

Dorset Coast Forum Project

Dorset Harbours Strategy Consultation Report

Executive Summary

The Dorset Harbours Strategy is being developed by the Dorset Coast Forum (DCF) on behalf of Dorset Council through the Dorset Council Harbours Committee. The area covered in this work includes the Dorset Council harbours at Weymouth, West Bay and Lyme Regis. As part of this process, DCF carried out initial stakeholder engagement to feed into the formation of the strategy during the months of September and October 2020. This report provides the summary of the feedback from consultations including virtual workshops and an online survey. This feedback provides an understanding on what harbour users feel works well and what doesn't work so well and ideas for future development. This information will be combined with other data and engagement with targeted stakeholders to form the basis of the strategy.

There were five main aspects of the harbour that were important to respondents:

- Culture and heritage
- Recreation and tourism
- Marine safety and enforcement
- Conservation and ecology
- Economy/business growth/regeneration

Dorset Council's three harbours, Weymouth, Bridport and Lyme Regis, all have unique communities but have many of the same issues and barriers to development such as limited space for development and restricted access. However, the range of opportunities for each harbour varies due to spatial considerations, available infrastructure improvements and the desires of the community.

Please note that all the summaries of the responses throughout this report reflect the responses and feedback we received and do not reflect the views of DCF or Dorset Council.

At Weymouth the facilities and diversity of activities were thought to be an aspect that worked well for the Harbour although there are improvements that can be made to the facilities. Overall, many people felt that Weymouth harbour was a well-managed safe harbour although there were a proportion who felt the approach to management was a concern. Issues for Weymouth harbour primarily focussed around lack of communication and stakeholder engagement, and traffic and parking in relation to harbour users' access although this is something outside of the remit of the harbour authority.

Ideas generated for development of Weymouth harbour included being open to the opportunities that might come with Brexit, accommodating developing sectors such as aquaculture, working with potential pedestrianisation measures to increase a wider tourism offer, reinstating ferry/port links, improving facilities for commercial and leisure sector and improving the offer for visitors and tourists by creating stronger links between the harbour and the attractions on offer.

For Bridport, harbour management was widely praised including with how the harbour operates and customer service received. The facilities were generally deemed adequate but could be improved with better use of pontoons. Some infrastructure issues were raised about the slipway, which is in the process of being addressed. There were some concerns regarding staffing levels especially during the peak season, as currently there is one harbour master who covers both Lyme Regis and Bridport. This tied into a small number of safety concerns due to perceived lack of staff capacity to enforce safety procedures and managing the increased visitor numbers in the summer.

Ideas for development that Bridport harbour included increasing the offer for leisure activities, having a wider joined up approach to tourism around the harbour including possible pedestrianisation and celebrating the heritage and culture of the harbour more. Staffing changes were suggested to incorporate a full-time harbour master but there was a proportion of respondents who didn't feel any change was necessary. A suggestion was also made to use a more diverse range of communication tools with harbour users. There were some infrastructure improvement suggestions such as improved boat storage, zoning for unloading and improvements to the slipway.

At Lyme Regis, similarly to Bridport, the management approach was generally praised. However, the same concerns about staffing levels were raised, especially during peak seasons and about the capacity of staff to enforce safety when covering both harbours. Respondents valued the mix of activities at the harbour and facilities were thought as adequate but could do with some improvements.

Ideas for development at Lyme Regis harbour included improving the aging infrastructure to make it more resilient to climate change, improving facilities, moorings and pontoons and centring the community in any future developments. There was a proportion of respondents who felt that there was not scope for change or were happy with the status quo.

The Dorset Coast Forum, with the Dorset Council Harbours Committee, will use this feedback, alongside supporting information and reports, to help form a draft strategy that will be presented for consultation. This is to ensure that the strategy reflects the needs of the community, and by taking a bottom up approach is supported by the community.

1. Background & Introduction

Following the formation of the unitary authority of Dorset Council in 2019, the Dorset Council Harbours Committee are looking ahead as to how Weymouth, Bridport and Lyme Regis harbours, seen in figure 1, will develop over the next 10 years. The Dorset Coast Forum are helping this work on behalf of Dorset Council through stakeholder consultation and the production of the Dorset Council Harbour Strategy for the period of 2021 to 2031. DCF have undertaken stakeholder consultation to support the creation of a strategy that aligns all three harbours under Dorset Council management while recognising the individual challenges and opportunities for each location.

