



Topic Paper

Economy

Version 1
August 2009

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1.0 Purpose

- 1.1. This is one of five topic papers that provide a general overview of North Dorset and this one focuses on the economy, summarising the evidence base which informs the policies in the Core Strategy and Development Management Policies DPD.
- 1.2. The paper is very much a working document which will be updated as new evidence is produced and the consultation process proceeds.

2.0 Introduction

- 2.1. This paper summarises the following as they apply to the economy
- The national, regional and county policy context;
 - Issues arising from stakeholder and community consultations;
 - Issues arising from evidence and research studies; and
 - Conclusions and implications for future policy.
- 2.2. This section provides a brief overview of the characteristics of the District, which need to be taken into account when developing policy including:
- The District's economy and labour market profile;
 - It's locational structure and retail catchments; and
 - Commuting patterns and sustainable communities.

North Dorset Economy & Labour Market Profile

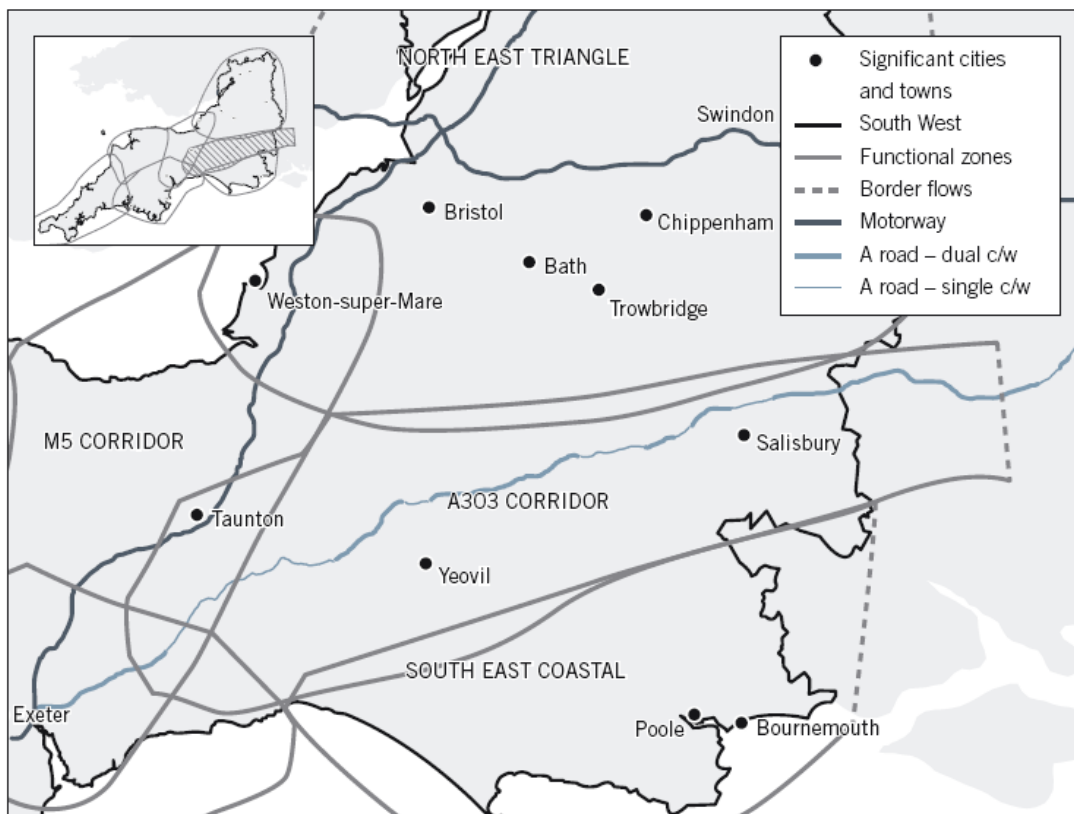
- 2.3. North Dorset is a predominantly rural district with a relatively sparsely located population, based around a number of market towns and smaller local service centres. The mid-2006 estimate of the resident population was 66,710. The District's population has grown by over 20% during the last fifteen years. Most of this growth has focussed around the main market towns of Blandford, Gillingham and Shaftesbury. About 83% of the working age population is economically active in the District and the employment rate is about 81%. The working age population is around 38,380.
- 2.4. The economy of North Dorset reflects the District's rural nature and it differs from the rest of the Dorset sub-region with more employment in primary sectors and utilities, manufacturing and construction whereas employment in financial and business services is well below the sub-regional average. More than half of employment in the District is in two sectors: public administration, education & health; and distribution, hotels and restaurants. Employment in manufacturing is just above the county average. About 17% of working age employees are self employed. Annual Business Inquiry data indicates that 5% (about 150) of the district's 2,950 businesses are in leisure and tourism. The Dorset county average is 6%.

