

Access and Recreation

The quality and variety of the Dorset Coast and its inshore waters make it an important resource for many different forms of sport and recreation. The range of activities has greatly increased in recent years, offering new challenges for those taking part – and for those who manage the coast and its inshore waters. There will be a continuing need to keep the balance between different activities, the environment, coastal development and other users of the coast.

Coastal Recreation: Need and Trends

Recreation not only provides an activity of interest but contributes to people's health and well-being. Today, people have high expectations of the quality of their leisure experiences, and the Dorset coast provides a rich and varied range of opportunities.

Detailed trends in coastal recreation are difficult to establish as there is only limited information for local policy making. It is generally accepted that participation in countryside and water recreation is on the increase with the most marked trend of the last 10 years in the growth of active coast and water recreation, including sports such as scuba diving, kayaking, kite surfing, climbing and power-boating.

The British Marine Industry Federation (BMIF) estimate that in 2009 13.2 million people (26.3%) regularly undertook some form of water sport. Approximately 26 million tourists visit the South West with approximately 40% of adults spending some of their leisure time in the coastal waters.

The Regulators

European

- [Bathing Water Directive \(2006\)](#) - sets water quality standards for bathing beaches. This will also replace the 1976 Bathing Water Directive from 2014.
- [Recreational Craft Regulations \(2004\)](#)

- [Recreational Craft Directive \(1998\)](#) sets safety and environmental design standards for certain types of recreational boats.
- Other European directives on wildlife and environment may have indirect

National

[Policy Planning Guidance Notes \(PPG 17 -Sport & Recreation\)](#) provides guidance on local authority planning policy. DETR have a lead role in setting local authority byelaw powers and ratifying byelaw proposals, and are currently reviewing these powers.

Sport England provides advice and grants aid and administers the National Lottery Sports Fund. Sport England and Physical Activity Network work together to encourage adults and children to take up more recreational sports during their leisure time.

Natural England can influence management decisions within designated areas with regards to sustainable development.

National Governing Bodies of Sport are voluntary organisations, though many take a lead role in setting standards and regulating competitive activity, and representing the general interests of their sport. British Marine Industries Federation represents the recreational boating industry.

County

Harbour authorities have byelaw making powers to ensure safety of navigation, which can include speed limits and restrictions on specific activities. Each harbour has its own byelaws.

Portland Harbour

Portland [Harbour Management Plan](#) essentially describes an overview of the Harbour and the activities that presently take place in the various areas.

Poole Harbour

[Poole Harbour Aquatic Management Plan](#) looks at ways of maintaining sustainable levels of economic and social activity within the Harbour and its hinterland, while protecting its natural environment. It considers the activities of all those involved in the development, management and use of the Harbour within a framework that facilitates the integration of their interests and responsibilities.

Christchurch Harbour

[The Christchurch Harbour and Waterways Management Plan](#) provides a framework for management through promoting the area's safe and sustainable use, whilst balancing the demands on the natural resources. The Plan also tries to address ways in which to minimise risks and resolve any conflicts of interests.

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Dorset County Authorities have statutory responsibility for rights of way.

[Bournemouth, Dorset and Poole Structure Plan](#) sets out an overall planning policy for Dorset.

Local Plans regulate development. District and Unitary Councils have some powers to make byelaws for coastal and water recreation

Dorset's Coastal Recreational Resource

The South West Coast Path and the main amenity beaches are significant coastal recreational activities. Water-based recreation activities have become concentrated around the urban areas of the coast.

The 2012 Olympic sailing events in Weymouth & Portland has inspired the growth of recreational water sports in what the Royal Yachting Association has credited as the best waters for sailing in Northern Europe. The Olympics will bring many tourists and water sport enthusiasts to the area, facilitating a significant financial boost for the local economy. The



Windsurfing at Portland. Copyright: Mark Simons

Olympics has made it possible to build the Weymouth Relief Road, built to diminish journey times and queues to and from Weymouth & Portland, especially in the active period around and during the games.

