback from Amy Burnett.
06.06.25	Draft, Rev.2 (6 June 2025)	Revised draft to reflect input from Evidence Working Group, discussions at Steering Group and consideration of policies, questions for Community Survey and potential projects.
16.09.25	Draft, Rev.3 (16 September 2025)	Revised draft to reflect review of previous draft to consider: (i) alignment of policies with extant Local Plan (2015) and Consultations (2021 and 2025); (ii) removal of Community Survey questions (although still encourage residents' feedback); and (iii) corrections to text. For review by Parish Council.
TBD	Issue 1: Final (xx/yy/zz)	First formal Issue of Topic Paper for inclusion within Plan and supporting documents.

Title Page Picture Acknowledgements

- A: Tamarisk Farm, West Bexington <https://tamariskfarm.co.uk>
 B: The Crown Inn, Puncknowle <https://www.crowninndorset.co.uk>
 C: Gorselands Caravan Park, Swyre <https://www.gorselands.co.uk>
 D: S.H. Treecare, Puncknowle <https://www.shtreecare.co.uk>
 E: Flying Frenzy, West Bexington <https://www.flyingfrenzy.com>

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Individuals Involved in Collecting Evidence for this Topic

BRB (supported by many constructive suggestions from the Steering Group)

Document Purpose

To set out the rationale and evidence to support policies on business and economy for the 3 Villages Neighbourhood Plan.

Introduction

The business community is at the heart of the neighbourhood area. It is critical to sustaining the nature of the villages: providing employment, delivering services and hospitality, and supporting tourism. The farms and landowners are pivotal in maintaining the rural environment that defines the area and is enjoyed and valued by residents and visitors. The Neighbourhood Plan provides the opportunity to shape the development of the area, addressing the economy, employment and characteristics of businesses in the parish. It also builds on a previous scheme – Vital Villages - run by the Countryside Agency in 2003 to assess opportunities for funding, although it only had a limited analysis of business.

Approach

The approach to business and the economy is an important part of the Neighbourhood Plan. Business issues emerged as one of the four main themes from a Community Session on 13th May 2023 that was held to explore the requirements for, and interest in, a Neighbourhood Plan. This acknowledged “the importance of the local farms and businesses to sustaining the nature of the parish”.

Three main approaches have been followed to develop the evidence base in this area since the Steering Group was established (in June 2023). First of all, the **census data** from the Office of National Statistics undertaken in 2021 and published in 2022 provided an important source of socio-economic data at both parish and broader levels. Most of the parish data were shared with the residents at a community drop-in event in April 2024 on Housing and Development (see Neighbourhood Plan website). The census data provide a range of information including occupations, socio-economic classification, hours worked per week, economic activity status, employment history, method of travel to workplace, and distance travelled to work. The census also provides interesting economic data at a county level with other analyses covering “Lower layer Super Output Area (LOAS) – or essentially “ward” area. Thus the Indices of Deprivation for 2015 and 2019 show that the Chesil Bank ward was ranked as 18,171 out of 32,844 LOASs in England. As such, much of the economic data for the neighbourhood area are fairly typical of those for Dorset as a whole (noting though, as discussed elsewhere, that the age profiles in the parish are skewed towards the older population).

The second approach was to generate primary data through **community engagement** to gather evidence, canvass views and explore the views from business owners and managers. The first action was to establish what businesses were in the parish - particularly the smaller, often one-person, businesses that operate from residential addresses. Hence, there was a period of iteration where an embryonic list of businesses was shared with the Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group and the Parish Council in order to make it as complete as possible. However, whilst the vast majority was easily defined, there was some ambiguity

over the smallest businesses - particularly letting properties. The second action was designing a questionnaire to provide data of greatest benefit for the business community and Neighbourhood Plan. As well as a process of iteration with members of the Steering Group, the experience was drawn from a number of neighbouring parishes in conducting business surveys. There was also a trial with five representative businesses that gave useful feedback in designing the survey. Finally, our consultant – Amy Burnett of Development in Transition – also reviewed and helped improve the draft questionnaire. The survey went to all businesses on 4th March 2024 with reminders issued on 23rd March and 23rd April 2024. Data protection issues were addressed: although the survey did not give any contact information for the businesses, in a small rural community like ours, it is inevitable that some businesses could be identified from the responses. This point was raised in the introduction to the survey and responders asked to avoid sharing any commercially-sensitive information. In a similar vein, the draft report was shared with all the businesses that responded, providing a four-week window for the opportunity to comment and/or correct errors before publication of the first formal version on the Neighbourhood Plan web page. The report was published on 4th September 2024 and put on the web-site. The total response rate was 56% (22 out of 39 businesses) which was encouraging, particularly when compared with similar surveys in other neighbourhood plans. However, care should be taken in extrapolating the results to the whole parish. In particular, one business in the parish is very different from the others. It is located on the edge of the parish and employs about 150 people but few of these, if any, reside in the parish. Most businesses have far fewer numbers and often are one-person operations. The businesses in the parish also vary enormously, ranging from those with a strong local reach to those with a regional, national, and occasionally international, impact.

