2.1 Introduction

2.1.1 One of the key roles of the Local Plan is to identify areas where development is generally acceptable, and areas where development may not be appropriate. A strategic approach has been adopted which identifies Development Boundaries as the general limits to development and Important Open Gaps between settlements and distinct parts of the built up area. In addition to specific policies in the plan, development proposals will also need to be judged against a set of development criteria. This chapter of the plan sets out these fundamental planning constraints and opportunities.

2.2 Defined Development Boundaries

2.2.1 In the interests of protecting the landscape and preventing the merging of towns and villages the idea of limiting new development in the countryside is a necessary part of the planning system as is the concept of a well defined urban boundary. Development Boundaries have been identified encompassing those areas within which development or redevelopment will be acceptable subject to other Local Plan policies. Outside the Defined Development Boundaries new development is strictly limited. The Structure Plan embodies a firm presumption against development in the countryside unless particular circumstances prevail.

2.2.2 It is important that such policies are firmly applied on the urban fringe where the urban area abuts areas of environmental sensitivity. Therefore outside the Development Boundaries defined on the Local Plan Proposals Map it is proposed that policies of general restraint will apply. This is in order to minimise sporadic development, protect areas of nature conservation and landscape importance, minimise the loss of agricultural land, prevent the coalescence of individual settlements or individual parts of the built-up area and preserve the open undeveloped nature of the countryside around Weymouth and the unique natural landscapes and features on Portland which are considered to be fundamental to the overall character of these areas.

2.2.3 The inclusion of a site within the Development Boundary cannot necessarily be taken as an indication of development potential or that planning permission will be automatically forthcoming. Other planning policies or material considerations may be relevant and effectively preclude development for sound planning reasons (see Policy D3). The Development Boundaries generally follow identifiable physical features. In some instances the boundaries seek to preserve open views or prevent the coalescence of development. A brief account of the factors influencing the delineation of the Development Boundary is set out in Appendix 1.

2.2.4 Looking in more detail at the boundary itself, a Development Boundary has been defined around the more urban built up parts of Nottington and Watery Lane, which are not within Conservation Areas. In the Wey Valley this approach seeks to preserve the individual integrity of settlements whilst protecting important gaps between groups of buildings and the different settlements. Further south the Wey Valley forms an Important Open Gap between built development at Southill and Radipole and this area is shown outside the Development
Boundary. Upwey, parts of Nottington and Radipole Village do not have a Development Boundary. These areas consist of scattered development and in view of the importance of preserving the rural character it is proposed that these areas be considered as open countryside and, like other open parts of the Wey Valley no development boundary has been defined. The features of Chafeys Lake and Radipole Lake, the latter leading down to the Inner Harbour area, both provide important open areas, which extend into the heart of the town centre.

2.2.5
To the south west of the Plan area the Development Boundary protects the landscape setting of the Heritage Coast. The undeveloped area of Little Francis at Lanehouse is considered an important local landscape feature and is therefore left outside of the Defined Development Boundary. The Portland Harbour Shore has been specifically excluded from the development boundary indicating that development would not be acceptable on this sensitive coastal area.

2.2.6
The ridge to the south of Littlemoor provides an important backdrop for much of the town area and the hill feature between Littlemoor and Preston is a particularly important local feature which has been excluded from the Development Boundary.

2.2.7
The Development Boundary around Sutton Poyntz deliberately excludes the Jordan Valley, which provides an Important Open Gap between Preston and Sutton Poyntz helping to retain the individual identity of the latter and provides the context for many of the buildings.

2.2.8
On Portland the Development Boundary has been drawn having regard to the Island's unique physical and environmental characteristics, the separate identity of different communities, and reflects the view of respondents to Pre-Degposits consultation on the Local Plan Review, that development on the Island should not extend beyond the boundaries of existing settlements. The approach is also backed by the Structure Plan which recognises the unique character of the Island and the importance of retaining the remaining generally undeveloped land as such and the Inspector's comments at the Portland Local Plan Inquiry regarding the finite resources of the Island and the need for the boundaries "to have a long term permanence" extending well beyond that plan period.

Policy D1 Development Boundaries

Within development boundaries residential, employment and other development to meet the needs of the local area may be permitted. Outside development boundaries development will be restricted to the following:

(i) development essential to the use of land for agriculture, forestry or horticulture in accordance with policy N22;
(ii) alterations and extensions to dwellings subject to policies D3 and H8;
(iii) conversion of suitable buildings to uses appropriate to the area in accordance with local plan policy N10;
(iv) the rebuilding or replacement of existing dwellings with equivalent sized dwellings on a one for one basis;
(v) proposals for farm diversification and stables in accordance with policies N23 and N24;
(vi) tourism and recreational development of camping and caravan sites in accordance with policies TO16 and TO18;
(vii) open air sporting or recreation facilities that do not have an adverse impact on the local environment or amenity of residents;
(viii) development provided for by other specific policies in this plan.
(ix) proposals for the generation of renewable energy from wind, hydro or tidal resources in accordance with policy D4

2.3 Important Open Gaps

2.3.1 Much of the open countryside outside the Development Boundary contributes to the setting of adjacent built up areas and provides them with access to the wider countryside. However, some tracts of land are particularly important in preserving the identity of individual settlements, by preventing the coalescence or merging of two distinct areas, and by providing open green corridors of aesthetic and wildlife value, and by linking open areas that extend from the open countryside into the heart of urban areas. These areas are particularly vulnerable to incremental development that can gradually erode their open character.