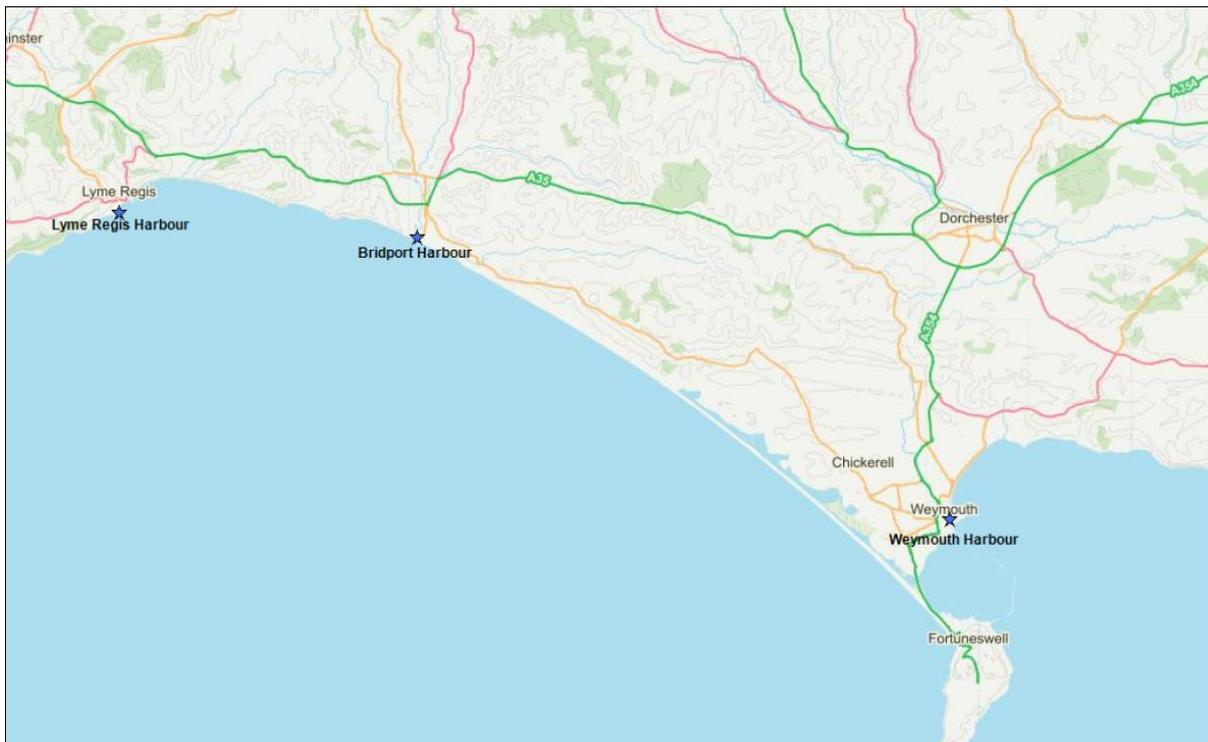


Figure 1: Map showing the location of Weymouth, West bay and Lyme Regis harbours

2. Purpose of the Dorset Harbour Strategy

The purpose of the Strategy is to create a vision for where the harbours will be in ten years and set out how that vision will be realised. Although it will be used primarily by Dorset Council to achieve this, it will help other management authorities, stakeholders and local communities know how they can expect to see Weymouth, Bridport (West Bay) and Lyme Regis Harbours develop over the next 10 years.

3. Consultation Format & Community Engagement

The initial consultation was through a scoping exercise to gain feedback from user groups about what works well, what doesn't work well and potential ideas for development. It was conducted online due to government guidelines to reduce the spread of Covid 19 by:

1. **Workshops via Zoom:** Four sessions took place with an open invitation sent to local stakeholders and harbour users including businesses, residents, local attractions and local authorities. The businesses included marine, fishing, retail, leisure and tourism. There was one workshop for Lyme Regis Harbour, one for Bridport (West Bay) Harbour and two workshops for Weymouth Harbour. The workshops were facilitated by DCF. Sixty stakeholders attended across all the workshops.
2. **Online Surveys:** A public consultation was carried out online during September and October via the DCF Dorset have your say website:
<https://www.dorsetcoasthaveyoursay.co.uk/dorset-harbours-strategy>. Analysis of results were by DCF. 470 individuals responded to the survey.

4. Promotion

The public consultation was promoted by press release, website, and social media. This was widely distributed by email through the harbour mailing lists, the Dorset Coast Forum mailing list and through social media channels of Dorset Council and DCF. Other organisations who also promoted the consultation included Weymouth Town Council, Weymouth BID, Bridport Town Council, Lyme Regis Town Council. It was picked up by local papers including the Dorset Echo.

5. Stakeholder Workshops Summary of Responses

5.1 Context

In the facilitated workshops, questions were put to stakeholders which covered three broad categories around each harbour:

- current uses
- value of the harbour
- ideas for development

The workshops were not to set out to agree common responses but aimed to get the breadth of opinion across stakeholders and therefore the questions were broad and open. Discussions were recorded for each workshop by the facilitators and all information has been considered but they have been summarised succinctly for this report.