Locational Structure

- 2.5. North Dorset is divided by two of the seven Functional Economic Zones identified in the Regional Economic Strategy (RES)¹, as shown in Figure 1

¹ Regional Economic Strategy for South West England 2006 – 2015 – SWRDA (May 2006)

Figure 1: Economic Activity Zones in Dorset



Copyright Mapinfo/Bartholomew - Adapted from Spatial Dynamics Final Report, DTZ

- 2.6. The northern part of the District, including Gillingham and Shaftesbury, lies within the A303 Corridor. Gillingham is noted as an important, fast-growing, local centre located close to both the A303 and the Exeter – Waterloo railway line, whereas Shaftesbury is described as an important tourism and service centre.
- 2.7. The southern part of the District, including Blandford, lies within the South East Coastal Zone. The RES recognises the importance of Blandford as a local centre and the importance of the Ministry of Defence presence at Blandford Camp, both in its own right and in terms of the potential economic development benefits associated with the ICT sector.

Retail Catchments

- 2.8. In order to assess the health of the district’s towns a Joint Retail Assessment² was undertaken with four other Dorset authorities.
- 2.9. The assessment confirmed that Blandford, Gillingham, Shaftesbury and Sturminster Newton all merit classification as ‘town centres’, but also notes that they *“all primarily serve a local catchment area and have limited draw*

² Joint Retail Assessment: Christchurch Borough Council and East, North and Purbeck District Councils – Nathaniel Lichfield and Partners (March 2008)

beyond their respective boundaries.” Other centres that exert an influence on these towns are listed in Figure 2 which shows that in terms of wider retail catchments, particularly for non-food shopping, the towns in the north of the District mainly look towards Salisbury and Yeovil whereas Blandford looks south-east towards Poole.

Figure 2 – North Dorset Town Centres and Wider Retail Catchments

Town Centre	Other Town Centres With an Influence	
	Major Influence	Minor Influence
Blandford	Poole	-
Gillingham	Salisbury Yeovil	Shaftesbury
Shaftesbury	Salisbury Yeovil	Gillingham
Sturminster Newton	Yeovil	Shaftesbury

Commuting Patterns

- 2.10. North Dorset has high economic activity rates and very low unemployment. However, Census data shows that commuting is an issue. In 2001 about 70% of the working age population both lived and worked in North Dorset, but census figures for 1991 and 2001 showed that North Dorset had a net loss of commuters of 3,400 and 3,200 respectively. Commuters are largely travelling to and from other parts of North Dorset, Wiltshire and Somerset although commuting to the South East Dorset conurbation is also an issue for Blandford and the southern part of the District.
- 2.11. Achieving a high level of self-containment in a rural area like North Dorset is challenging, however, the provision of a sufficient range and number of jobs in suitable locations would help to reduce the need for commuting and contribute to the creation of more sustainable communities in the District. The linked provision of homes, jobs and services is a key element of regional policy³.

³ Policy SD 4: Sustainable Communities, from the RSS Proposed Changes indicates that sustainable communities should be created and maintained by linking the provision of homes, jobs and services based on role and function so that cities, towns and villages and groups of places have the potential to become more self-contained and the need to travel is reduced.

3.0 National, Regional and Local Policy Context

National Policy

3.1. National Policy in respect of economic development is set out in Planning Policy Guidance (PPG) and Planning Policy Statements (PPSs).

