1 A Review of Plans, Policies and Guidance

1.1 The literary review of plans and policies affecting the three locations making up the Western Dorset Growth Corridor (WDGC) i.e. Weymouth, Dorchester and Portland with specific reference to public space forms part of the commission awarded to Bounce Back CIC. It is the purpose of the review to identify how Plans, policies and guidance address the issue of art and public space (public realm) in order to inform future revisions of key documents and/or to identify ways to aid delivery of improvements to public spaces with specific reference to the three key sites identified by the Council for more detailed consideration.

1.2 From the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) in setting the government’s design expectations to local studies and reports, a not insubstantial number of documents form the background to this study. Of most import are the plans that make up the statutory planning framework as these guide the intentions of the Councils for their areas and guide development proposals and the decision making process.

1.3 Below the statutory plans sit a range of documents produced as design guides, detailed proposals, topic specific themed reports and other sundry documents. The literary review considered all documents listed in the project brief and Bounce Back’s proposal to the Council.

Weymouth

1.4 By far and away the majority of documents produced relate to Weymouth. Dating back over the last decade or so a number of studies, reports and plans have been produced with the aim of making improvements to the town centre. The award of the Olympic sailing events to the Borough focused attention in the years leading up to the Games, and the opportunity to showcase the town spurned a package of measures of which, in part, were implemented. The recession ultimately affected the amount of public sector funding that came into the town and restrictions today on the public purse
continue to affect public projects here and elsewhere. The production of the current Local Plan and the recent Weymouth Town Centre Masterplan draw together the issues that have been discussed and reported on over many years to now provide a clear direction and intent for the town centre.

1.5 The current policy context for all three places is encapsulated in the recently adopted Local Plan of October 2015. The Plan sets out separate visions for Weymouth and Portland and for Dorchester, a set of strategic objectives and strategic themes from which themed policies and then locational specific policies are set out. The Plan has a strong design emphasis seeking the application of sound design principles and outcomes aimed at improving the quality of development. Specific mention of the space between buildings (public realm) features in the overall design considerations and for this level of plan this is considered appropriate for a themed topic section and policy. Public Art is referenced in Policy ENV10, The Landscape and Townscape Setting, where the policy seeks public art opportunities as appropriate. It does not explain where or how these will be considered. In future reviews of the Plan it may be helpful to add explanation within the supporting text as to how Public Art can enhance local character and contribute to cultural heritage.

1.6 Of more import is the detailed locational policies and the expected outcomes that the Plan seeks. The section on Weymouth starts with a vision for the town which focuses on the regeneration of the town centre, to include attractive public spaces. This gives a strong cue to the importance that public space plays in making successful places. The locational specific policies then set out a clear statement of intent for the protection of important assets and the need to look after the town’s special features whilst taking the opportunity to improve the overall quality of the place, including the public realm, but without reference to the role that art can play. The strategy clearly supports public realm improvements and this provides a good base to seek
such improvements whether through development or interventions by the Council, agencies or other parties.

1.7 The adoption of The Weymouth Town Centre Masterplan, around the same time as the Local Plan, provides greater detail about the nature of improvements and expected change. Providing more depth to the strategy and policies within the Local Plan it sets out a strong place-making case for the regeneration of the Town Centre and importantly the role of public space in making Weymouth an attractive place. The identification of key locations for improvement, key routes and the linkages between locations provides a sound platform for the development of specific projects.

1.8 The Masterplan includes an initial Public Realm Strategy which focuses on improving the public spaces, rebalancing the priority given to pedestrians while still providing for motor vehicles and to provide a pedestrian harbour circuit. The strategy is very much focused on linkages and connections as important strategic improvements rather than the detail of what they will look like and how they will be delivered, but it does provide the context for developing projects to achieve the objectives of the Masterplan.

1.9 Of all the other technical studies and emerging reports that have been and are being produced there are perhaps two that require specific reference. The Watkins Dally report of 2006 looking at Seafront Regeneration found much support through the public consultation that took place, and indeed it informed a number of projects leading up to The Olympic Games. The report set out a very clear strategy and projects for The Esplanade aimed at respecting the cultural heritage of the town whilst making improvements that would enable the town to retain its national importance as a tourist destination. The strategy was simple in context focusing on public space and improvements to it that would provide an uncluttered environment and help to reduce the dominance of the road and traffic associated with it running
behind The Esplanade. The vision remains relevant today and taking this forward forms a key recommendation to come out of this report.