The third strand of the evidence gathering was researched at a broader, typically county level so that the parish result could be put in context. A key document was the Local Plan completed in 2015 for West Dorset, Weymouth and Portland, and also the emerging draft for Dorset Council that should be adopted in 2027. This has been reviewed with respect to policies on economy, agriculture and tourism. Whilst the 2015 Local Plan has a chapter dedicated to Economy, it is relatively silent on our neighbourhood area (no key employment sites were identified). It does however contain useful sections on economic development, farming and tourism. This 2015 Local Plan is the extant source of local policies and is analysed in Appendix II. Since its publication, there have been two further Consultations: in January 2021 and August 2025. Whilst these are both important documents that indicate the direction of policy thinking, they do not radically change the approach to Business and Economy. Their policy implications are also summarised in Appendix II. The Dorset Economic Growth Strategy was another useful source of information. Tourism is highlighted in the Local Plan and is important to the parish. One constraint of the business survey identified earlier was the limited information on holiday lettings. Hence, research was undertaken into the role and economics of the tourist industry in Dorset. This included understanding the mix of day-trip and longer-stay visitors to the county and the seasonality of the tourist industry. Here an extensive review of the economic impact of Dorset's visitor economy was conducted for the Dorset Tourism Partnership in 2019 and is a valuable source document. However, since this assessment was conducted, the COVID-19 pandemic affected the hospitality sector with businesses in the parish impacted.

A Policy is developed for the Neighbourhood Plan that seeks to recognise and promote the role of business in the parish. Like other parts of the Plan, the business and economy of the parish does not sit in isolation, and these policies will be cross-referenced with other relevant policies in the plan. The role of local businesses is an important part of the **vision** for the Neighbourhood Plan and is also reflected in specific **objectives**: [NB Being reviewed]

2.2 “sustain a focused, vibrant, and balanced community that meets the needs of our residents, businesses and visitors;

2.3 “recognise the importance of tourism to the local economy and seek to strike a balance in the types of accommodation available;

2.4 “encourage and support effective land management (large and small), and local businesses and include improving infrastructure where possible;

“reflect the value of community hubs, such as the Village Hall, churches, pubs, and restaurants, and seek to ensure they are maintained and enhanced where possible.”

Action points will be included to raise the profile of business and economy.

Business and Economy: Action Points

Ref	Summary	Responsible Person	Status
B&E 1	Produce listing of all businesses	BRB (in Plan)	Complete
B&E 2	Enhance synergies between businesses	Separate project for Parish Council to consider; should be led by volunteer from business community	Being considered by SG as a separate project for PC
B&E 3	Explore “Bride Valley Discount Card”	Person from Business Community to lead and interface with stakeholders	Dependent on above

Data Sources

1. West Dorset, Weymouth & Portland Local Plan 2015
<https://www.dorsetcouncil.gov.uk/documents/35024/327480/West+Dorset%2C+Weymouth+h%26+Portland+Local+Plan+2015.pdf/e6f329e7-ec5b-52fc-7364-4a8726877184>
2. Dorset Local Plan – Consultation January 2021
<https://www.dorsetcouncil.gov.uk/documents/35024/285538/DCLP-Jan-2021-DorsetCouncilLocalPlan-vol1.pdf/7e0ff0f0-426f-523d-bd45-cc1fe4d60fac>
and Consultation August 2025
<https://www.dorsetcouncil.gov.uk/documents/d/guest/dorset-council-local-plan-options-consultation-document-2025-printweb-final>
3. Office of National Statistics Census 2021 <https://www.ons.gov.uk/census>
4. Vital Villages, Puncknowle, Swyre and West Bexington, Countryside Agency, October 2003.
[NB Will need a reference]
5. Dorset’s Economic Growth Strategy – Business and Environment, 2024
<https://www.dorsetcouncil.gov.uk/w/business-and-environment#:~:text=Our%20aim%20is%20to%20ensure,new%20businesses%20to%20the%20area.>

6. The Economic Impact of Dorset's Visitor Economy 2019 Dorset and Districts, November 2020
https://assets.simpleviewinc.com/simpleview/image/upload/v1/clients/dorset/2019_The_Economic_Impact_of_Dorset_s_Visitor_Economy_338a1a8e-7f3c-44da-9442-8ac7be65f3a3.pdf
7. Dorset Council State of Dorset Reports into Economy and Tourism, e.g.
<https://gi.dorsetcouncil.gov.uk/insights/Reports/Topic/Economy>
8. Business and Economy Sections from Neighbourhood Plans of local parishes, e.g. Chesil Bank
<https://www.dorsetcouncil.gov.uk/documents/35024/4310929/Chesil+Bank+Neighbourhood+Plan+%282022-2032%29.pdf/a6401fb1-4f46-549a-0879-05a323bd1430>
9. Neighbourhood Plan for Puncknowle, Swyre and West Bexington Business Engagement Survey March/April 2024
https://neighbourhoodplan.puncknowle-swyre-pc.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/09/NP_BUSINESS-ENGAGEMENT-Report-4-Sept-2024.pdf

Key Stakeholders

- Business owners/managers in parish.
- Local Dorset Councillor (Sally Holland for Chesil Bank ward).
- Dorset Council and related activities linked with business and employment (Dorset Community Action, Inspire Dorset, Dorset Growth Hub, Dorset Local Enterprise Partnership, Dorset Business Mentoring).
- Federation of Small Businesses – South West.
- Dorset Tourist Industry, including National Landscape (notably for Tourism and Visitor Management) and Visit Dorset.

Key Takeaways

- Stronger encouragement for development to help sustain and grow businesses in the parish, particularly where they are in keeping with the landscape and rural environment.
- Encouragement for affordable housing to help local families remain and work in the area.
- Increase and promote community and business awareness of local business activities.
- Recognise importance of tourism to the area whilst balancing need to sustain rural environment.

Draft Policies

POLICY B&E1. Business Support

Business development will be supported where it brings sustainable benefits to the community (e.g. employment, environment, health and well-being) and fit well with the rural character of the area.

RELATED POLICY

Repurposing Disused Buildings (Linked with Development)

Potential Question for Community Discussion

Business and Economy

Business activities within the parish include farms, leisure facilities (e.g. caravan sites, pubs and restaurants) and a range of small enterprises that often operate from residential addresses and/or manage tourist accommodation.