PPS1: Delivering Sustainable Development

3.2. Sustainable development is the principle objective underpinning planning. At the heart of sustainable development is the simple idea of ensuring a better quality of life for everyone, now and for future generations. The PPS states that planning should facilitate and promote sustainable development *“by contributing to sustainable economic development”*⁴.

PPS 12: Local Spatial Planning

- 3.3. PPS 12 states that *“the planning system has been substantially reformed to embed community responsive policy-making at its heart and to make contributing to the achievement of sustainable development a statutory objective”*⁵. PPS 12 then goes on to stress the critical role that spatial planning has in relation to economic growth and regeneration by: providing a flexible supply of land for business and identifying suitable locations; ensuring that new business is drawn to the area by providing an attractive environment and a sufficient workforce well housed and able to access employment opportunities easily and sustainably; bringing in private funds; and providing a basis for making bids for public funds⁶.
- 3.4. PPS 12 requires that the contents of a Core Strategy are founded on a thorough understanding of the needs of its area and the opportunities and constraints which operate within that area. Thus, in order to inform policy, the Council has gathered together an evidence base about the area and how the local economy is performing at present. In addition, a number of studies have been commissioned by consultants including a retail assessment⁷ and a work space strategy⁸. These studies and other evidence are considered in more detail in Section 5.

PPG 4: Industrial, Commercial Development and Small Firms

3.5. PPG 4 encourages planning authorities to ensure that there is sufficient land available which is readily capable of development and well served by infrastructure. However, this PPG will be replaced by PPS 4: Planning for Prosperous Economies. This PPS has been published in draft and sets out the Government’s comprehensive policy framework for planning for sustainable economic development in urban and rural areas, including

⁴ Paragraph 5, page 2, PPS1: Delivering Sustainable Development – Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (January 2005)

⁵ Paragraph 1.5, page 3, PPS 12: Local Spatial Planning – DCLG (June 2008)

⁶ Paragraph 2.5, page 5, PPS 12: Local Spatial Planning – DCLG (June 2008)

⁷ Joint Retail Assessment: Christchurch Borough Council and East, North and Purbeck District Councils – Nathaniel Lichfield and Partners (March 2008)

⁸ Bournemouth, Dorset, Poole Workspace Strategy and Delivery Plan – GVA Grimley (2008)

town centres. It draws together policies from a number of other PPSs and PPGs to consolidate national planning policy on economic development into a single document.

PPS 6: Town Centres

- 3.6. PPS 6 states that one of the Government's key objectives for town centres is to promote economic growth of regional, sub-regional and local economies. In order to deliver the Government's objective of promoting vital and viable town centres, development should be focused in existing centres in order to strengthen and, where appropriate, regenerate them.

PPS 7: Sustainable Development in Rural Areas

- 3.7. PPS 7 states that planning policies at both the regional and local level should facilitate and promote sustainable patterns of development and sustainable communities in rural areas. This should include policies to sustain, enhance and where appropriate, revitalise country towns and villages and for strong, diverse, economic activity, whilst maintaining local character and a high quality environment.

PPS 3: Housing

- 3.8. PPS 3 urges local planning authorities to consider whether sites that are currently allocated for industrial or commercial use could be more appropriately re-allocated for housing development. The Council has undertaken an Employment Land Review (ELR)⁹ and some employment sites have been recommended to be released for mixed-use regeneration.

Regional Policy

- 3.9. Regional Policy is set out in the emerging Regional Spatial Strategy (RSS)¹⁰ and the Regional Economic Strategy (RES). The RES and RSS are both committed to securing sustainable economic progress. The RSS supports the RES objectives, which are:
- To deliver successful and competitive businesses;
 - To deliver strong and inclusive communities; and
 - To help deliver an effective and confident region¹¹.

