

West Dorset District Council

Rural Functionality Study

Executive Summary

The Rural Functionality Study forms part of the evidence based to support the formation of policy in the Local Development Framework. It seeks to address the gaps in the knowledge over the working of rural areas identified in The Inspector's Report on the Revised Deposit Local Plan (2006).

The study was based on a survey of residents in ten case study villages and three rural business sites in West Dorset. This was coupled with a desktop study based on secondary data from sources such as the census. The key findings from the study are summarised below.

- Supporting development in villages with facilities is more sustainable because where facilities exist in a village they will be utilised by local residents. This trip is more likely to be carried out on foot or by bicycle than by car. For villages without a shop, top up shopping is not carried out at the location closest to the village. It is likely these people combine their shopping with journeys made for other activities.
- Development in villages does not necessarily mean that facilities will be retained. The desktop study revealed that there does not appear to be a relationship between an increase in household numbers over time and the retention of facilities in a village. Despite an increasing number of households over time in all of the villages, there were losses of facilities in seven of the villages. The evidence implies that a substantial amount of development is required to support new and existing facilities.
- A key reason for moving to West Dorset is its environmental quality. The most popular reason given for moving to rural Dorset was to live in a nice area. West Dorset is well known for its beautiful countryside. 71% of the district is a designated Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, and the coastline is a World Heritage Site in recognitions of its outstanding geological interest.
- When relocating to a village, moving to be nearer to shops and facilities is not an important factor. The least popular reasons for moving to villages were to be near schools, shops or facilities. These were not considered important because most of the villages do not have a shop.
- There is no evidence to suggest that an ageing population will form in a village where there is no development. The comparison of age structures of selected villages showed that there was no clear link between when a village received development and changes in the age structure over time.
- There is a high reliance of the private car for journeys. This was the dominant mode of transport for all journeys. For activities that take place outside of the village this may be unavoidable, but even where there was a bus service available it was rarely utilised by the residents.
- People generally travel to their nearest settlement to carry out food shopping, but for non-food shopping and recreation the trend for people to travel to the nearest settlement that would meet their needs is less pronounced. Whilst all

the villages accommodated a number of leisure activities, they cannot meet the needs of everyone due to the diverse range of hobbies that people follow

- Remoter villages have a higher proportion of home working, but those who do commute to work travel longer distances. Whitchurch Canonorum had 53% of the working population employed within the village, and Thorncombe had 40%. These are located in the more remoter areas of the district. Puddletown and Charlton Down had the lowest proportion of home workers, possibly because they are closer to larger settlements with good transport connections. Stoke Abbott and Whitchurch Canonorum had the highest proportion of long distance commuters (over 100km), although the survey did not reveal whether this trip was being made on a daily basis or if the commuters were living away from home during the working week.
- The settlements around Dorchester act as dormitory villages for the town. Dorchester meets the employment and shopping needs for the majority of residents in Puddletown, Charlton Down and Crossways.
- Rural business sites do not support the local area as much as they could. The response to the business surveys was poor, but the results indicate that rural business sites are not being wholly effecting in providing employment for local people, or supporting the local economy.

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CHAPTER 1: Introduction and Methodology

Purpose of the research

As part of the process for the production of the Local Development Framework, West Dorset (and other Local Authorities) are required to form an evidence base to support the formation of policy. The Inspector's Report on the Revised Deposit Local Plan (2006)¹ stated that '*the plan's policies need to be underpinned by a firm appreciation of changing social patterns as well as the economic needs of the countryside for a local workforce.*' Questions were also raised as to the applicability of the hierarchical settlement pattern (as pre-supposed in RPG10², the Structure Plan³ and PPS7⁴) to a large rural district such as West Dorset. The Rural Functionality Study seeks to address these gaps in the knowledge over the working of rural areas.

Research objectives

A review of the available literature and data relevant to the rural functionality of West Dorset revealed a number of key areas worthy of further research. The objectives of the study can be divided into three main topics: demographic change, employment and retail and leisure activities.