Activities in Dorset's coastal zone

Bathing /Beach Recreation

Dorset has 50 bathing beaches which are used for swimming and informal recreation. There are 8 'bathing only' zones set up for public safety. The main resort beaches are vitally important to tourism and attract an intense level of activity, mainly during the summer period, whilst rural beaches provide quieter sites. However, these sites are seeing an increase in activity, especially for sports such as paddle boarding and kite surfing.

Climbing

Climbing is a fast-growing sport nationally, and Portland is one of the best locations for 'sports climbing', which uses routes with pre-prepared, fixed bolts. Climbing opportunities in Dorset are on hard limestone cliffs of Purbeck and Portland. There are over 1000 routes on Portland. Seasonal and route restrictions have been agreed to avoid conflict with nesting birds.

Cycling

Dorset has experienced a growth in demand for recreational cycling. The main facilities for cycling are quiet rural roads and bridleways. Some parts of the coast path, including the Ridgeway are bridleways and suitable for off-road cycling – but most of the path is footpath only. There is an ongoing background of problems of nuisance and damage from mountain-bike use on coastal footpaths and effective awareness raising is needed.

Golf

Golf is experiencing continued growth in popularity. At present there are 10 golf courses located in the coastal zone in Dorset. Development pressures for new and expanded facilities are controlled by the planning system, and new golf courses are now subject to Environmental Impact Assessment.

Hang-gliding and Paragliding

Hang-gliding and paragliding has been a localised minority activity on the coast for many years. The main clubs are located out-of-county, and use sites in West Dorset, Portland, Kimmeridge and Bournemouth when weather conditions are suitable. Although a minority activity, there are safety concerns where take-off and landing areas are open to the public, and this has led to a local ban at Charmouth during the main season.

Personal Watercraft (Jet-skis)

Personal watercrafts are popular forms of recreation on the Dorset Coast. Their use particularly centres on urban areas, and they make considerable use of Poole Harbour (where a zone is set aside for them), Studland and Swanage Bays. They also launch and navigate off the beaches in the conurbation and at Weymouth.

Jet-skiing is probably the most controversial recreational use of the coast, and has attracted national attention from the media in a campaign to ban them. Concerns about their use vary, and range from noise disturbance to people, disturbance to wildlife and safety concerns where the craft mix with swimmers or other water users.

Power Boating

Power boating is a popular activity centred on the main resorts, with the Royal Motor Yacht Club

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organising annual races at Weymouth, Poole and Bournemouth, with the annual Youth National Powerboat Championship being held in Dorset. In West Dorset the activity centres on the powerboat club at Lyme Regis. As with other fast moving watercraft there are both noise and safety implications associated with the use of the craft in the near shore area.

Sailing

Sailing is a well established pastime around the Dorset Coast. The strongholds of both yacht and dinghy sailing in Dorset are Poole and Portland Harbour, with over 6,000 yacht berths and moorings. There is also significant activity centred on Swanage and Christchurch and a large marina at Weymouth. This has increased with worldwide Olympic sailing teams visiting Portland to train. Lyme Regis has a small fleet of resident yachts and an active dinghy sailing club. The east of the County is a popular destination for cruising yachts, with demand enhanced by yachts visiting from the yachting stronghold of the Solent, and to a lesser extent by foreign yachts. Studland and the area south of Brownsea Island are popular anchorages for day cruising.

The coast west of Poole is exposed, with limited shelter at Swanage, Weymouth and West Bay. There is regular cruising activity between Poole and Weymouth. The natural barrier of Portland limits cruising further west. The extent of visitor moorings in Dorset is also limited, and some of the smaller harbour moorings are for residents only. This can cause some problems for sailors in the west of the county, with no available moorings between Portland and Devon.