Regional Spatial Strategy

- 3.10. The RSS Proposed Changes identify North Dorset as part of the Bournemouth and Poole HMA. A figure of 45,400 jobs for this HMA is recommended with 23,000 at Bournemouth and 19,000 at Poole. This suggests that there is only a need for 3,400 jobs in the rest of the HMA

⁹ Employment Land Review: Review of Existing Sites – North Dorset District Council (April 2007)

¹⁰ At the time of writing the most up to date document was The Draft Revised Regional Spatial Strategy for the South West Incorporating the Secretary of State's Proposed Changes – for Public Consultation – Government Office for the South West (July 2008)

¹¹ As set out in paragraph 8.1.1 of the RSS Proposed Changes - Government Office for the South West (July 2008)

outside Bournemouth and Poole. The Council's view is that this level of job provision would be inadequate to meet local needs. The RSS Proposed Changes indicate that 7,000 homes need to be provided in North Dorset between 2006 and 2026, indicating an increase in population of about 16,100¹². Even if 3,400 jobs were provided in North Dorset, this would not provide sufficient jobs for the economically active part of the projected additional population. In mid-2003 there were 21,100 employees in employment in North Dorset, with an estimated population of 64,000 (i.e. there were jobs for about 33% of the existing population). 3,400 jobs would only provide jobs for about 21% of the projected increase in population.

- 3.11. More recent forecasts undertaken by the Research and Information Group at the County Council support these concerns. The forecasts estimate that over the decade from 2006 to 2016 North Dorset is projected to see growth of around 0.8% per annum in the number of employed and self-employed jobs (about 2,000 jobs)¹³. With similar levels of housing growth anticipated for the period 2016 to 2026, the figure in the RSS Proposed Changes is clearly inadequate.
- 3.12. The District Council objected to the RSS Proposed Changes raising concerns about the inadequate job figures. It is hoped that the current figure will be reviewed and a more realistic figure will be included in the final version of RSS.
- 3.13. The location of jobs is also important if more sustainable patterns of development are to be achieved. Growth of businesses in rural areas should be focussed on the most sustainable and accessible locations. This can range from the development of sizeable employment sites in market towns to home-working or the creation of live / work space and the re-use of redundant farm buildings. The scale of employment generation should be appropriate to, and help support, the role and function of the place upon which it is centred and should provide for maximum accessibility to sustainable modes of transport and lowest practicable levels of car use.
- 3.14. Over the next two decades, growth is expected to follow much the same pattern and continue to be service sector led, especially by education and health, other business services and distribution. Employment in manufacturing and agriculture is expected to continue to decline in line with national and regional trends.

Regional Economic Strategy

- 3.15. The RES recognises that a key challenge for the South West is to secure economic growth within environmental limits. The RES assumes a growth rate of 2.8% per annum in terms of Gross Value for the region and 2.5%

¹² The 2001 Census shows an average household size of 2.3 persons in North Dorset. On that basis, 7,000 additional homes would result in an overall population increase of 16,100.

¹³ In view of the recession the figures are likely to be slightly optimistic. Model used Local Economy Forecasting Model 2005 Cambridge Econometrics. Projections should be treated with caution.

per annum for Dorset and Somerset. The RSS Proposed Changes, which postdate the RES, set out a higher growth rate (3.2% per annum). The job totals required in each of the Housing Market Areas (HMAs) identified in the region are based on the assumed growth rate of 3.2%.

- 3.16. The RES identifies the environment as a key driver for the economy and incorporates the environment as a core element of its vision for the South West. Over 12% of the regional economy directly relies on the land and landscape and business efficiency can be enhanced through better environmental management. The Regional Development Agency has identified food and drink as a priority sector, which is clearly linked to the environment. There are a number of different EU funded rural diversification schemes in place across Dorset in this sector. The one covering the Cranborne Chase and West Wiltshire AONB area is called “Sowing Seeds”. There is also “Direct from Dorset” which is a food labelling scheme to encourage consumers to invest in high quality Dorset produce. Future schemes that have been discussed include the development of a possible “food hub” at North Dorset Business Park, Sturminster Newton.
- 3.17. The RES highlights a lack of basic skills as a key issue for the region. There is a key role for local authorities, working with other stakeholders including the South West Regional Skills Partnership to facilitate spatial links between skills development, business productivity, prosperity and sustainable skills. The skills challenges and employment opportunities presented by an ageing population together with the need to promote lifelong learning are issues which are particularly pertinent in the South West.
- 3.18. North Dorset’s low wage economy and the lack of further and higher education opportunities mean that young people, particularly in the 18 to 24 age group, leave the District. Further education is offered by the North Dorset Skills Centre at Wincombe Lane, Shaftesbury, which is part of Yeovil College, but otherwise local people need to travel further afield to Yeovil, Salisbury, Poole or Bournemouth. Improving the facilities offered by Yeovil College at Shaftesbury would improve the opportunities available to the existing and future workforce and help them to acquire the skills needed to meet the requirements of local employers.

