

Coastal Communities – Social and Economic

Evidence shows that people have lived, fished and farmed on the Dorset Coast for thousands of years. In Medieval times, as trade grew ports and other coastal settlements became more established. Tourism has been a major driving force since the 1850s. Today, two-thirds of the Dorset population - around 470,000 people - live on or near the coast. Around twenty-five per cent of the Dorset Coast has been developed.

Early Days

The earliest evidence of human activity on the Dorset Coast is at Hengistbury Head, dating from 12,000 BC. At that time sea levels were over 50 metres lower than today and the present seabed was dry land. Sea levels gradually rose and prehistoric communities continued to develop along the coast, with economies based on agriculture and fishing. Over time a pattern of small villages and settlements developed, becoming consolidated by the 13th century. Outside of the sheltered harbours, many villages were established some way back from the coastline to gain shelter from the elements and from raids by the French.

Marine Trade Grows

As early as 3,000 years ago, seamen were developing trading routes along the shores of Britain and across to mainland Europe. As maritime trading prospered and grew so the ports and settlements in sheltered locations developed, and during the medieval period a line of ports grew along the coast.

The larger and more significant ports evolved in well located and deliberately chosen locations. Wareham, a pre-Saxon settlement, occupied a strategic location and was an important cross Channel port by the early eighth century. Poole was a medieval town dating from around 1180, and proved to be in a more suitable position for

trade than Wareham, and later Weymouth. It remains the most significant port in the County, handling a large volume of freight and several cross Channel services.

There is evidence of a Roman port at the head of Radipole Lake, but despite its excellent location, Weymouth did not really develop as a port until the thirteenth century. By the 1840s Weymouth had become a port for travel to the Channel Islands and Cherbourg.

Portland Harbour is largely a man-made facility developed for military purposes. This included the Royal Navy Air Station, HMS Osprey, that was closed in 1999. The site has since been redeveloped under the name Osprey Quay to reflect its origins and has strong commercial links with the marine sector. Osprey Quay includes the new 600 berth Portland Marina and the Weymouth and Portland National Sailing Academy which will be the venue of all the sailing events for the London 2012 Olympics and Paralympics Games.

Christchurch was important as a harbour from at least the Iron Age and was important in the 1840s for export of iron ore and import of coal for south Wales.

Other ports grew along the Dorset coast in less ideal locations. Bridport developed when small

ships were able to navigate the one and a half miles inshore. As ships grew larger activity switched to the mouth of the River Brit at West Bay, but there has been a continuous struggle to keep the harbour open in the face of a constant pounding by the sea. A major 17m scheme to protect West Bay from flooding from the sea and allow better access to the harbour was completed on 8th March 2005.

Lyme Regis has no natural harbour. Development as a medieval port was enabled by the construction of a large breakwater, known as the Cobb, which provided an artificial bay in which ships could be moored. In recent times, a multi-million pound land stabilisation and coast protection scheme was completed in April 2007 (Phase II environmental improvements) to protect the town from destructive landslides and coastal erosion.

Tourism

Development elsewhere on the coast, other than the ports, has taken the form of more general urbanisation, centred around sheltered or low lying stretches. About a quarter of the coastal landscape is now urbanised. This comprises residential, industrial and commercial uses but also, significantly, development for tourism and recreation.

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Much of the coastal development is relatively recent and it started with the sudden popularity of spa towns and sea-bathing resorts. Weymouth in the late 18th century and Bournemouth in the mid 19th century underwent rapid growth, as hotels, tea-rooms and other attractions were built to cater for new, wealthy visitors. In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, the introduction of the railways, and an increase in leisure with the advent of paid leave meant that holidays by the sea suddenly became available to the masses. Towns with beaches rapidly turned into resorts.