Sailing at Portland. Copyright; Mark Simons

Sea Angling



Sea Angling is widespread in Dorset, from both shore and boat. The common law right of fishing in the sea means that the sport is exempt from licence, unlike freshwater fishing. The most significant site is Chesil Beach, which is a nationally and internationally recognised beach angling venue. Boscombe Pier is an important venue along the Dorset coast for disabled anglers: as a result several competitions are held there annually. The extent of sea angling on some sites has a potential impact on fish populations inshore, and the extent of litter, and discarded and lost tackle continues to remain an issue.

Scuba Diving

Dorset is a popular dive area, and is nationally advertised within the diving press. However in recent years Dorset (mainly Portland) has seen a decline in diver numbers. This is due to the sinking of HMS Scylla in Plymouth, a more accessible launching facility in West Bay and the ban on diving HMS Hood. There are also fears that the 2012 Olympics could decrease visiting diver numbers as boat movement is restricted. This is being rectified by the wreck-to-reef project at

Ringstead where it is hoped a wreck will be submerged for the divers. There are many dive schools in Dorset offering air, trips and training. There are also dive charters operating out of Swanage, Weymouth, Poole, West Bay and Lyme Regis.

Shore diving sites on the coast include: Chesil Cove and Swanage Pier both have a national reputation as safe sites for training.

As technical diving increases in popularity, new, deeper dive sites are being explored, therefore attracting a new calibre of divers. There are potential impacts to wildlife and underwater archaeology from diving activities; however the efforts of sports divers are also a potential resource to help improve our knowledge of the marine environment, with projects such as SeaSearch. **Importance: Regional/National Diving in Dorset. Copyright: Seasearch**



Surfing/Paddle Boarding

Surfing is a relatively new sport on the Dorset Coast, but has become popular with local surfers at

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Bournemouth, Highcliffe, Kimmeridge and Lyme Regis when the weather allows. Although surf is often small and messy during summer months, it is generally after winter storms that conditions are more suitable. In 2009, Europe's first artificial reef was opened at Bournemouth. Currently the surfing reef is closed due to safety but the area has been regenerated. Paddle boarding is a new activity that is increasing with popularity, as it is ideal for Dorset's local inshore water conditions, especially sheltered places such as Kimmeridge and Weymouth Bay.

Walking

Walking is the most popular of all recreational activities on the Dorset Coast, with an estimated 1 million people walking part of the South West Coast Path annually. Most visitors to Dorset will spend some time walking along the coast, or at one of the many natural attractions, whilst most residents will make short repeated visits throughout the year. The South West Coast Path provides a continuous route along the coast from Poole westwards, although there are continued problems in dealing with slippage and coastal erosion of the route in West Dorset, which highlights the particular need for long term coastal maintenance and protection.

Water Skiing/Wakeboarding

Three water skiing clubs are registered with the British Water Ski and Wakeboard Federation based in Lyme Regis, Weymouth and Poole. Numbers in each of the clubs have remained steady over the last few years, but has increased slightly as wakeboarding becomes a more popular sport with young people. There is a designated area for water-skiing and wakeboarding in Poole. On the open coast, water skiing tends to be

undertaken principally in the resort areas of Bournemouth, Swanage, Weymouth and Lyme Regis.

Windsurfing/Kite surfing

Wind surfing is mainly limited to the accessible beaches on the coast. There are popular sites at the beaches in Poole and Christchurch Bays, but the most significant site is Portland Harbour. Here the combination of strong south westerly winds, together with the shelter afforded by Chesil Beach can provide unusual conditions, which allow high speeds to be reached. The site is therefore very well used when the conditions are right, and is a venue for high-level competitions. It is also becoming ever more popular with both local and visiting kite surfers with the hope to attract more high level competitions. There has been some conflict of use as kite surfing is faster and more agile than wind surfing and can cover more ground. Erosion of sensitive shingle vegetation has been a concern, addressed by installing wooden walkways to the beach

Canoeing/Kayaking remains a popular activity for school groups and outdoor education centres, as well as individual and small groups of adults. Popular routes include Kimmeridge-Swanage (Jurassic coast) and in Poole Harbour, over to Brownsea Island. Surf kayak has also become popular as small surf conditions are ideal. Kayak fishing is now very popular along the Dorset coast, with more launch sites and good inshore fishing areas making the activity popular with older people. International Canoe Championships are also held in Dorset.