County / Sub-regional Context

Dorset Sustainable Communities Strategy

- 3.19. The preparation of the Core Strategy requires close alignment with the priorities in the Dorset Sustainable Communities Strategy (DSCS)¹⁴. The strategy outlines a possible future scenario which gives rise to a ‘strategic challenge’ for Dorset. The concern is that *“by 2016 the county has an*

¹⁴ The economy of rural Dorset is discussed in Section 3.4 of Shaping Our Future: The Community Strategy for Dorset 2007 – 2016, Dorset Strategic Partnership (June 2007)

increasing number of older people, second home-owners and out-of-county commuters, with a generational imbalance. The economy has failed to develop higher-wage jobs for the workforce and wages remain low". Low wages means that there is too large a gap between income and house prices, making affordability a key issue. This County wide situation is no less pertinent to North Dorset.

- 3.20. The DSCS identifies four key characteristics of Dorset's economy, which are:
- Economic growth is generally lower in rural Dorset than regionally or nationally;
 - Gross value added (GVA) per resident is below the national and regional average;
 - Dorset's rate of new business formation is below average; and
 - Workplace-based earnings in Dorset are lower than the regional or national average.
- 3.21. The DSCS indicates that the local economy needs to be stimulated to improve performance in relation to these characteristics and that this is vital if the 'strategic challenge' facing the County is to be tackled.

Raising the Game

- 3.22. This is an economic development strategy for the whole sub region of Bournemouth, Dorset and Poole for the period 2005-2016. The strategy seeks to: identify a vision; identify how the local economy is performing and its potential; and identify what action can be taken in the priority areas of infrastructure, transport, affordable housing, skills and workforce development, business competitiveness and effective partnership working. There is a need to "Raise the Game" in the sub-region as the area is not as productive as it could be and is a relatively low wage economy. There is a skills gap and shortage that has been exacerbated by a rapidly ageing population and out-migration of young people. Also the area is one of the least affordable sub-regions in England in terms of the ratio of house prices to incomes. The aim is to strengthen the economy and ensure that it delivers greater value for local people in terms of the quality of jobs available.

Local Area Agreement and Multi Area Agreement

- 3.23. A Local Area Agreement (LAA) for rural Dorset has been agreed between central government and many partners represented on the Dorset Strategic Partnership. The LAA provides a focus for delivering the community's priorities, as identified in Dorset's SCS. LAA targets and indicators will be used to monitor the performance of the DPD's policies. In addition, a Multi Area Agreement (MAA) has been agreed between Bournemouth Borough Council, Dorset County Council, the Borough of Poole and Central Government, primarily as a means of taking forward economic development across the Dorset sub-region.
- 3.24. The County / sub-regional strategies tend to focus on the economic development needs of the main urban areas. Whilst such a strategic

overview helps to provide a wider context, it does not always address the issues for North Dorset, which due to its largely rural nature, can be different. The Council is working with partners to produce an economic development strategy for North Dorset, which will bring these local issues more sharply into focus.

4.0 Issues Arising from Stakeholder and Community Consultations

- 4.1. The community's views on a number of key issues relating to the economy were sought when the Council undertook consultation on the issues and options¹⁵ for a 'stand alone' core strategy in June – July 2007¹⁶. The consultation took place well before the RSS Proposed Changes were produced and the issues and options discussed were based on the draft RSS¹⁷.
- 4.2. The Economic Prosperity section of the Issues and Alternative Options consultation sought stakeholders and resident's views about: the need to identify sufficient employment land; the protection of existing employment land; and how to promote and enhance a diverse and sustainable local economy. The number of consultation responses to the economic prosperity section of the paper although limited, supported the view that existing employment sites should be extended where appropriate and additional sites should be identified, if required, in sustainable locations. It was acknowledged that extensions should only be permitted when the current supply of employment land has been taken up. Also the community's view was that employment uses should be strictly controlled on employment sites.
- 4.3. Other issues that received support were homeworking, promotion of sustainable tourism and the sustainable re-use of rural buildings. Consultees commented on the need for a careful balance between promoting a diverse and healthy rural economy and other objectives including the protection and promotion of the countryside.