The research objectives are as follows:

- To examine the relationship between when a village received development and changes in the population age structure of the village over time
- To assess the reasons behind in-migration to rural West Dorset
- To quantify the proportion of residents who work locally
- To identify the origin of employees at local business sites
- To determine the shopping and leisure activity patterns of rural residents
- To relate the shopping patterns of residents to the facilities in local settlements

Methodology

Village Survey

It was decided to base the work on case studies of a sample of villages. The villages for the survey were chosen to ensure diversity in their population size, location within the district, accessibility, facilities and development over time. The location of the survey villages is shown in Figure 1, which shows their geographical spread across the district. Addresses were taken from the in-house Geographical Information System (GIS). The proportion of addresses surveyed in each village is shown in Table 1.

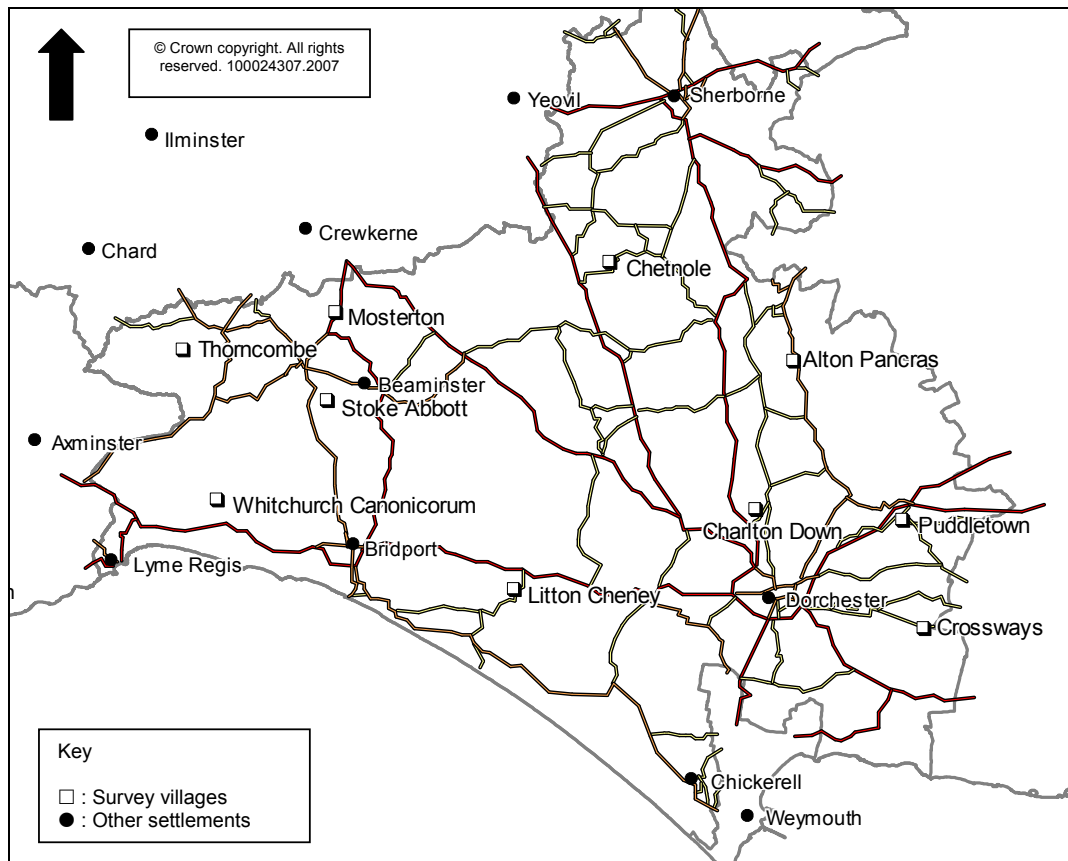
¹ Kingaby, J. (2006) *Inspector's Report (West Dorset District Council Local Plan Review)* The Planning Inspectorate

² Government Office for the South West (2001) *Regional Planning Guidance for the South West (RPG 10)*

³ *Bournemouth, Dorset and Poole Structure Plan; Replacement Structure Plan Deposit Plan* (2004)

⁴ ODPM (2004) *Planning Policy Statement 7: Sustainable Development in Rural Areas*

Figure 1: Location of survey villages



There were an infinite number of questions that would have been useful to ask through the questionnaire, however in order to ensure a good return rate the questionnaire had to be limited in length. The village questionnaire was based on surveys carried out by West Oxfordshire District Council⁵ and Vale of White Horse District Council⁶. The questions were adapted to bring out detailed information about where the members of the household were travelling for work, education, shopping and leisure, and by what mode. The questionnaire does not reveal the reasons behind travel patterns, due to limitations in the length of the survey, but in some cases this could be gleaned from cross-correlation between questions. There was also a small section on how long the residents had lived at the address, their reasons for moving there and if they intended to move in the near future, their reasons for doing so.