Kayaking. Copyright: Mark Simons

There are three clubs based in the east of the county which take part in an annual regatta programme for Hampshire and Dorset.

Coasteering is a new and extreme way to experience the Dorset coastline. The activity involves swimming, climbing and cliff jumping. There are obvious serious risks to this activity which is possibly why it has become so popular with young people. Coasteering should be a group activity led by qualified and experienced instructors; however, there are no ways of enforcing this which could lead to damage to the area and accidents. Some companies are also offering eco-coasteering, which focuses more on the geology and wildlife of the coastline.

Coastal Sports Development

The general view of growth in coastal sport and recreation masks much more complicated patterns of change. There is scope to improve sporting opportunities in Dorset, and it cannot be taken for granted that sport and recreation will flourish in the best way without assistance. Sports development is the name given to the task of encouraging and

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promoting sport, and provides one means of helping to integrate future activity with other interests. For coastal recreation, some of the main issues are:

- **Young People**

Research for the BMIF by Southampton Institute suggests that there remains a strong interest in water-sports with some more fashionable than others, by young generations, but it does appear that it is becoming more difficult for many to take part. There are good opportunities to try out water activities, but less scope to continue with them. Organised after-school clubs have declined, and there is increased competition for parents' time to support regular participation. With regards to the recent recession, many water sports are no longer as affordable as before, especially as many require lessons and specific equipment. Heightened concern about safety and security is placing a greater load on youth sports coaches and leaders to gain qualifications and meet the necessary police checks. Unfortunately it does appear that the number of volunteer sport coaches has declined over the last decade.

- **Sporting organisations**

A climate of support for voluntary organisations is important, and where they exist, they can be valuable in assisting management and representing the needs of their activity. Governing bodies of sport, and sports clubs provide essential organisation and opportunities for many activities, but tend to rely on voluntary effort to survive. The more casual and informal types of recreational activity, such as windsurfing and jet-skiing are generally not club-based and so lack a local organisational structure.

- **All levels of ability**

Dorset produces some top-quality athletes, and water sports are one of the areas where the County's sportsmen and women have excelled in the past and continue to do so. To continue and strengthen this tradition, there is a need to ensure that support and training is available to encourage those with ability to achieve their potential. Weymouth and Portland will inevitably gain from the 2012 Olympics, with more money being put into sailing academies and more young people being encouraged to try a variety of water sports. Governing bodies needs here.

- **Effective training**

A good structure for providing training and coaching is essential to maintain basic safety standards, and promote performance. The public and private sector schools and centres are important facilities for training in outdoor activities. Clubs also have an important role to play for the more organised forms of activity, but there are challenges to deliver effective training to the more informal activities such as jet-skiing.

Management Issues

Alongside the promotion and development of sport and recreation, there is a need to address and manage the possible conflicts which arise from regular recreational use. In brief the main areas, which need to be considered, and the issues in Dorset include:

Competition for Space

This is increasing as levels of recreation increase. This can pose a safety issue for some forms of recreation, but it can have a wider effect of reducing the quality of recreational experience – particularly for activities where the remote nature of the coast is part of the attraction. Locations such as Swanage, Studland, Poole Harbour and the near shore areas of the resorts are

extremely popular and can become overcrowded at peak times. There are examples of accidents, near misses and nuisance as a result of too many users – or incompatible activities taking place at the same place at the same time.