Weymouth Beach. Copyright Mark Simons
Cheaper accommodation, such as guest houses, sprang up and many new buildings built specifically to cater for the entertainment of these new visitors arrived on the scene. Piers were created and a range of coastal activities developed. Dorset, with its sandy beaches, so rare on the south coast, was in a position to

take maximum advantage. Swanage, Lyme Regis, Poole, Christchurch and West Bay all had their heyday at this time, which lasted right through to the 1950s. By then most of the developed coastline that we see today had been established, and Poole, Bournemouth and Christchurch had merged into one conurbation stretching for some 25 kilometres along the coast.

During this time the coast in general came under severe human pressure, largely generated by visitors from the major resorts. It



Weymouth Harbour. Copyright Mark simons

was the rapid growth in the use of the motor car in the late 1950s and early 1960s that brought pressure to bear on the wilder and undeveloped parts of the coast. These new visitors were much more mobile, and able to seek out the quiet corners that had hitherto lain undisturbed.

Caravan parks, some standing in isolation and others merging into urban areas, were developed at several coastal locations. Their development was largely in response to the desire of many of Dorset's new, mobile visitors to be close to the sea and the beautiful coastline. Ironically, some development took place in prominent positions, marring the unspoilt landscapes that the visitors had come to see. Caravan accommodation continues to provide the bulk of tourist accommodation on the rural coast, and impacts can now be reduced through more sensitive siting and landscaping.

Today, tourism remains Dorset's largest coast-dependant industry. Other industries, which do not rely on a coastal location, have also grown in importance. A prominent example is Poole's establishment as a centre for the financial and insurance industry. Elsewhere there is a diversity of small and medium sized businesses.

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Population Facts and Figures

The coastal communities are defined as the boroughs of Christchurch, Bournemouth, Poole and Weymouth and Portland, along with the parishes in Purbeck and West Dorset district which border the coastline.

The total population of this area is just under 452,000 (2008 mid-year estimates, ONS). This accounts for 64% of the total population of Bournemouth, Dorset and Poole (710,500).

The majority of people live in the conurbation of Christchurch Bournemouth and Poole (348,500). Other significant urban areas are Swanage with a population of 10,100, Weymouth and Portland (65,000) and Bridport (8,140).

Over the last ten years the coastal population has increased by 1.44%, although some areas have grown more than others. West Dorset has experienced the largest increase in population at almost 6%, whilst in adjacent Purbeck the total has fallen by almost 4%.

District PARISH	1998 Mid-Year Estimates	2008 Mid-Year Estimates	% change
Bournemouth	161,400	163,900	1.5
Poole	139,074	138,800	-0.2
Christchurch	44,011	45,800	4.1
Weymouth & Portland	63,331	65,000	2.6
Purbeck (part)	15,360	14,810	-3.6
Chaldon Herring	180	160	-11.1
Corfe Castle	1,530	1,530	0.0
East Lulworth	180	180	0.0
Kimmeridge	110	120	9.1
Langton Matravers	1,080	940	-13.0
Steeple	90	90	0.0
Studland	520	470	-9.6
Swanage	10,180	10,100	-0.8
West Lulworth	740	600	-18.9
Worth Matravers	750	620	-17.3
West Dorset (part)	22,370	23,670	5.8
Abbotsbury CP	470	470	0.0
Bridport CP	7,180	8,140	13.4
Burton Bradstock CP	1,030	1,000	-2.9
Charmouth CP	1,360	1,340	-1.5
Chickerell CP	4,930	5,350	8.5
Chideock CP	610	590	-3.3
Fleet CP	100	90	-10.0
Langton Herring CP	150	150	0.0
Lyme Regis CP	3,830	3,660	-4.4
Osmington CP	550	590	7.3
Owermoigne CP	450	480	6.7
Puncknowle CP	450	470	4.4
Stanton St. Gabriel CP	100	120	20.0
Swyre CP	100	100	0.0
Symondsburry CP	1,060	1,120	5.7
Total	445,546	451,980	1.4

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An Ageing Population

A key characteristic of Dorset is that of a rapidly growing elderly population.

Just over 25% of the area's population is over retirement age. This is significantly higher than the national average of 19%. Christchurch borough has a particularly high number of older people with 34% above retirement age. This figure is higher still in the far west of the County; in the parishes between Burton Bradstock and Lyme Regis around 40% of the population are over retirement age.