1.10 The second study is the emerging work on the necessary sea defences for The Esplanade. These will have significant implications for the look and feel of the town. A sensitive approach will be required and a good starting point would be to revisit Watkins and Dally's work to see how this can inform the ultimate solution. It is worth noting that the Environment Agency, certainly within the region, have a very good track record of understanding the importance of good design and how art and the use of artists can add benefit to coastal defence schemes in sensitive locations, and early and regular engagement with them should take place.

1.11 To summarise the review of documents covering Weymouth there is a strong planning basis and clear articulation of changes required to deliver improvements to the Town Centre. The role of public space is at the forefront of thinking and the contribution that it makes to better places. However, in all the current literature there is little mention of the role that art can have in enhancing places and contributing to the cultural heritage of the town centre. Only in saved Urban Design Supplementary Planning Guidance from 2002 does the design of the public realm and public art, in the form of % for art, feature. This lack of current reference is in very sharp contrast to the various reports and projects implemented in the years leading up to the Olympic Games where public art as it was referred to featured heavily in project briefs, design and delivery.

Portland

1.12 The Isle of Portland is a unique place with a mixture of settlements across the Island. The Local Plan vision for Portland centres on maintaining its natural and built attributes and improving the economic and social situation for its residents. Tourism plays a vital role in the local economy of the island focused on its natural assets with sailing and other water based recreation,
walking, climbing and bird watching the most popular. The Local Plan makes no specific reference to improvements to public spaces on Portland although by inference on key sites and at tourism locations investment will aid the economic and social benefits being sought by the Council.

1.13 A Portland Neighbourhood Plan has commenced with Arts and Culture being one of its themes. The Plan is still at an early stage and other than this there are no other documents that we are aware of that relate or make reference to art and public space.

**Dorchester**

1.14 Dorchester, the County town of Dorset, is the third location within the WDGC that forms part of this study. It is the largest settlement in West Dorset District. The Local Plan vision for West Dorset focuses on the natural environment and community aspects of the District with protection of the environment, the economy, affordable housing and community facilities identified as key to the success of the area.

1.15 The Local Plan vision for Dorchester seeks to raise the profile and standing of the town as a vibrant centre meeting a variety of retail, cultural, health and leisure ambitions. It refers to the importance of good design but overall is more generic than the vision for Weymouth. The specific policies address development locations and the type of development proposed. The Plan refers to the emergence of a Dorchester Transport and Environment Plan that aims to reduce traffic issues and reduce the adverse effect on air quality and how through the Plan improvement to public spaces will support environmental enhancement to the town centre. Beyond this the Dorchester section is silent on art and public realm.

1.16 Supplementary Planning Documents (SPD) help exemplify and detail the policies of the development plan. For West Dorset, the adopted Design and Sustainable Development Guidelines 2009 remains extant. It is, however, proposed to review this document in the next three years through the
production of joint updated SPD for both Council areas. The current document is a guide to good design incorporating sustainable methods of construction. It is extremely detailed covering all aspects to be considered in the design process including a short section on how public art can be incorporated into developments. Through the documents’ review this section could be expanded to explain more how art plays a significant role in making places.

**Conclusion on the Review of Plans, Policies and Guidance**

1.17 In reviewing the documents it is noticeable that design features highly in the statutory planning documents and the various reports and studies undertaken. However, in the context of this report while public realm or public space is integrated and referenced as part of creating good places, the role of art in public space is silent, which is in contrast to the position 10-15 years ago where public art and its incorporation into development and its relationship with public space was detailed in documents and through delivery.

1.18 Weymouth, Portland and Dorchester are all important historically and culturally with fine examples of buildings and spaces. The use of art in public space is not uncommon yet there is little reference in the current suite of documents of how public art can be incorporated into the design of public spaces. This is in contrast to the recognition of public space being important and making a vital contribution to place-making and ultimately how places are viewed. The opportunity to rectify this can be taken through the forthcoming production of the joint Design SPD.