Q. Do you agree that local business development should be supported as long as it benefits the community, is sustainable and does not impact the rural character of the area?

A. Yes/No

Appendices

Appendix I: Key references and additional information

1. West Dorset, Weymouth & Portland Local Plan 2015
<https://www.dorsetcouncil.gov.uk/documents/35024/327480/West+Dorset%2C+Weymouth+h+%26+Portland+Local+Plan+2015.pdf/e6f329e7-ec5b-52fc-7364-4a8726877184>
2. Dorset Local Plan – Consultation January 2021
<https://www.dorsetcouncil.gov.uk/documents/35024/285538/DCLP-Jan-2021-DorsetCouncilLocalPlan-vol1.pdf/7e0ff0f0-426f-523d-bd45-cc1fe4d60fac>
and Consultation August 2025
<https://www.dorsetcouncil.gov.uk/documents/d/guest/dorset-council-local-plan-options-consultation-document-2025-printweb-final>
3. Dorset’s Economic Growth Strategy – Business and Environment, 2024
<https://www.dorsetcouncil.gov.uk/w/business-and-environment#:~:text=Our%20aim%20is%20to%20ensure,new%20businesses%20to%20the%20area.>

4. Town and Country Planning (Use Classes), 1987 (as amended 2020), for example, as summarised in Lichfields Guide <https://lichfields.uk/content/projects/use-classes-order-guide/>
5. Vital Villages, Puncknowle, Swyre and West Bexington, Countryside Agency, October 2003. **[NB Will need a reference]**
6. The Economic Impact of Dorset's Visitor Economy 2019 Dorset and Districts, November 2020 https://assets.simpleviewinc.com/simpleview/image/upload/v1/clients/dorset/2019_The_Economic_Impact_of_Dorset_s_Visitor_Economy_338a1a8e-7f3c-44da-9442-8ac7be65f3a3.pdf
7. Place and Resources Scrutiny Committee 9 November 2023 Review of Dorset Council's Tourism Service <https://moderngov.dorsetcouncil.gov.uk/documents/s37387/Review%20of%20Dorset%20Councils%20Tourism%20Service.pdf>
8. Dorset Council State of Dorset Economy December 2023 <https://gi.dorsetcouncil.gov.uk/insights/Reports/Topic/Economy>
9. Dorset County Council Our Communities Topic Report: Tourism September 2018 https://gi.dorsetcouncil.gov.uk/insights/Home/Asset/407?asset_type=report&asset_id=226#:~:text=Visitor%20spend%20of%20£1.1,chain%20impacts%20could%20double%20this.&text=Dorset%20attracts%20a%20mix
10. Chesil Bank Neighbourhood Plan 2022 – 2032 <https://www.dorsetcouncil.gov.uk/documents/35024/4310929/Chesil+Bank+Neighbourhood+Plan+%282022-2032%29.pdf/a6401fb1-4f46-549a-0879-05a323bd1430>
11. Stinsford Neighbourhood Plan 2021 – 2038 https://124360045-544340106590976001.preview.editmysite.com/uploads/1/2/4/3/124360045/stinsford_neighbourhood_plan_adopted_2022.pdf
12. Charmouth Neighbourhood Plan November 2021 https://www.dorsetcouncil.gov.uk/documents/35024/1896965/Charmouth_NHP_November_2021_FINAL_VERSION+reduced.PDF/f1dee45c-b470-882c-be88-311dc5d8296c
13. Askerswell Neighbourhood Plan 2018 – 2028 https://www.dorsetcouncil.gov.uk/documents/35024/296604/Askerswell_NP_Referendum.pdf/9f4af99a-2278-ba50-63e8-d3650f01b564
14. Office of National Statistics Census 2021 <https://www.ons.gov.uk/census> Also used in parish demographic and socio-economic data for Puncknowle and Swyre, and Dorset salary data <https://neighbourhoodplan.puncknowle-swyre-pc.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/09/16-Puncknowle-Census-2021-ONS.pdf> ; <https://neighbourhoodplan.puncknowle-swyre-pc.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/09/15-Swyre-Census-2021-ONS-2.pdf> ; <https://www.varbes.com/salary/dorset-salary>
15. Neighbourhood Plan for Puncknowle, Swyre and West Bexington Business Engagement Survey March/April 2024 https://neighbourhoodplan.puncknowle-swyre-pc.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/09/NP_BUSINESS-ENGAGEMENT-Report-4-Sept-2024.pdf