District PARISH	All persons	% aged 0-15 years	% aged 16-59(F)/64(M) years	% aged 60(F)/65(M)+ years
Bournemouth	163,900	15.6	62.1	22.3
Poole	138,800	17.6	58.1	24.3
Christchurch	45,800	15.7	50.2	34.1
Weymouth & Portland	65,000	16.9	58.8	24.2
Purbeck (part)	14,810	14.8	53.3	32.1
Chaldon Herring	160	18.8	62.5	18.8
Corfe Castle	1,530	17.0	53.6	29.4
East Lulworth	180	16.7	66.7	22.2
Kimmeridge	120	16.7	66.7	16.7
Langton Matravers	940	16.0	53.2	31.9
Steeple	90	22.2	66.7	22.2
Studland	470	12.8	59.6	27.7
Swanage	10,100	14.5	52.1	33.4
West Lulworth	600	15.0	60.0	25.0
Worth Matravers	620	11.3	50.0	38.7
West Dorset (part)	23,670	15.6	52.4	32.0
Abbotsbury CP	470	17.0	55.3	25.5
Bridport CP	8,140	16.3	54.8	28.7
Burton Bradstock CP	1,000	11.0	45.0	44.0
Chickerell CP	5,350	17.9	54.0	28.0
Chideock CP	590	10.2	49.2	40.7
Fleet CP	90	22.2	66.7	22.2
Lyme Regis CP	3,660	13.9	47.5	38.5
Osmington CP	590	13.6	61.0	27.1
Owermoigne CP	480	14.6	52.1	35.4
Puncknowle CP	470	14.9	53.2	31.9
Stanton St. Gabriel CP	120	16.7	50.0	33.3
Swyre CP	100	10.0	60.0	30.0
Charmouth CP	1,340	14.9	41.8	42.5
Langton Herring CP	150	13.3	60.0	33.3
Symondsburry CP	1,120	14.3	55.4	30.4
Total	451,980	16.4	58.4	25.2

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Social Profile of the Communities

The social characteristics of the coastal communities of Dorset are very varied in nature. Many of the villages distributed along the West Dorset and Purbeck Coast fall into categories of relative affluence with the majority of the households described as 'Comfortably off' or 'Wealthy Achieving'. It should be noted, however, that pockets of social deprivation will exist in these villages but are often be masked by the general level of affluence and the geography at which these indicators are measured.

There are also significant levels of deprivation along the Dorset Coast. Both Weymouth and Portland have a number of districts that fall within the top 20% most deprived nationally and Weymouth Town Centre in particular suffers significant deprivation. Further along the coast parts of both Poole and Bournemouth experience considerable deprivation, with areas along the coastal strip such as Boscombe and East Cliff in Bournemouth featuring in the top 1% and 10% respectively for multiple deprivation.

This contrast provides significant challenges to the task of ensuring the economic and sustainable development of Dorset's coastal communities.

Deprivation data is derived from the Indices of Deprivation 2007 produced by the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) – this is a national data set that can be

used to compare deprivation and its underlying facets at a small geography (LSOA) across the whole country. More information on the ID 2007 and the results for Dorset can be found on <http://www.dorsetforyou.co.uk>

The Social Classification data e.g. 'Wealthy Achievers' is provided from ACORN 2009 classifications produced by CACI and is based on a number of different sources. Although this data can prove very useful in the profiling of an area it should be treated with some caution as some of the information that makes up the data is derived from surveys that can only ever give an indication of the social make-up of a household.

Future Development Patterns

The majority of the County's resident population live in the coastal area. This is partly because it is perceived as a 'nice place to live', but also because development opportunities tend to cluster around existing infrastructure.

Several areas of economic activity do require coastal locations. These include fishing and port related activities. Other indirectly related activities have developed in the coastal area, such as food processing and businesses associated with the former Naval Base at Portland.