At the start of each workshop, attendees were polled to ask them “what the most important aspect of harbour management was to them”. The summary of all the polls conducted, as shown in figure 2, shows the most important areas were recreation and tourism, economic growth, conservation and ecology, marine safety and enforcement and culture and heritage.

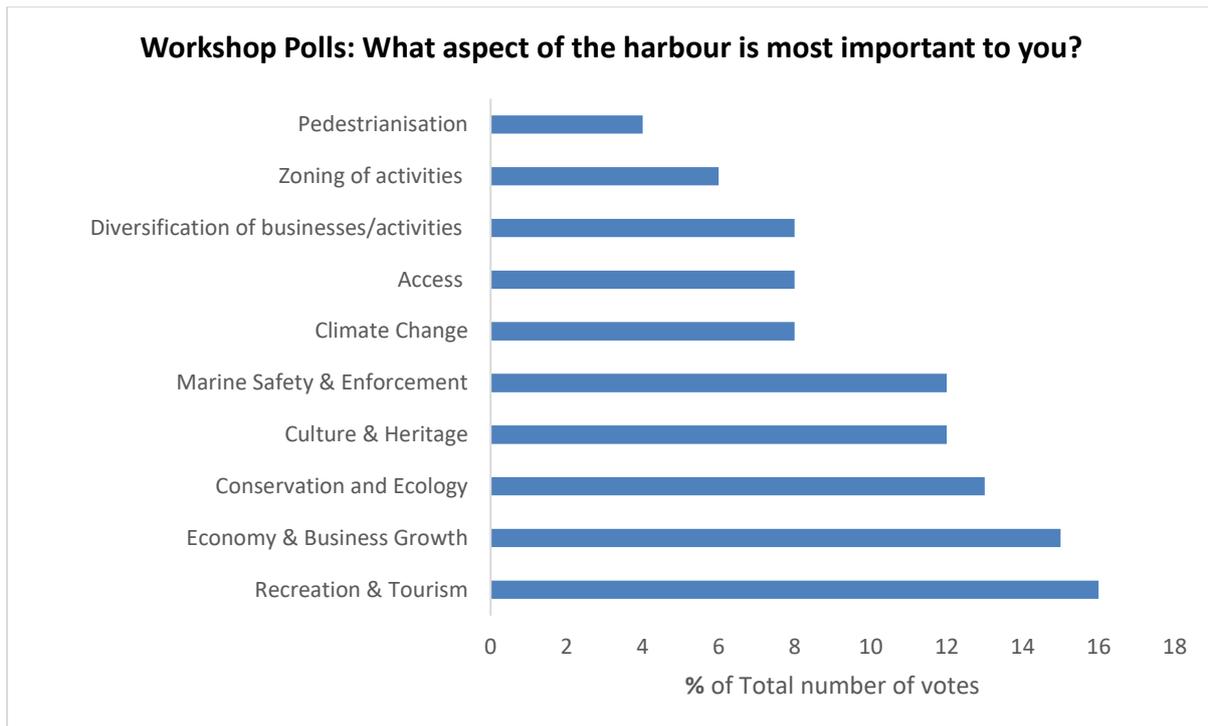


Figure 2: What aspect of the harbour was most important to all workshop attendees

5.2 Summary of responses by harbour

5.2.1 Bridport Harbour

How would you best describe the harbour

General analysis concluded that Bridport harbour is a mixture of a working and tourist harbour, friendly and traditional and not over commercialised. There is a good blend of fishing boats, leisure craft, local businesses and tourist attractions. It is a well-designed harbour given the constraints it faces.

What works well

The management and harbour staff are helpful, friendly and available. The food outlets and Discovery Centre are popular and there is a diverse base of tourism activity. The mix of tourism, leisure and commercial activity works well. Overall, the current provision of facilities is adequate, the new pontoons work well.

What does not work well

Access and parking including disabled parking provision is not adequate for the demand. Although the facilities are adequate, there could be better access to power, water and fuel along the eastern side and there could be better toilet facilities for visitors. There is only one harbour master covering two harbours and although the team do a good job- perhaps there is scope for more staff. Could be better links with beach management. Seagulls are a problem especially in busy times with lots of tourists around. Better loading and unloading zones could be applied for the fishing industry.

Ideas and development opportunities

It was felt there was a greater potential for pedestrianisation and a more joined up tourism approach. Climate change and sea level rise should be the driver of change for improved infrastructure. More pontoons could help with expansion but would need a level of protection.

Better information for users and improved IT facilities. West Bay in general should have a bigger vision than the harbour and to choose a theme to be a leader in. Opportunities to utilise West Beach more, become more involved in community events and have a beach manager in place to link up with the harbour was put forward. There were also suggestions of improving the offer for harbour users e.g. parking fees etc. Access to West Bay and around the harbour should be considered together.