¹⁵ Core Strategy: Issues and Alternative Options – North Dorset District Council (June 2007)

¹⁶ Since this consultation the Council has now decided to produce a Development Plan Document (DPD) containing both the Core Strategy and a limited number of development management policies. Details of this (and other DPDs) can be found in the Council's Local Development Scheme 2009

¹⁷ The Draft Regional Spatial Strategy for the South West 2006 – 2026 – South West Regional Assembly (June 2006). It should be noted that the overall level of growth proposed for North Dorset has increased (from 5,100 net additional dwellings in draft RSS, to 7,000 net additional dwellings in the RSS Proposed Changes). The community views on economic growth expressed in 2007 need to be seen in this context.

5.0 Issues Identified from the Evidence Base

Overview of Evidence Base Studies

North Dorset District Wide Local Plan

- 5.1. The Local Plan¹⁸ sets out the current economic objectives for the District, which includes: maintaining, improving and diversifying employment opportunities for the local community; maintaining an adequate land supply in a variety of locations for future employment needs; and support for the expansion of existing and creation of new businesses. The Local Plan identifies a number of existing employment areas and new allocations. It envisages that the majority of the employment development will be concentrated in Blandford, Gillingham and Shaftesbury in line with its overall strategy to encourage sustainable development.

Main Evidence Sources

- 5.2. To help the District Council take forward new policy, it jointly commissioned consultants to produce reports identifying key policy issues which the Local Development Framework should seek to address. These studies include:
- Employment Land Review: Review of Existing Sites¹⁹
 - Joint Retail Assessment²⁰
 - Workspace Strategy and Delivery Plan²¹
 - Economy and Labour Market Profile²².
- 5.3. The Council's Annual Monitoring Report²³ also provides information on: the delivery and availability of employment land; the provision of retail floorspace; vacant industrial and retail floorspace; and loss of employment land to other uses.

Employment Land Review (ELR)

- 5.4. The current and future suitability of existing employment sites (as identified in the Local Plan) was reviewed in the ELR. The ELR assessed all employment sites to ensure: that there was sufficient provision for future economic development; that it is appropriately located across the District and; that it has a reasonable prospect of being realised for development.
- 5.5. Following a preliminary appraisal, the ELR identified 13 of the District's 40 employment sites that required a more detailed assessment to establish if they should be retained, assessed further or recommended for release through the LDF process. Of these 13, three were recommended to be

¹⁸ North Dorset District-Wide Local Plan (First Revision) – North Dorset District Council (January 2003)

¹⁹ Employment Land Review: Review of Existing Sites – North Dorset District Council (April 2007)

²⁰ Joint Retail Assessment: Christchurch Borough Council and East, North and Purbeck District Councils – Nathaniel Lichfield and Partners (March 2008)

²¹ Bournemouth, Dorset, Poole Workspace Strategy and Delivery Plan – GVA Grimley (2008)

²² North Dorset Economy and Labour Market Profile – Dorset County Council (Summer 2009)

²³ The most recent Annual Monitoring Report is for the year April 2007 to March 2008

released from their current employment use through the LDF process and a further three should be assessed for their potential to accommodate mixed use development. These were:

- The Brewery Site, Blandford;
- Station Road, Gillingham; and
- The Creamery, Sturminster Newton.