The large numbers of tourists who visit this area are attracted by the coast, its sandy beaches, coastal foot paths and the opportunities it provides for other coastal, or water related,

leisure and recreational pursuits. The coast is the focus of significant activity to serve both the residents and visitors.

Approximately 25% of the open Dorset coastline is now developed. Much of this took place before the Town and Country Planning Act in 1947. After this Act, there has been an increasing emphasis upon protecting and conserving the undeveloped coast. This will require careful and creative control of development. The framework for this to be achieved is provided by the statutory Development Plans, which cover the coastal area and associated legislation.

Housing Availability

In recent years, there has been considerable concern about the increasing number of people unable to compete in the housing market. This is seen as a problem particularly for younger people wishing to stay in Dorset. A combination of high house prices, reflecting demand a depletion of rented stock and typically lower than average wages in rural areas has exacerbated the problem. In addition, it is estimated that some 90% of second homes and holiday accommodation in the County are located within the coastal area. This is particularly relevant in coastal parishes - where up to 20% of the housing stock can be second or holiday homes.

Employment Prospects

The economy of the coastal area is heavily dependent upon the tourism industry. Whilst

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this may provide employment opportunities, the sector is typified by seasonal, low-skilled and low-waged employment. This is reflected in the lower than average wage levels, seasonal increases in unemployment and tendency for young people to leave the area to seek training and employment.

The closure of the Naval Base at Portland had at the time a significant impact on the local economy including a reduction in job opportunities and local spending power. The development of Osprey Quay and other sites have improved employment prospects in the area. However, the recent credit crunch and economic downturn have slowed development at Osprey Quay and have forced a number of local employers to close, including the Portland Spa at the former MOD site at Southwell. Despite these recent setbacks, the future is looking very encouraging with new sites creating skilled employment opportunities and the Weymouth and Portland National Sailing Academy hosting all the sailing events of the London 2012 Olympic and Paralympics Games, which will put the Dorset coast on the world stage.

Local Representation

There are many current issues affecting the population of the coastal area. It is crucial that the 'voice' of the coastal population is heard in the debate. This can be achieved through a number of channels; the more common routes include local Town and Parish Councils, and other tiers of Local Government, as well as

local community and amenity groups. In addition, with the advent of Local Agenda 21, more scope should be provided for community involvement in live issues and decision making.

The coast makes an important economic contribution to Dorset, and there is a need to increase this where possible, but without causing damage to the environment or interfering with existing activities.

The most important economic attributes of the coast

Some of the coast's main economic attributes are related to the leisure opportunities that it offers. People come to the coast for numerous leisure activities including walking, sailing, fishing or diving and spend their money locally, which does not necessarily have to be directly related to their leisure activity. These leisure opportunities and visual attributes of the coast also encourage people to move towards the coast to live and work on a more permanent basis. The coast benefits economically from the sea's natural resources through the commercial fishing industry. Sea-based transportation of both passengers and freight also contributes towards the economy in coastal areas. Finally there are growing opportunities from the wind and tidal power available in coastal areas.

Scope for an increase in economic activity on the coast - the most promising opportunities for Dorset

There is significant scope to increase economic activity on the coast, but it will have to be done in a sustainable manner. Ideally economic activity will be constant throughout the year so seasonal fluctuations, especially in the tourism sector, should be minimised. High-value added economic activity should be encouraged and in some areas it may be appropriate to increase the volume of economic activity.

There are a number of promising opportunities for increasing economic activity on the Dorset coast, most notably hosting the sailing events of the London 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games. The area's profile has also been enhanced by the Jurassic Coast World Heritage Site. These opportunities have helped supply further potential opportunities including the prospect of having an increasing number of cruise ships stopping over in Dorset. Finally there is the opportunity of increased economic activity from commissioning and servicing the Navitas wind farm.

How can the coast's contribution to employment within Dorset be increased?

Increasing economic activity outlined above will also increase employment within Dorset generally. This should go beyond the measure of full time equivalents and additional factors such as average earnings and training will need to be improved to meaningfully contribute towards employment in the area.