5.22 Weymouth Harbour

How would you best describe the harbour

The consensus was that it is a working harbour with a mixture of activities and a source of Livelihood for many. It's vibrant and picturesque with a unique geography. Its sheltered position means it is a year-round facility. There is a strong history and heritage and it is now a hub for activity for work, leisure and socialising.

What works well

Temporary pedestrianisation measures¹ provoked a difference of opinion as some deemed them to work well to create a café culture but others did not support them. Good access and transport links for loading and deliveries and the fact it is a working harbour also contributes to tourism and leisure sector. Previous festivals and events at the harbour attracted many visitors into the town with the harbour seen as vibrant and busy. The harbour has a diverse arrangement of commercial and leisure activities which is good for the economy. The fishing fleet has good access to the quayside and town and the current positions for charter boats is beneficial. The harbour bridge is integral and is also an attraction to tourists. The harbour is perceived to be a safe environment for users e.g. good access, speed limits in place. The Weymouth Harbour Consultative Group² is a mechanism that could work well.

What does not work well

The harbour has lots of potential but there is a lack of leadership, direction and focus for the management. It was felt the management approach was not welcoming there was a lack of support for the marine businesses although some disagreed with this. Communication from the harbour authority and through the consultative groups was raised as an area that needs to be improved. There seems to be a lack of communication around traffic management and parking facilities. The temporary traffic restrictions in the summer 2020 divided opinion as some felt the Café Culture has caused issues with litter and undesirable behaviour leaving rubbish on boats and noise issues for residents. There was also a feeling that visiting watercraft on the leisure side were more supported than commercial craft by the harbour authorities. Local business users feel it's difficult to move through levels of bureaucracy get things done.

Ideas and development opportunities

Any opportunities around development of the harbour needs to be integrated with future development plans for the Peninsular, Brewers Quay and North Quay as all connected to the

¹ A 12-week temporary traffic order was in place at Weymouth Harbourside at the time of the workshops.

² The Weymouth Harbour Consultative Group is a group of nominated harbour user representatives that the Harbours Committee regularly consults (except in a case of special urgency or where it would be seriously detrimental to the interests of the Council to do so) on all matters substantially affecting the conservation, protection, regulation, management, maintenance and improvement of the harbour and its navigation.

harbour with new funding and investment. On a strategic level any development needs should be part of a broader strategy for the whole town.

Key ideas included: pedestrianisation with emphasis on the café culture, tourism and leisure, festivals and events that generate income for the town; Access to the area could be restricted to residents and business who work the harbour; Promotion of the culture and heritage as a tourist attraction with new wayfinding and interpretation. Coastal defences need to be evaluated and taken in to account when planning future developments. Facilities could be improved regarding pontoons, berths, access and parking, lighting, electricity and water, toilets, IT provision for communication purposes. There is a need to attract other markets to use the harbour and the town including ferry services and transport infrastructure as well as provision for visiting ships which generate income and attract tourists

5.23 Lyme Regis Harbour

How would you best describe the harbour

Lyme Regis harbour is best described as a mixture of working and tourist harbour, friendly and traditional and not over commercialised. A good blend of fishing boats, leisure craft, local businesses and tourist attractions like the Cobb. Harbour is rich in history and culture with a good location.

What works well

The Harbour Master and Assistant HM are friendly and supportive, and the management works well. The blend of commercial and leisure boats works well, as do the slipways, pontoons and access to the sea. There is a general satisfaction with the existing facilities with minor improvements but infrastructure improvements that could be made.

What does not work well

There was concern that some boats entered the swimming areas and it was suggested to have defined areas for water sport activities. Currently personal watercraft (jet skis etc) are not allowed to launch from the harbour and there was a mixed opinion as to whether this should be allowed to happen. In busy periods there were concerns about the congregation of pedestrians on slipways. Traffic management, signage and vehicle access requires improvement. Access to pontoons can be difficult at times. Maintenance and usage of buildings on the Cobb was highlighted as something that needs to be improved. There are not enough power outlets during busy periods. The aging infrastructure needs to be addressed.

Ideas and development opportunities

Workshop attendees highlighted that infrastructure repairs are vital with flood defences needing to be considered with rising sea levels. It was felt that the cobb and harbour was one of the most valuable places in the town. Community events could be capitalised on and improved alongside implementing infrastructure that could attract people e.g. underwater lights in the harbour and make better use of seasonality to attract visitors at less busy times. It was suggested to look at opportunities for the personal watercraft users to launch by ensuring responsible practices and codes for registered owners to comply with. It was also raised to make better use of the Cobb buildings and promote businesses and facilities there but ensure heritage is kept.