Policy D2 Important Open Gaps

Developments in Important Open Gaps will only be permitted where:

(i) the development would be designed and sited so as not to be visually intrusive;
(ii) the proposal, either individually or cumulatively with other proposals, does not significantly harm the open character of the gap;
(iii) the setting, individual character and identity of built up areas adjoining the gap is maintained;
(iv) the proposal would not lead to the coalescence of development within or across the gap.

2.3.2 A descriptive justification for the Important Open Gaps is included in Appendix 2.

2.4 General Development Criteria

2.4.1 The consideration of general development criteria is of fundamental importance to the determination of planning applications. In assessing whether environmental aspects have been properly respected, the Local Planning Authority will have regard to factors such as natural habitats, ecological value, micro-climate, geology, land stability and soils, public access, landscape and townscape character and pollution. Where such factors are considered to relate to a site, an appropriate survey will be required in support of any planning application. In particular, on sites supporting natural habitats ecological surveys may be required to establish the presence or absence of important species. In addition, the degree of disturbance caused to adjoining users, the availability of essential services, and the general environmental impact are all matters for detailed consideration in the determination of planning applications. Some major or complex developments require a very careful and detailed analysis of these issues in the form of an Environmental Statement. The criteria against which developments will be judged as requiring such an assessment are set out in the 1999 Environmental Assessment Regulations.

2.4.2 In the light of PPG1 (General Policy and Principles) and PPG3 (Housing) design and layout need to be informed by the wider context, having regard not just to any immediate neighbouring buildings but the townscape and landscape of the wider locality. The local pattern of streets and spaces, building traditions, materials and ecology should all help to determine the character and identity of a development, recognising that new building
technologies are capable of delivering acceptable and sometimes innovative and exciting buildings.

Policy D3 General Development Criteria

Proposals for development will be determined in accordance with the following criteria:

(i) buildings and spaces should respect those features that contribute to "local distinctiveness" and the character of the area;
(ii) designs and layouts should be safe, take account of crime prevention and community safety issues and, where possible, be accessible by persons with a disability;
(iii) proposals should not be detrimental to the environment by virtue of noise, smoke, fumes, dust or other emissions;
(iv) existing landscape, townscape, riverine, coastal, nature conservation, and other environmental features, including linear and stepping stone features that penetrate built up areas or link consolidated open areas, and the best and most versatile agricultural land should be respected for their intrinsic value and retained, protected or enhanced where possible;
(v) proposals should help to "green" the residential environment by assisting sustainable drainage, contributing to biodiversity, promoting energy efficiency in layout and design and creating more opportunities for retaining and planting trees in the borough;
(vi) proposals should not have a seriously detrimental impact on the privacy and amenity of existing occupiers and new occupiers;
(vii) design and layouts should focus on the quality of places and living environments, and give priority to pedestrians rather than the moving and parking of vehicles;
(viii) access, parking, open space where appropriate, and other services should be provided in accordance with the policies in this plan;
(ix) new development should not pose a risk to highway safety.

2.4.3
Policy B1 sets out the general design guidelines that will be used to assess proposals. These considerations apply equally within Conservation Areas alongside Policy B8 although the Conservation Area statement will identify the particular features of importance that will need to be taken into account.

2.5 Renewable Energy

2.5.1 Renewable energy has the potential to contribute towards sustainable development. The various forms of renewable energy not only produce energy with no net production of greenhouse gases (e.g. carbon dioxide) but also avoid the use of extracted mineral fuels, enabling energy generation with far less environmental impact. Some types of renewable energy e.g. solar, wind, hydro and tidal, are virtually waste and pollution free in operation. The Government has set a target to produce 10% of the national energy requirement from renewable sources by 2010, close to the end of the period of this Local Plan Review. This target is principally to achieve the UK commitments to reduce the production of greenhouse gases under the Kyoto Protocol. The Government Office for the South West commissioned an assessment of the renewable energy potential of the South West Region that was published in February 2001. The Renewable Energy Assessment and Targets for the South West identified the type and number of renewable energy schemes that Dorset could realistically support in order to contribute to the Government target. Work is now continuing with the Revision 2010 project to identify renewable electricity targets for all sub-regions in the South West including Dorset. This target will be published in the forthcoming Review of the Structure Plan.
Policy D4 – Renewable Energy

Renewable energy proposals that contribute towards emerging targets for renewable energy production in the Borough will be supported, subject to consideration of their impacts upon landscape, wildlife and heritage assets and residential and public amenity. In determining planning applications for new developments, the Borough Council will balance any likely adverse impacts with the economic, social and environmental benefits that would be gained.

2.5.2 The contribution of the Borough of Weymouth & Portland to meeting the targets for renewable energy generation is likely to be limited. The geography of the Borough makes it a poor location for Combined Heat & Power and Biogas. The Borough’s watercourses are insufficient to support Hydro schemes and the local distribution of historic landscapes does not favour large scale on-shore Wind Energy capture. Perhaps the greatest realisable potential in the Borough is from building related Solar photo-voltaic arrays.

2.5.3 The various policies of this plan relating to landscape, wildlife designations, heritage assets, the location of employment development and the control of building adaptations will apply to the various types of renewable energy proposals as appropriate. Appendix 8 describes the current and emerging technologies and provides an indication of some of the policies and issues that would need to be considered in determining applications for different types of renewable energy scheme.