Liabilities

Private landowners along the coast are concerned about the risk of legal action if a recreational user has an accident on their property, and a number have sought to take out insurance. This has become an issue with many landowners who do not encourage recreational activities such as climbing or mountain biking on their land, and can do little to stop unauthorised use. The extent of actual risk is not clear at present.

Safety

Recreation generates the majority of call-outs to the Coastguard and Lifeboats. In 2008, the 35 lifeboat stations in the South West launched 1567 times, with Poole being the busiest, launching 156 times. Other lifeboat stations in Dorset are at Weymouth, Swanage, Lyme Regis, Mudeford and an RNLI beach lifeguard area at Bournemouth. The RNLI lifeguards dealt with 8423 incidents. This shows just how busy local waters have become and brings into question whether enough is being done to regulate safety. Land-based activity is the single largest source of incidents, although most forms of water activity are also represented. The overall levels of incidents are increasing, and the coastal emergency services are continuing to develop awareness campaigns and publications – led by the RNLI's sea safety liaison working group.

Noise

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With an increase of water users, motorised air and water sports can be a major source of nuisance in some places. It is an issue at some of Dorset's resort beaches, and on the northern shore of Poole Harbour was a consideration in the location of the jet-ski zone. Small amounts of noisy activity have the potential to create a disproportionate impact on the tranquillity of the remoter parts of the coast.

Wildlife Damage and Disturbance

This is a potential impact of recreational activities. There is little substantiated evidence of widespread problems in Dorset, but there are localised issues. The main concerns are potential disturbance to cliff nesting birds in Portland and Purbeck due to climbing, air sports and close approaches by water craft. Potential disturbance of Little Terns nesting on Chesil Beach requires an active warden presence. Direct damage due to recreational access is a pressure on the coast path and other well used rights of way. It's also a concern for other activities at well used sites – angling at Chesil and windsurfing at Ferrybridge have required specific management measures to be introduced.

Marine and Beach Litter

Litter is a continuing problem on the Dorset coast and a proportion of it is attributable to recreational sources. Continued awareness raising within beach visitors, sailors and anglers appears to be required. The Marine Litter Summit of 2009 continues to raise the profile of marine litter, and looked to find ways to tackle sources of marine litter and minimise its input. The summit also showed just how complex marine litter is as it deals with cross-borders and international issues. There is a local campaign running along the Dorset and East Devon coast – 'Litter Free coast and Sea'. And in 2012 here will be a Dorset Beachcare

project to address the ongoing problem of beach and marine litter.

Sewage Pollution

It remains legal to discharge sewage from recreational vessels. However, disposal of sewage from boats should be discouraged and if necessary prohibited i.e. in areas of weak tidal movement. Disposal of sewage must occur as far from the shoreline as possible. There are localised concerns at both Studland and south of Brownsea about the impact of flushing boat toilets on busy days, and resulting beach pollution. Boat users are encouraged to use on-shore facilities. Elsewhere the levels of discharge may not be sufficient to cause noticeable problems - however as the general quality of Dorset's sewage discharges improves, it is desirable to remove as many other sources of sewage discharge as possible. With the Bathing Water Directive 2006, more scientific knowledge and management came into force, with an increase in annual water testing. Several - but not all - ports and marinas in Dorset currently offer pump-out facilities for recreational craft and Wessex Water have offered free connections to the sewage system for sites who wish to install them. Many yachts do not have the necessary holding tanks fitted to use these facilities at present.

Promoting Coastal Recreation

Sport and recreation are already actively promoted in Dorset by the private sector, tourism interests and some local authorities. Promotion has an important role in shaping future activity on the Dorset Coast, and in addition to the messages given by general tourism. Organisations involved in managing recreation could benefit from involvement promotional activities and publications about recreation in Dorset.

Much of today's information is sourced from the internet, which enables better accuracy in information, more information stored in one place and it can be kept up-to-date more easily. iCoast (www.icoast.co.uk), developed through DCF is a portal website that offers information and locations on 26 different coastal activities as well as the codes of conduct and safety advice.