6. Online Survey Summary of Responses

6.1 Number of responses

The number of responses to the online public survey were 470. The percentage of people inputting into each harbour area was 41% from Weymouth, 30% from Lyme Regis and 29% from Bridport harbours.

6.2 Key interest or connection with the harbour

Figure 3 showed that the largest connection with the harbour were people from recreational boating or water activities (212 people) followed by residential and private mooring (123 people). The large number in the other category reflects non harbour residents, employees of the harbour and visitors to the area.

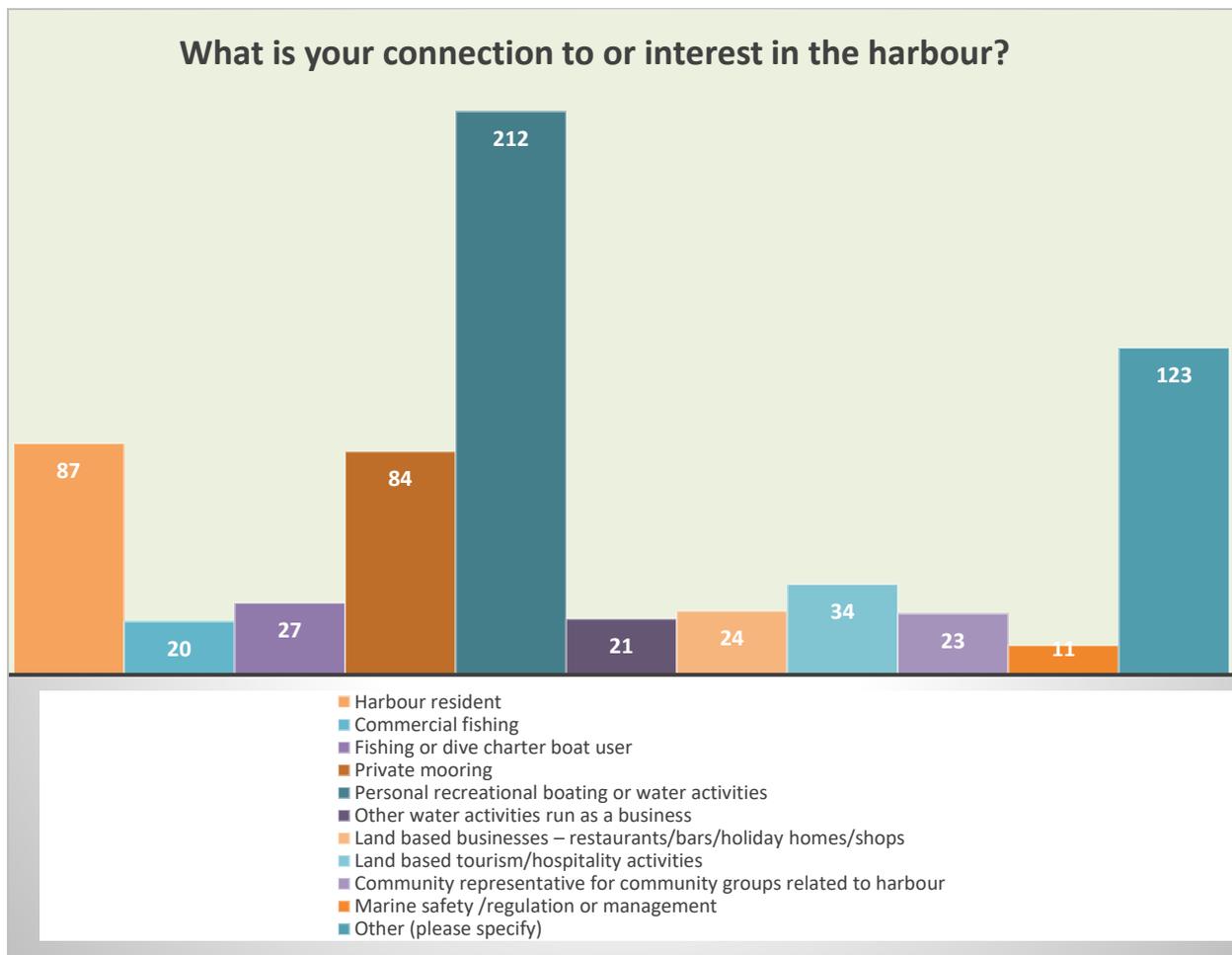


Figure 1 respondents connection and interest to the harbour

6.3 Harbour description

Respondents were asked to describe the current harbour which were then categorised as to whether they were positive, negative or neutral/mixed comments. Figure 4 indicates that overall people described the harbours positively. Peoples positive comments included descriptive words such as attractive, picturesque, vibrant, unique and diverse. People also commented positively on the heritage and culture, tourist attractions, community spirit, the benefits of working harbours. At Weymouth the negative comments mainly related to the management, traffic, anti-social behaviour. At Lyme Regis and Bridport, negative descriptions were mainly around parking, access and overcrowding at times.