Appendix II: Dorset Local Plan 2015 Economic Policies - Analysis

Policy	Detail	Analysis
ECON1. PROVISION OF EMPLOYMENT	i) Employment development will generally be supported: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • within or on the edge of a settlement; • through the intensification or extension of existing premises; • as part of a farm diversification scheme; • through the re-use or replacement of an existing building; or • in a rural location where this is essential for that type of business. ii) Proposals for live-work developments will be supported in locations considered suitable for open market residential development.	Relevant to NP and to be reflected in text and policies.
ECON2. PROTECTION OF KEY EMPLOYMENT SITES	i) Within key employment sites (as identified on the policies map) applications for B1 (light industrial), B2 (general industrial), B8 (storage and distribution) and other similar uses will be permitted subject to proposals not having a significant adverse impact on surrounding land uses. ii) The use of key employment sites for employment purposes other than B1, B2 and B8 may be appropriate if it can be proven that the use provides on-site support facilities or demonstrates an economic enhancement over and above B1 / B2 / B8 uses. Such development will not prejudice the efficient and effective use of the remainder of the employment area. iii) Retail uses will not generally be supported. Exceptionally, uses which have trade links with employment uses or are un-neighbourly in character (such as car showrooms, tyre and exhaust centres, or trade counters) may be permitted on employment sites which have good access to a range of transport options. iv) Other uses that do not provide direct, on-going local employment opportunities will not be permitted.	Not relevant to NP – No key employment site within parish identified within Local Plan.
ECON3. PROTECTION OF OTHER EMPLOYMENT SITES	i) Outside key employment sites, the redevelopment of existing employment sites to an alternative employment use will normally be permitted. ii) The redevelopment of employment land and premises for non-employment uses that are in accordance with other planning policies will be permitted where it will not prejudice the efficient and effective use of the remainder of the employment area and:	Relevant to NP and to be reflected in text and policies.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the present (or where vacant or derelict, the previous) use causes significant harm to the character or amenities of the surrounding area and it has been demonstrated that no other appropriate viable alternative employment uses could be attracted to the site; or • a substantial over-supply of suitable alternative employment sites is locally available; or • redevelopment of the site would offer important community benefits or no significant loss of jobs / potential jobs. 	
<p>ECON4. RETAIL AND TOWN CENTRE DEVELOPMENT</p>	<p>i) Development proposals for retail and town centre development should be appropriate in type and scale to the particular centre and its catchment population.</p> <p>ii) Small scale development of shops, financial and professional services, food and drink, office, leisure and community uses will be permitted in local centres.</p> <p>iii) A sequential approach will be taken to planning applications for new (or major extensions to) retail and town centre uses, except in the case of:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • small scale rural development (including offices); • small scale community facilities; • employment trade related uses on key employment sites. <p>iv) Development likely to lead to significant adverse impacts on existing centres will be refused.</p> <p>v) Development will be expected to maintain an appropriate concentration and mix of retail and other town centre uses in the centre, to protect its vitality and viability. Retail uses should normally make up about 75% or more of the nearby ground floor primary shopping frontage. Retail and other main town centre uses should make up about 75% or more of the nearby ground floor secondary shopping frontage. Development in these locations will be expected to have its main access and windows onto the primary (or secondary) frontage.</p> <p>vi) The use of upper floors of premises in the town centre areas for residential or commercial uses will be encouraged subject to the ground floor use not being undermined and, where possible, separate access to the upper floors being provided.</p>	<p>Not relevant to our rural parish.</p>

<p>ECON5. TOURISM ATTRACTIONS AND FACILITIES</p>	<p>i) Proposals for new, or extensions to, tourism attractions and facilities will be encouraged and supported, particularly where they would:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • enhance an existing attraction or facility; or • provide wider environmental benefits, such as helping maintain an historic building; or • provide wider community benefits, such as a new recreational facility that will be used by the local community as well as visitors; or • increase the quality and diversity of the tourism offer in the local area and benefit the local economy. <p>ii) Development should, where possible and practicable, be located within or close to established settlements, or make use of existing or replacement buildings.</p> <p>iii) Major tourism attractions should preferably be located within the towns and will be expected to provide adequate visitor facilities, such as parking and toilets, rather than relying on community facilities in the area.</p>	<p>Relevant to NP and to be reflected in text and policies.</p>
<p>ECON6. BUILT TOURIST ACCOMMODATION</p>	<p>i) New built tourist accommodation will be supported:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Within an established settlement of more than 200 population; • Through the re-use of an existing building; • Through the replacement, intensification or extension of existing premises where the expansion would improve the quality and appearance of the accommodation and site. <p>ii) Larger hotel / guesthouse developments should be located within the town centres.</p> <p>iii) Proposals that would result in the permanent loss or reduction in size of hotels and larger guesthouses will be resisted unless it can be demonstrated that their tourist function is no longer viable and there is no market for the business as a going concern.</p>	<p>Minor relevance to NP.</p>
<p>ECON7. CARAVAN AND CAMPING SITES</p>	<p>i) New caravan and camping sites should be well located in relation to existing facilities or make appropriate provision for facilities on site. Farm diversification projects (for agricultural and other land-based rural businesses) for new caravan and camping sites will be supported, provided they are in keeping with the rural character and the development makes an on-going contribution to the business that is diversifying.</p>	<p>Minor relevance to NP</p>

	<p>ii) Proposals for the expansion, intensification or reorganisation of existing sites must clearly demonstrate that development forms part of a long term management plan to improve the quality and appearance of the accommodation and site.</p> <p>iii) All development (including the change of use from touring to static units) must not, individually or cumulatively, have a significant adverse impact on the distinctive characteristics of the areas landscape, heritage or built environment. Proposals in the Heritage Coast are unlikely to be supported.</p> <p>iv) Development proposals must include an appropriate landscape scheme and provision for its ongoing maintenance</p>	
ECON8. DIVERSIFICATION OF LAND-BASED RURAL BUSINESSES	<p>i) Diversification projects (for agricultural and other land-based rural businesses) for the use of land or buildings for non-agricultural employment purposes will be supported, provided they are in keeping with the rural character and comprise:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The use of land; or • The re-use or replacement of an existing building or buildings; or • New ancillary development that relates well to existing development provided that there are no redundant buildings capable of re-use /replacement. <p>ii) The proposed diversification must make an on-going contribution to sustaining the enterprise and may be required to be tied by legal agreement to the business that is diversifying.</p>	Relevant to NP and to be reflected in text and policies.
ECON9. NEW AGRICULTURAL BUILDINGS	<p>i) The development of new agricultural buildings, or extension of existing buildings, will be permitted where the development is necessary for the purposes of agriculture on the unit or locally where facilities are to be shared, and there are no existing buildings on the unit which are capable of re-use. The scale, siting, design and external appearance of the buildings should be designed to minimise adverse impact on the landscape character and residential amenity.</p>	Relevant to NP and to be reflected in text and policies.
ECON10. EQUESTRIAN DEVELOPMENT	<p>i) Equestrian developments, including extensions to existing premises, will be permitted where:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Schemes would not, individually or cumulatively, harm the landscape character or rural amenity of the countryside; and • The scale of development is appropriate to the proposed use and the number of horses to be kept; and 	Potential minor relevance to neighbourhood area.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Adequate supervision can be provided without the need for new or additional on-site residential accommodation; and • In the case of substantial built development proposals, a satisfactory independent assessment is submitted regarding the long term economic viability of the enterprise. <p>ii) Development should make use of existing buildings where possible and must otherwise relate well to existing development.</p> <p>iii) Proposals to re-use or adapt substantial purpose-built equestrian holdings for non-equestrian uses will only be permitted where it can be demonstrated that continued equestrian use is inappropriate or unviable. Proposed uses must be in accordance with other plan policies.</p>	
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Implications of Dorset Local Plan Consultation January 2021 to Economic Policies