1.19 In terms of how the review of documents informs the future direction and focus for work to bring about improvements to public spaces and the raising of the aesthetic quality of these spaces, the brief sought the emphasis to be on Weymouth Town Centre. It has already been stated that a large number of different documents have been produced that have to a greater or lesser
extent influenced the current and future look and feel of Weymouth. The current planning policy framework sets the agenda for Weymouth Town Centre and it is now about delivering the vision and strategy, not revisiting policy. Likewise for Dorchester and Portland working up detailed proposals that can be taken forward should be the focus of efforts.

Informing the Way Forward

1.20 It can be argued that all the major public spaces in Weymouth Town Centre require attention to some degree, but there is a clear need and opportunity to address space adjacent to the Water's edge, from the Swannery car park as a major arrival point, its connection south along the lower reaches of the River Wey through to Westham Bridge and beyond into the town centre and continuing around the inner harbour, Customs House Quay and on to the Pavilion Theatre. From here at the southern end of The Esplanade the sweep around to the Pier Bandstand is the most important public space, providing the man-made edge to the back of the beach and views out across the Jurassic Coast, and behind the magnificent Georgian buildings that are the townscape backdrop to Weymouth Bay.

1.21 The Watkins Dally Report 2006 and its recommendations in part have been delivered and it is the view of this report that their strategy is as relevant today as it was 10 years ago. However, a lot has changed and the moment should be taken to review what has and what has not been achieved and seek to refresh the work to inform projects that can be implemented for the good of the town. The original Watkins: Dally report and proposals focused on The Esplanade and this work could be updated.

Funding

1.22 Through the planning system improvements to public space can be achieved by either using monies collected from the Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) or through Planning obligations, most commonly s106 agreements. The Councils will introduce CIL in July this year thereby removing the opportunity
to secure off site funding through Planning Obligations. What this means for public space enhancement is that on development sites, such as the key regeneration sites identified in Weymouth Town Centre Masterplan, the design of public space will be important to secure through the planning application process, preferably agreeing design and materials as part of any approval rather than deferring details through the use of conditions. Outside of development sites i.e. the public spaces across the town centre and in Dorchester and Portland that do not form part of a major development scheme will require separate funding.

1.23 To receive funding from CIL will require public space generally or specific public space projects to be listed on the Councils R123 list. This will need careful consideration as whichever is chosen will determine whether other funds collected through Planning Obligations can be put towards projects. If public space or projects are not on the list, then they will not be eligible for funding through CIL. The matter of then securing funding for public space projects from the CIL pot will be a matter for the Local Authority, or discussion with neighbourhood forums or groups where a neighbourhood plan is in place, to prioritise where the funding will be spent. A strong case will need to made against competing infrastructure projects.

1.24 Outside of the planning related funding streams opportunities should be taken to bring in external funding. The Dorset LEP has indicated that funding will be available for Weymouth Town Centre flood defence scheme and the Council should look to other funding opportunities such as the lottery or Coastal Communities Fund to aid delivery of public space projects.

Recommendations from the Review of Plans, Policies and Guidance

1.25 Through the review of Plans and other documents the opportunity should be taken to expand the value of art in the public realm as part of place-making. The review of the Local Plan may afford the opportunity to include wording to support this aim but this will depend on how much of the recently adopted
plan is reviewed. However, the matter is generally uncontentious and therefore the opportunity presented should be taken.

1.26 In the joint Local Development Scheme March 2016 it is programmed to produce a joint Design Supplementary Document. In this document the opportunity should be taken to include how art in the public realm can enhance public spaces and the enjoyment and use of spaces. The document could take the opportunity to set out in an appendix how the process of engaging artists in the design process works and how in the joint Council’s areas this will work.

1.27 Above all else, and specifically in the context of Weymouth Town Centre and the projects for Dorchester and Portland, with the buildings blocks of policy and supporting documents in place, the focus needs to be on delivery of development and public space enhancement projects. Projects need to be developed that can be implemented, that can enable funding bids and have the support engagement and support of the local community. At the heart of projects will need to be the desire to aesthetically enhance public space and therefore any guidance or brief that is written will require this as its core objective.

1.28 It is recommended that the Dally:Watkins 2006 Weymouth Esplanade plan be revisited. This will help to inform the ultimate flood defence solution for the town.

1.29 For all three locations it is important that projects are developed that have the support of the community and local engagement should form an integral part of project development.

1.30 Those involved within the Councils will need to ensure that public space improvements are prioritised and appropriately funded to bring about the intent of their own policies in order to foster economic growth and environmental enhancement.