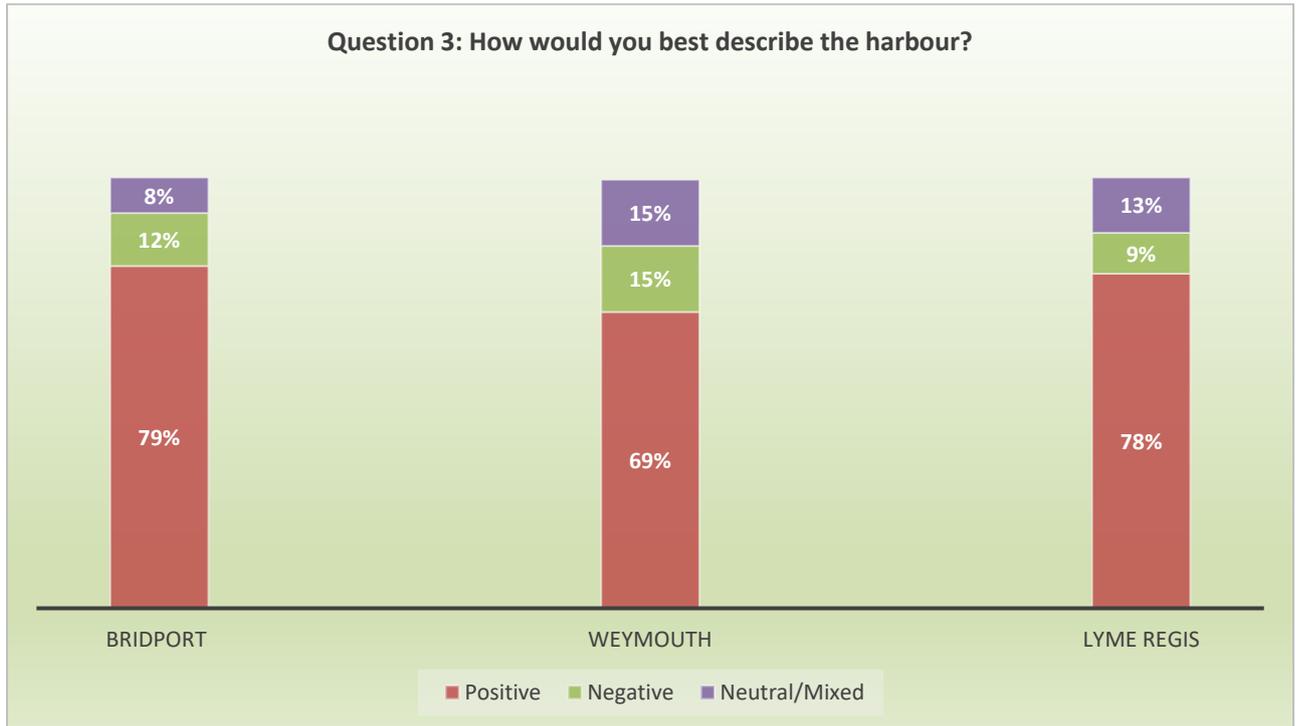


Figure 2 How respondents best describe about the harbour- positive and negative comments

6.4 Harbour management that works well

Figure 5 provides analysis for each harbour on what people think works well currently. The results indicate that generally people felt the management worked well, were happy with the facilities and the diverse mix of activities at each harbour. Weymouth was the only harbour with pedestrianisation and traffic related comments in a positive light- mainly relating to the temporary measures in place at the time. Bridport and Lyme Regis had comments saying there were happy with no personal watercraft being allowed to launch from the harbours.



Figure 5 What aspects of the harbour work well and would like to stay the same

6.5 Harbour management that does not works so well

Management featured strongly in comments about what doesn't work so well- particularly at Weymouth. Comments about the management in Weymouth mainly related to the approach and communication and that there was not enough engagement with harbour stakeholders. Safety and enforcement were a concern mainly relating to antisocial behaviour rather than the safety of the harbour operations themselves. Comments relating to management at Bridport and Lyme were focussed on staffing structure due to the shared harbour master. There were concerns around safety and enforcement in Lyme Regis which related to staff capacity in peak seasons but not to any specific incidents or infrastructure. Facilities, mooring and pontoons were also something respondents felt didn't work so well and needed to be improved. There were similar concerns about Bridport in relation to management structure and safety and enforcement issues. Facilities needed improvement and some issues with the slipway were specifically highlighted. Figure 7 shows the diversity of what people thought didn't work well at each of the harbours.