Whilst the Dorset Local Plan Consultation in January 2021 provided welcome improvements in its approach to many areas – not least in development, the changes to economic policy were more modest. The strategic priority was to deliver sustainable economic growth and improved infrastructure across the whole of Dorset, increasing productivity and the number of high-quality jobs, creating great places to live, work and visit. The ambition was to create 21,000 new jobs over the lifetime of the plan. The economic policies were structured in a similar manner to the 2015 plan, i.e.

- ECON1 Protection of Key Employment Sites
- ECON2 Protection of Other Employment Sites
- ECON3 Hierarchy of Centres and the Sequential Test
- ECON4 Town Centre Impact Assessments
- ECON5 Management of Centres, Primary Shopping Areas and Markets
- ECON6 Supporting Vibrant and Attractive Tourism
- ECON7 Loss of Tourist Accommodation
- ECON8 Caravan and Camping Sites
- ECON9 New Agricultural Buildings
- ECON10 Diversification of Land-based Rural Businesses
- ECON11 Equestrian Development

ECON2 contains information on the re-use of buildings that is relevant to our NP but broadly reproduces the wording of ECON3 from the 2015 Plan (as above). Policies ECON6 to ECON8 do not contain any changes of significance to our parish compared with policies ECO5 to ECON7 in the 2015 Plan (see above). Similarly, whilst ECON10 on the diversification of land-based rural businesses supports the re-use of buildings that is relevant to our Neighbourhood Plan, the wording is similar to ECON8 in the 2015 Plan (see above).

Implications of Dorset Local Plan Consultation August 2025 to Economic Policies

The Dorset Local Plan Consultation in August 2025 is at an earlier stage of consultation than the January 2021 cited above. Thus, no target for new jobs is identified. Rather it focuses on providing the land necessary to meet employment requirements. An Employment Land Study was completed in 2024 and considered the employment land demand and supply in the area through an assessment of employment needs within the Functional Economic Market Area from 2021 to 2039. It highlights which employment sectors are expected to see strong growth and those which are predicted to decline. The work looked at the strategic need for employment space across the whole area rather than by individual settlement but does identify a range of future requirements for Dorset Council. For the Dorset Council area, the study suggested that between 2021 and 2039, there is an overall requirement for between 111.8 to 162.8ha land (375,200 to 532,300 sqm floorspace) to be delivered. The main employment sites suggested mirror those in earlier Plans and do not include our neighbourhood area. Even away from the allocated sites, the Consultation concentrates on the larger villages and towns (Tiers 1 to 3). There is little recognition of the economy directly linked with tourism.

Appendix III: Draft Plan Proposed Text

Sub-Section in “A Portrait of our Parish”

2.6 Business & Economy

2.6.1 The business community is at the heart of the parish. It is critical to sustaining the nature of the villages: providing employment, delivering services and hospitality, and supporting tourism. The farms and landowners are critical in maintaining the rural environment that defines the area and is enjoyed and valued by residents and visitors. There are about 40 businesses that operate in the parish including agriculture, tourism and hospitality, food production and services. Most of the businesses are well-established and relatively small. The business community supports nearly 300 jobs, although one major food production business based at the edge of the parish dominates this figure.

Sub-Section in Engagement with the Community: Business Survey, Spring 2024

4.2 Business Survey, Spring 2024

What we did

4.2.1 We initially established what businesses were based in the parish – this was more challenging for the smaller, often one-person, businesses that operate from residential addresses. The second issue was designing a questionnaire to provide data of greatest benefit for the business community and Neighbourhood Plan. Experience was gained from a number of neighbouring parishes in conducting business surveys. There was also a trial with five representative businesses that gave useful feedback in designing the survey. The survey went to all businesses on 4th March 2024 with reminders issued on 23rd March and 23rd April 2024. Data protection issues were addressed within the survey given the small rural nature of the parish. The report was published on 4th September 2024.

What we found out

4.2.2 The total response rate was 56% (22 out of 39 businesses) which was encouraging, particularly when compared with similar surveys in other neighbourhood plans. The survey results were considered in four areas: agriculture & food production, hospitality & tourism, services and other.

4.2.3 Whilst there is a very diverse range of businesses across the parish, they are united by a strong commitment to the local area and desire to sustain both the landscape and vibrant and active community. The farms and landowners are pivotal in sustaining the rural environment that defines the area and is enjoyed by the residents.