Workspace Strategy

- 5.6. The Workspace Strategy undertaken in 2008 reviews and updates the 2004 Workspace Strategy and took account of the findings of the ELR. Its aim is to provide a robust evidence base for employment land demand for the whole of the Bournemouth, Dorset and Poole area on a Travel to Work Area and local authority level. The Strategy seeks to ensure that there is a delivery of sufficient appropriate employment land and quality of employment premises to meet business requirements and ensure the sustainable growth of the sub-regional economy.
- 5.7. The strategy indicated that there would be a need for about 25.3 hectares of employment land in the District between 2006 and 2026. It also identified a number of key strategic sites at the main towns that would play a major role in meeting the need for employment land. These are:
- Land south of the A30 at Shaftesbury;
 - North Dorset Business Park, Sturminster Newton;
 - Brickfield Business Park, Gillingham; and
 - The Brewery Site, Blandford.
- 5.8. The Annual Monitoring Report shows that the overall need for employment land can be met from the existing supply of employment sites. This includes both sites with planning permissions and sites allocated in the Local Plan (which have been re-examined for their suitability through the ELR process) that have yet to be implemented.
- 5.9. The strategy indicates that where there are urban extensions in parts of the sub-region, support should be given to the inclusion of employment areas. It also recognises that employment in non B Use Class jobs will form a significant part of future employment growth and indicates that local authorities should plan accordingly. It also indicates that priority should be given to the continued improvement of town centres.
- 5.10. There is currently little office accommodation in North Dorset, but the strategy indicates that over a third of the demand between 2006 and 2026 will be for office space. There are some purpose built offices in the District such as those at Stour Park, Blandford and Wincombe Business Park, Shaftesbury. However, the majority of offices are small in nature and often occupy space above shops in the main market towns or are ancillary to industrial uses throughout the District.
- 5.11. The strategy indicates that North Dorset is well positioned to take advantage of the likely changes to the sectors of the economy. It performs well against a number of labour market indicators with a growing working age population, high economic activity rates and high skill levels. However,

there are issues that apply across the sub-region that recommendations in the strategy seek to address. It indicates that planning policy documents should identify all regionally and locally important employment sites and locations where mixed use packages could be appropriate.

- 5.12. The delivery of sites is also a major issue. Where sites are not coming forward, the strategy suggests that intervention should occur to ensure delivery both on small and large sites. Issues related to infrastructure requirements for economic developments need to be considered with a more coordinated approach to ensure better use of existing and planned funding and delivery.

Retail Assessment

- 5.13. The Retail Assessment identified floor space projections for both convenience and comparison goods at Blandford, Gillingham, Shaftesbury and Sturminster Newton. The assessment suggests that the strategy for accommodating such growth should be based on maintaining the existing market share and by reducing the level of shop vacancies.

Key Issues from National Policy

- 5.14. The key issues from national policy that North Dorset will need to address are:
- **The provision of a supply of land for business in suitable locations.** This will include a supply of land not only for B-Class 'industrial' uses, but also land for offices and non B-Class uses (for example retailing, health and education);
 - **The creation of suitable conditions to attract inward investment.** The right kind of new businesses (for example 'knowledge-based' firms), would provide a better range of job opportunities for local people. Such businesses need suitable land and a skilled workforce and are attracted by a quality environment;
 - **Ensuring that employment land remains fit for purpose** by periodically reviewing its suitability; and
 - **Promoting more self-contained and sustainable communities.** More and better jobs locally can help to reduce the need for people to commute, (both within North Dorset and to locations outside the District) to find suitable employment.

Key Issues from the DSCS

- 5.15. The key economic issues in Dorset that need to be tackled are:
- **Low economic growth.** Economic growth is generally lower in rural Dorset than regionally or nationally;
 - **Low productivity.** Gross value added (GVA) per resident is below the national and regional average.
 - **Low rates of business formation.** Dorset's rate of new business formation is below average; and
 - **Low wages.** Workplace-based earnings in Dorset are lower than the regional or national average.

Other Issues

5.16. Other key issues primarily from the evidence base are:

- **Meeting the economic development needs of the District.** The economic development needs of a small rural authority like North Dorset are not always fully recognised or understood in wider regional and sub-regional strategies. It is important that these more local needs are fully taken into account in the Core Strategy;
- **Delivering employment land.** Where sites are not coming forward, the public sector needs to be proactive in assisting delivery, especially in cases where associated infrastructure is required;
- **Adapting to sectoral change.** The current global economic difficulties add uncertainty to predictions of how the national, sub-regional and local economies might change. However, being able to adapt to sectoral change is important if the District's economic prospects are to be enhanced;
- **Attracting higher quality jobs.** Residents of North Dorset have skills at the national average or just above. However, often the range of jobs on offer in the District is not sufficient and residents need to seek employment opportunities elsewhere; and
- **Commuting.** The provision of a sufficient range and number of jobs in suitable locations would help to reduce the need for commuting and contribute to the creation of more sustainable communities in the District.