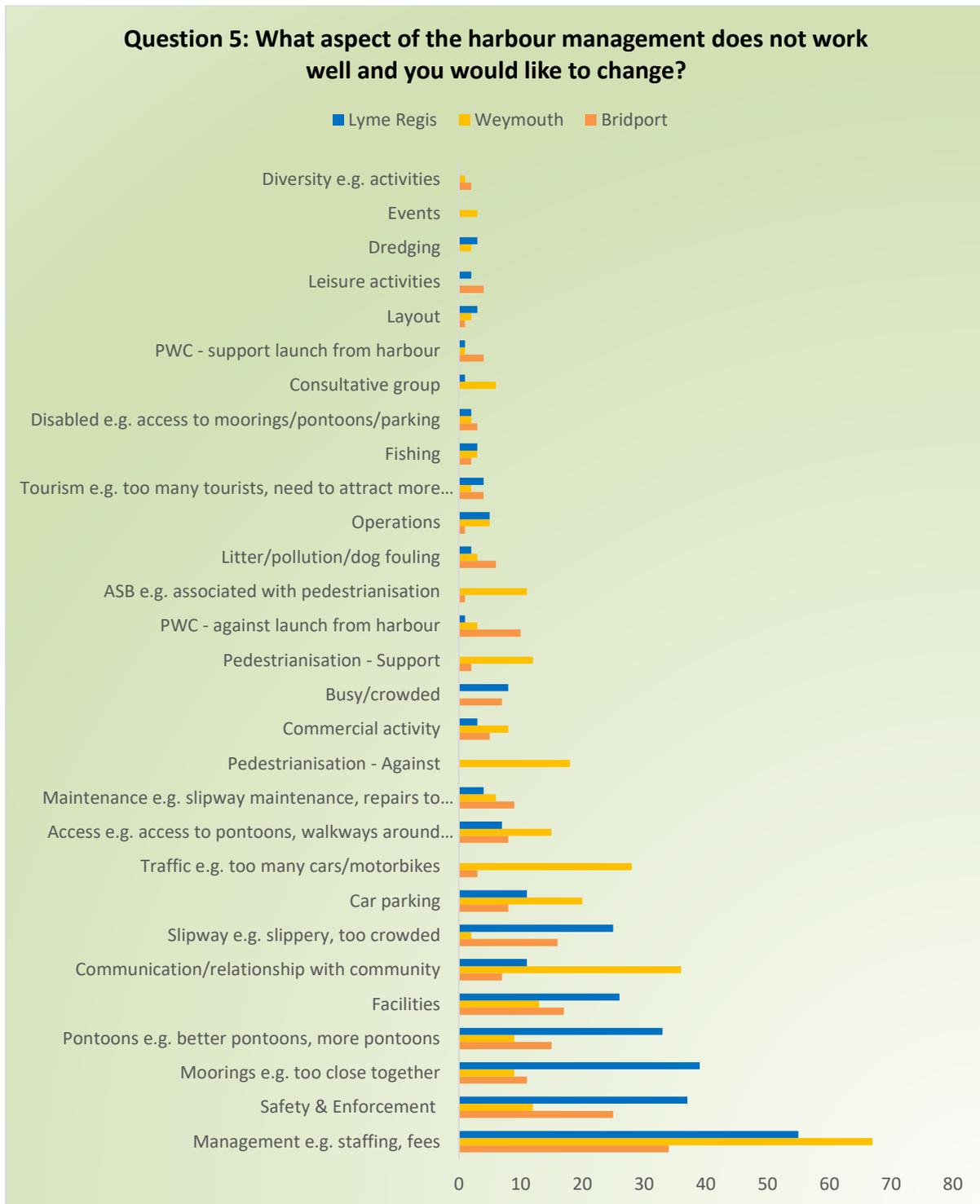


Figure 6 what aspects do not work well and would like to change

6.6 Harbour importance to individuals

When asked about what aspects of the harbours that were most important, the most frequent responses highlighted culture and heritage, recreation and tourism, marine safety and enforcement, conservation and ecology and economy and business growth. Pedestrianisation also featured which has appeared as a thread and general trend in all our consultation but this was mainly from responses about Weymouth harbour. Figure 8 shows the many different aspects across all three harbours.