4.2.4 Most of the businesses are well established, typically operating in the parish for 20+ years. One business in the parish is very different from the others. It is located on the edge of the parish and employs about 150 people but few of these, if any, reside in the parish.

Most businesses have far fewer numbers and often are one-person operations. An informed extrapolation of the responses infers that the business community supports around 200 full-time, 60 part-time and 30 seasonal jobs in the parish.

4.2.5 Many of the business community thought that there is relatively little awareness of this business activity by the majority of residents (with recognition also that the businesses could do more to promote themselves). Most businesses felt that community cohesion would be enhanced by greater awareness of, and support for, local businesses. Some businesses were particularly appreciative of the support from the Parish Council, but others felt that the Parish Council(s)¹ and Dorset Council could play a stronger, more proactive, role to help local businesses, e.g. with a supportive attitude to planning applications that fit in well with the landscape and environment. The need for more affordable housing, particularly to enable young families to live and work in the area was highlighted by a number of businesses in the survey.

4.2.6 Some businesses – notably in tourism and hospitality – were more affected by the COVID-19 pandemic than others; they have also suffered from the challenging economic times and significant increases in energy and other business costs. There is also some evidence that people’s desire to work from home can make it more difficult to attract people to jobs with traditional working patterns. Some businesses were able to expand their footprint during the pandemic and also could take advantage of more on-line business.

4.2.7 Many of the business community have a passion for the local environment and commitment to long-term sustainable businesses. This was shown in feedback showing interest in effective environmental management (albeit with concern on both the cost and impact of some regulations), sustainability, and renewable energy. Water management is a significant issue, with a number of areas increasingly affected by flooding. The state of the infrastructure was also a concern with both the poor maintenance of roads (pot-holes), the lack of public transport, and broadband limitations and mobile phone signal coverage affecting some businesses.

Chapter: Business and Economy

7 Business and Economy

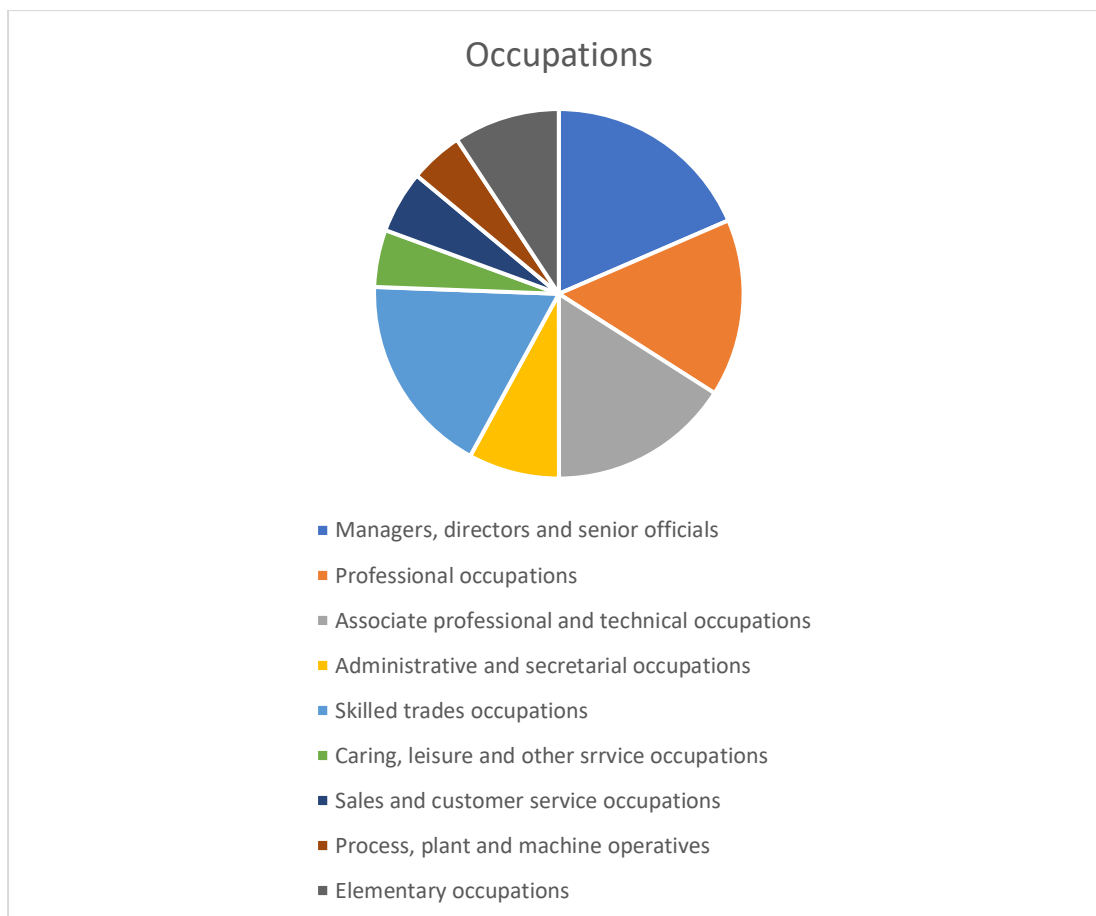
7.1 Economic Context

7.1.1 The overall contribution to UK GDP from the Dorset economy in 2023 was £9.3B. The average salary in Dorset was £32,001. This is 8.8% lower than England’s national average salary of £35,106. The average weekly hours worked in Dorset is currently 39 hours with the average male working 39 hours per week and the average female 37.0 hours per week. For context, the average price of a house in Dorset was £408,500.

¹ NB Some of the businesses border and hence interact with neighbouring parishes.