6.0 Conclusions

- 6.1. Dorset is a low-growth, low-waged economy, which is not as productive as it could be. Although these County-wide issues also affect North Dorset, the District is reasonably well positioned to take advantage of future changes to the economy for a number of reasons:
- It performs well against a number of labour market indicators with a growing working age population, high economic activity rates and high skill levels²⁴;
 - It has a track record for delivering employment land at above the planned rate²⁵; and
 - it already has sufficient employment land and a number of key employment sites identified to meet future workspace needs²⁶.
- 6.2. North Dorset needs to develop a more competitive economy that reflects wider sub-regional aims, but also recognises the particular economic characteristics of the District and brings greater prosperity to its residents. Central to this is the need to maintain a flexible and responsive supply of employment sites and premises, as outlined in the RES and the Workspace Strategy. However, there are also a range of qualitative issues that need to be addressed in order to ensure that the economic growth contributes to the creation of more sustainable communities in the District.
- 6.3. The key conclusions from this topic paper in relation to the provision of land for employment are:
- The ELR found that the vast majority of employment sites in the District are fit for purpose, but periodic reviews will be required in the future;
 - 25.3 hectares of additional employment land (primarily for B1, B2 and B8 uses) is required in the period up to 2026 to meet the needs of existing firms and new employers;
 - Sufficient employment land, including a number of key strategic employment sites at the main towns, has already been identified to meet the need for B-Class uses;
 - Changes in the economy mean that there is likely to be an increased need for offices and non B-Class uses in future;
 - The ELR has identified opportunities for mixed-use regeneration, which can help to meet the needs for offices and non B-Class uses;
 - There needs to be continued improvement in town centres to increase the overall market attractiveness of the area and to support office and service sector job growth; and

²⁴ Bournemouth Dorset Poole Workspace Strategy and Delivery Plan – GVA Grimley (2008)

²⁵ See chart at the top of page 35, Annual Monitoring Report 2008, North Dorset District Council (December 2008)

²⁶ Bournemouth Dorset Poole Workspace Strategy and Delivery Plan – GVA Grimley (2008)

- There is a need for additional retail floor space at Blandford, Gillingham, Shaftesbury and Sturminster Newton, which could be accommodated largely through a strategy of maintaining existing market share and reducing shop vacancies.

6.4. The key conclusions from this topic paper in relation to associated issues are:

- The RSS Proposed Changes do not make sufficient provision for jobs in North Dorset. The Council has raised this as an issue and hopefully it will be resolved in the final version of RSS;
- A pro-active approach to the delivery of employment sites and premises is required, especially where they are not coming forward, or infrastructure provision is an issue;
- The Core Strategy needs to clearly explain and take account of the economic development needs of North Dorset, which are not always fully recognised in wider sub-regional strategies that focus on larger urban areas. The production of an economic development strategy for the District could help in this respect;
- The environment is a key economic driver in the South West and schemes are already in place in North Dorset in related sectors, such as food and drink, which build on this;
- Skills need to be enhanced to meet the changing needs of employers as the employment structure of rural Dorset shifts towards higher skill level occupations in the future. Working together with partners such as Yeovil College could help to improve skills;
- The diversification of the economy would provide local residents with a range and choice of jobs, especially higher-waged, skilled jobs, which would help to reduce the need to commute to find suitable employment;
- The linked provision of homes and jobs helps places to become more self-contained. In North Dorset this can be achieved by focusing employment sites and other employment generating developments at the District's main towns where existing and future housing is concentrated. Such development also needs to be phased to come forward at the same time as housing growth; and
- Some more limited provision in villages and the countryside is important to achieve sustainable communities in the District's more rural areas.