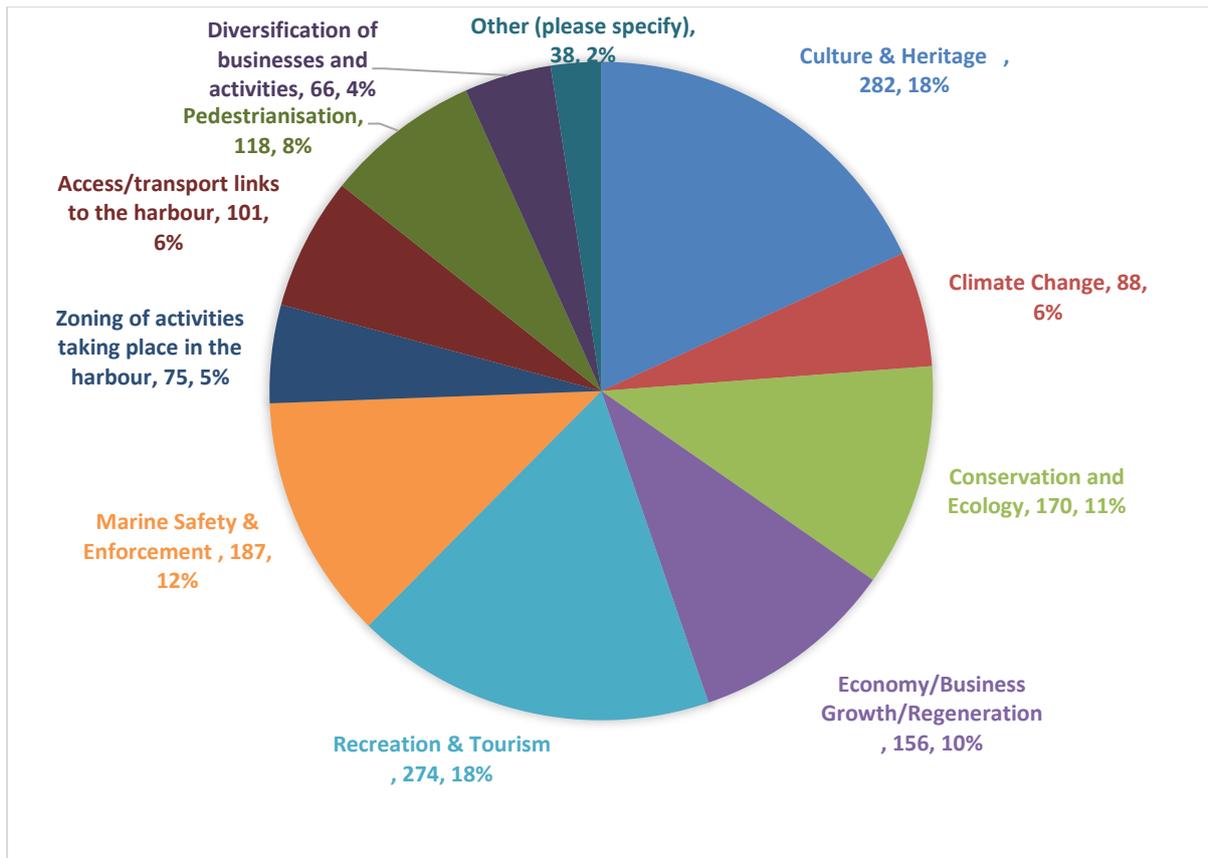


Figure 7 what aspects of the harbour are most important to respondents

6.7 Harbour development over the next 10 years

The key ideas and comments are summarised below:

- For Weymouth harbour pedestrianisation along the harbourside was raised frequently as a key development alongside linking the harbour activities into the peninsula development and other sites around the harbour that could play a role in providing facilities or opportunities to the users. Supporting the tourism sector in Weymouth through linking up with beach management, local tourism attractions and developing the offer to visitors. Being open to reinstating the ferry links was another suggestion for future development along with supporting commercial activities through provision for emerging sectors and ensuring that the current users have the facilities they need, management, retaining heritage and culture and the role of festivals and events as an income generator.
- Lyme Regis harbour focused on environmental issues, marine safety, maintenance, coastal defence, management as well as more capacity for pontoons and moorings, facilities and leisure activity. A more joined up approach with the management of the town.
- Bridport harbour stated leisure activities, heritage and culture, tourism and access, traffic management and facilities. While marine safety featured and the regulation and usage of powered watercraft (PWC) mainly referring to jet skis. However, they were also many comments opting for no change.

6.8 Personal Watercraft launching points

An additional question for those responding about Bridport and Lyme Regis harbours was put forward as to whether personal watercraft (jet skis) should be allowed to launch from the harbour. From responses to the questions, it was highlighted that the terminology wasn't clear which made responses difficult to properly interpret. It was decided that any analysis of this question would be unreliable and invalid so unfortunately this question has not been considered in this report.

7. Next steps

Dorset Coast Forum will use this stakeholder feedback to help inform the development of a Dorset Council Harbours Strategy. It is important to get stakeholder feedback in which to build a strategy that is supported by the communities.

DCF will continue to conduct further targeted consultation on the early stages of development. We are working with key stakeholders to ensure the framework and direction of the strategy reflects the feedback and data which supports it. We will be hosting a public consultation, where all harbour users and communities can have their say on the draft strategy, in the Summer of 2021. The feedback from that consultation will then be incorporated to form the final Strategy to be approved by Harbours Committee and Dorset Council in Autumn 2021.