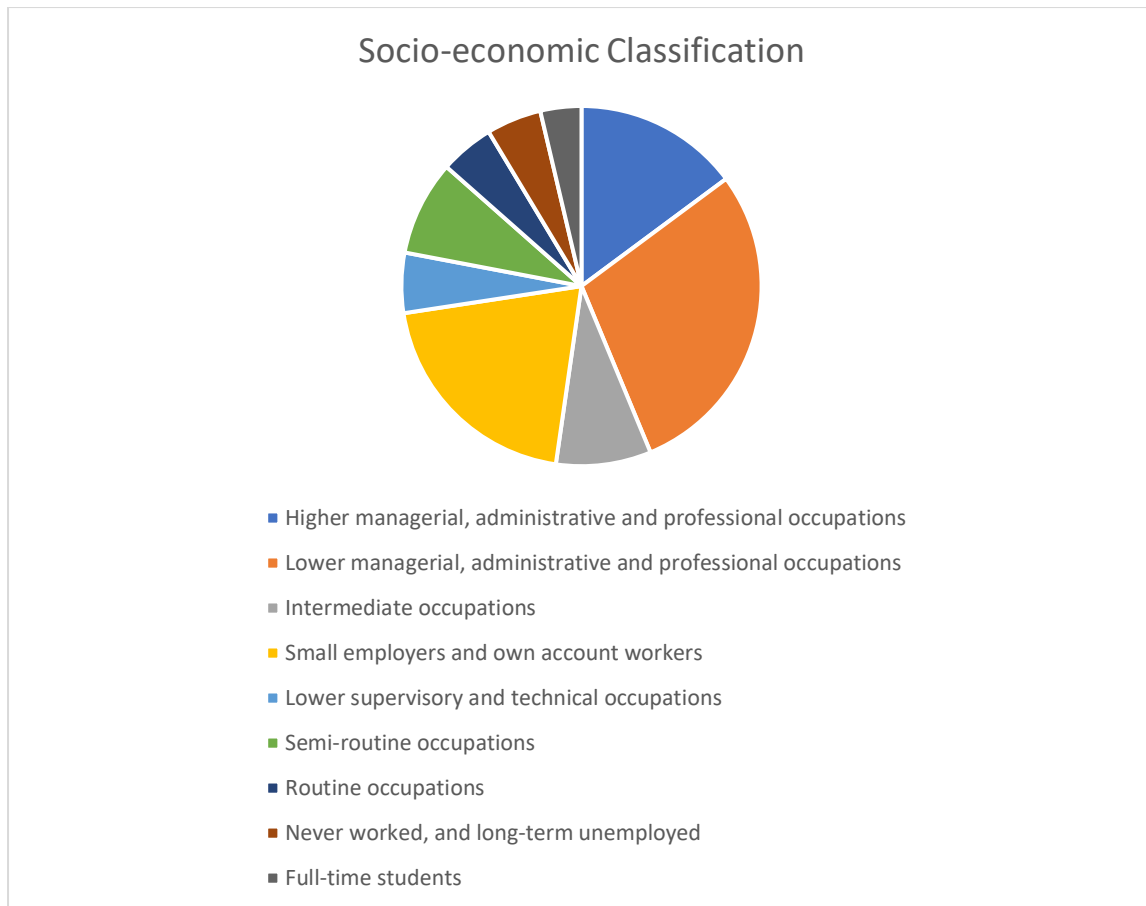
7.1.2 The socio-economic and demographic data from the 2021 Census for the Neighbourhood Area show a distinctly older age profile than the average in England for the two parishes. Hence, it is not surprising that there is a large retired population with only 50.3% of Puncknowle residents and 54.0% of Swyre residents economically active². Of those who work, just over half work full-time (31-48 hours a week), 14% work more than 49 hours a week, 15% work part-time (16–30 hours) and 18% work part-time (less than 15 hours a week). A significant number of those who work do so mainly at or from home (42%), with the vast majority (90%) of those who need to travel to work driving a car or van. For those residents that need to drive they have a range of distances to reach work (12.5% <10km, 16.7% 10–30km, 14.2% >30km).

7.1.3 The range of occupations across the Neighbourhood Area for residents aged 16 years and over in employment is illustrated below.



7.1.4 The socio-economic classification of people aged 16 years and over for the residents of the Neighbourhood Area is shown overleaf.

² Data from the Vital Villages survey undertaken in 2003 indicate a similar level of employment with 33% employed and 18% self-employed.



7.1.5 As noted above, the 2021 census data show that about 20% of the residents work mainly at or from home. It is likely that this figure will increase given the trend for increased homeworking and limited public transport. Such homeworking is likely to help sustain more active village communities and lessen environmental impacts. However, it also depends on good connectivity and work to encourage good mobile and broad coverage, both in residential homes and community assets.

7.2 Employment

7.2.1 There are about 40 businesses that operate in the parish, as shown in Table 1. These businesses vary enormously, ranging from those with a strong local reach to those with a regional, national, and occasionally international, impact. Most of these are relatively small (sole traders or micro businesses employing fewer than 10 staff). Most of the smaller businesses were home-based but the larger businesses had their own business premises (typically Class E). The businesses in the parish can be considered in four classes: agriculture and food production, tourism and hospitality, services, and other. Most of the businesses are well-established, typically operating in the parish for 20+ years. From the survey it is inferred that the business community supports around 200 full-time, 60 part-time and 30 seasonal jobs, although these data are skewed by one major food production business based at the edge of the parish.