Management Techniques

Almost all forms of coastal recreation demand some level of management. In many cases the needs may be limited to the provision of basic access facilities, and the management issues revolve around the quality of the facilities provided. Some coastal activities require a more active approach: intensive beach and water activities often bring with them a need for staff to ensure safety and deal with conflicts.

A range of techniques are available to help try and ensure that enjoyable recreational activity is available to those that want it, and to reduce conflicts where they occur. Some of the main mechanisms include:

Recreational facilities

Recreational facilities need to be provided to support activities in appropriate places. They include:

Self regulation through clubs

Self-regulation through clubs can be very effective. Groups of users are often the best regulators of their own activities, working to guidance and codes of conduct issued by the governing body of their sport.

Codes of Conduct

Conduct codes are produced by most of the national sports associations and organisations such as the BMIF have produced codes of conduct, which outline acceptable behaviour and rules for particular sports.

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iCoast promotes all codes of conduct for coastal and water recreation along the Dorset coast.

Working Groups and Forums

These can help reduce conflicts and agree management schemes. The Purbeck Climbing Forum is one such group, providing a means of agreeing and monitoring management. Harbour users' groups can also be effective.

Permits & Charging

Can be introduced where an organisation has powers to do so, and can be effective. Harbour authorities have the power to introduce permits and charging within their boundaries. Poole Harbour Commissioners use this mechanism effectively for water-skiing.

Zonation

Zoning of recreation can be effective for activities where conflicts can be reduced by limiting either the areas or times when activities take place. Although most often considered as a management tool for water sports, zones can also be applied to terrestrial activities. Where schemes are in place they need to be well publicised, and there needs to be coordination to ensure activities are fairly provided for in zones that suit them. Zoning has been used successfully at several sites in Dorset, including Bournemouth seafront and Poole Harbour, while seasonal restrictions have proved effective in managing cliff climbing in Purbeck.

Information Provision

Good quality site-based information needs to be provided to raise awareness of local regulations and sensitivities. Information needs to be well presented, clearly written and effectively distributed. Public

launch points are one important place to focus site based information boards.

Published information and codes of practice are also useful in promoting good safety and environmental conduct.

The Role of Legislation

A positive approach to managing recreation through the positive provision of facilities, voluntary cooperation and 'education rather than legislation' is the accepted ideal. In many cases it proves a successful approach, but in reality a measure of legal backing is also important to the success of many management schemes. Powers are needed to ensure that measures can be backed up by enforcement, particularly where a minority of individuals may ignore other measures.

The main legal mechanisms for regulating recreation are the byelaw making powers of harbours, local authorities and the National Trust. Where bye-laws are introduced they need to be effectively 'policed', and the ability of authorities to back up bye-law creation with enforcement must be considered before any new measures are introduced. Harbour authorities remain a source of good practice in regulating recreational activity, and the up-dated Poole Harbour Aquatic Management Plan 2006 is one of the leading examples of a co-ordinated approach to coastal recreation management. This plan co-ordinates management of the harbour and serves as a Management Scheme for the European Marine Site. It covers present and future needs for nature conservation and recreation.

Recreation management is one of the main areas where the ideal is a more active approach to management on the whole of the open coast. There is a need for co-ordination of policy, and a detailed plan of action. This is one of the areas where detailed coastal zone management plans could be of particular value in the future.

Scope for Growth

One of the key needs is to identify the scope for the Dorset Coast to accommodate an increase in active sport and recreation. The current focus of activity is within the urban areas of the coast, and in the future a continued focus on these areas is likely to be a sensible approach. There are places where the resource is attractive, where infrastructure is in place, and where local management is most likely to be achievable..

Outside of the developed coast and resort areas the scope for growth is more limited by the lack of infrastructure and exposed conditions. It is important to retain the character of the remote, quieter areas, which makes them suitable for informal and more adventurous land and water recreation.

Updated May 2012