Table 1. List of Businesses

Business	Village
<u>Farms and Food Production</u>	
Ford Farm (Cheese Factory)	Puncknowle (Litton Cheney)
Hazel Lane Farm (The Dairy)	Swyre
Manor Farm	Swyre
Manor Mead Farm	West Bexington
Modbury Farm	Swyre
National Trust	West Bexington/Swyre
Tamarisk Farm	West Bexington
The Manor	Puncknowle
Water Lane Fish Farm	Puncknowle
West Mill Farm (River Bride Herd)	Puncknowle
<u>Hospitality & Tourism</u>	
Crown Inn	Puncknowle
Gorselands Caravan Park	Swyre/West Bexington
Home Farm (Fergorse Campsite)	Puncknowle
Manor Hotel	West Bexington
Swyre Retreat	Swyre (Puncknowle)
The Lemon Tree (The Bull) ³	Swyre (Puncknowle)
The Club House	West Bexington
Vurlands (Egg Cup)	Swyre
<u>Other</u>	
Bride Valley Nurseries	Puncknowle (Litton)
Creative Glass Design	Puncknowle
Flowerdew Farm, Hazel Lane	Puncknowle
Flying Frenzy	West Bexington
Soft Furnishing	West Bexington
Modbury Farm Shop	Swyre
Sea Springs Seeds (chillies)	West Bexington
She sews on the sea shore	West Bexington
<u>Services</u>	
Bride Valley Reflexology	Puncknowle
Dorset to Doorstep (Taxi)	Puncknowle
Flintstone Contractors (Builder)	Puncknowle
Flower Social CIC (Florist)	Puncknowle
Garden Services	Puncknowle
James AW Harris (Electrician)	Puncknowle
Jobsons (Chimney sweep)	Puncknowle
Olliffe Plumbing	Swyre
PMJ Motorcycles	Puncknowle
S.H. Tree Care	Puncknowle
Sinclair Electrical	West Bexington
South Spark	Puncknowle
Landscape Gardener	Puncknowle
Garden Services	Swyre

³ The Lemon Tree was established after the Business Survey was completed but recently closed.

7.3 Agriculture & Food Production

7.3.1 The farms and landowners are critical to sustaining the rural environment that defines the area and is enjoyed by both residents and tourists. Although the nature and sizes of the farms vary, there were some common issues across this group, as summarised below.

- General feeling that the Parish(s) and Dorset Council could take a more pro-active position in supporting business, notably in planning permissions for applications that fit well with the landscape and vernacular.
- Some difficulties in attracting staff, with particular concerns about the lack of more affordable housing and the state of rural infrastructure (roads, water management and drainage, mobile phone coverage and bus service).
- Commitment to sustainable operations (renewable energy, environmental management).
- Limited awareness of businesses from residents and visitors. Whilst most of community was felt to be supportive, greater access had led to some issues with a small minority of inconsiderate visitors (e.g. litter, gates left open, dog owners not picking up).
- Some interest in exploring alternative uses for under-utilised and listed buildings.

7.3.2 Two of the Local Plan (2015) policies relate to this sector: ECON8 (Diversification of Land-Based Rural Businesses) and ECON9 (New Agricultural Buildings) and should be used to consider any relevant development proposals.

7.4 Tourism & Hospitality

7.4.1 Tourism has an important economic impact on the parish and wider area with West Dorset estimated to have a total visitor spend of >£300M with tourism accounting for 15% of all employment.

7.4.2 Many of the businesses in the parish in the tourism and hospitality sector are well established with a loyal customer base. Whilst the COVID-19 pandemic forced changes – necessitating closure and restrictions, they have generally recovered well. However, the restaurants/pubs are particularly impacted by the seasonality of the tourist industry and have suffered in the difficult economic environment (including high energy costs). Changes in social habits may also have been accelerated by the pandemic with less footfall in the pubs, restaurants and hotels.

7.4.3 A number of policies within the West Dorset, Weymouth and Portland Plan (2015) relate to tourism and hospitality, notably ECON5 (tourism attractions and facilities), ECON 6 (built tourist accommodation) and ECON7 (Caravan and Camping Sites). These all seek to balance the economic benefits of tourism with the environmental impact and wider community benefits and should be used in the parish for any relevant development proposals.

7.5 Other Local Business Needs

7.5.1 A number of other themes emerged from the business survey as summarised below:

- There are synergies between the businesses, e.g. tourists are attracted to the area by the rural environment and Heritage Coast that are maintained by the farms and landowners; tourist accommodation supports greater use of the restaurants and pubs.
- Interest in affordable housing but little support for further second homes and holiday lets beyond their current footprint. Some interest in alternative uses for under-utilised agricultural buildings.
- Recognition of the importance of sustainability and a low-carbon or net-zero/carbon negative future (including interest in renewable energy).
- Concerns over local infrastructure (conditions of roads and limitations of bus service, localised flooding, and connectivity – broadband availability and mobile coverage).
- Desire for greater awareness of local businesses from community and also increased connectivity between businesses.

7.6 Policies

7.6.1 The following policy has been prepared to guide and support local businesses and encourage further business investment. Along with the other policies in this Plan, it is designed to ensure that our parish remains a vibrant and active community that meets the needs of both residents and tourists.

POLICY B&E1. Business Support

Business development will be supported where it brings sustainable benefits to the community (e.g. employment, environment, health and well-being) and fit well with the rural character of the area.

RELATED POLICY

Repurposing Disused Buildings (Linked with Development)

POTENTIAL PROJECT: Enhance Awareness of and Encourage Use of Local Businesses

The Parish Council will support volunteers from the business community raise community awareness of and support for local businesses. This could include activities such as:

- **Producing a listing of all local businesses.**
- **Enhancing the synergies between local businesses through appropriate promotions.**
- **Exploring the feasibility of a “Bride Valley Discount Card”.**