The survey form was carefully designed and worded. It was short, clear, direct and simple to complete. For a copy of the survey see Appendix 1. A covering letter explained the background to the survey, and the inclusion of a freepost return envelope and an incentive of a prize draw for completed surveys ensured a good return rate of 48.4%.

⁵ West Oxfordshire District Council (Date unknown) *Householder Survey Form*

⁶ Vale of White Horse District Council (2006) *Analysis of travel patterns for the identification of sustainable development locations within the Vale of White Horse*

Table 1: Villages selected for survey

Village	Population size*	Facilities**	Main period of housing growth	% of addresses surveyed	Number of surveys sent out	Return rate
Alton Pancras	150	Bus service, no facilities	-	100%	71	52
Charlton Down	2380	Bus service, facilities	2000's	50%	245	42
Chetnole	340	Bus service, facilities	-	100%	176	50
Crossways	2010	Bus service, facilities	1980's	50%	461	49
Litton Cheney	370	Bus service, no facilities	1970's	100%	203	47
Mosterton	610	Bus service, facilities	1970's	100%	274	54
Puddletown	1260	Bus service, facilities	2000's	50%	266	53
Stoke Abbott	220	Bus service, no facilities	-	100%	88	49
Thorncombe	730	Bus service, facilities	1990's	100%	266	41
Whitchurch Canonichorum	340	Poor bus service, no facilities	-	100%	110	47

*Source: 2004 Mid Year Estimate from Dorset County Council. Figure for Charlton Down includes Charminster.

**Facilities for this survey are defined as shops, post offices, or petrol stations. A full services list is shown in Table 2 on the following page

The responses were divided up according to their village of origin for analysis. The diversity of the villages meant that it would be inaccurate to aggregate the results to make assumptions about rural West Dorset as a whole, but villages with similar characteristics were compared to see if the results were similar.

Business Questionnaire

Business sites were chosen to act as case studies to see whether employees were being drawn from the local area, or whether there was significant commuting to the sites from outside of the local area. The business questionnaires were intended to supplement the results of the village surveys, which also contained information about where people were travelling to work, so only three sites were surveyed. This was also due in part to another survey being recently sent out to businesses in West Dorset as part of the Employment Land Review, and it was recognised that this might affect the return rate. Pineapple Business Park (Bridport), Piddlehinton Enterprise Park and Station Road Business Park (Maiden Newton) were selected because good working relationships had been established with owners of the first two sites, and the site at Maiden Newton benefits from a rail connection. The former sites had their surveys hand delivered, whereas the site at Maiden Newton received postal questionnaires.

Table 2: Village services

	School	General Store	Post Office	GP Surgery	Pharmacy	Petrol Station	Village Hall	Church	Public House	Cash Point	Other Shops	Bus Service
Alton Pancras								✓				Daily
Charlton Down		✓					✓					Hourly
Chetnole			✓*				✓	✓	✓	✓		Daily
Crossways	✓	✓	✓*	✓	✓	✓*	✓			✓		Hourly
Litton Cheney	✓							✓**	✓			Daily
Mosterton	✓		✓*				✓	✓	✓			Daily
Puddletown	✓	✓	✓*	✓			✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	Daily
Stoke Abbott							✓	✓	✓			Weekly
Thorncombe	✓		✓*				✓	✓				Daily
Whitchurch Canonicorum							✓	✓**	✓			Weekly

* With shop

** With hall

(Source: DCC Rural Facilities Survey 2002, updated by WDDC Spring 2006)

The business questionnaire intended to gather information about the types of businesses locating on rural sites, where employees were commuting from, the usual mode of transport to work, and to what extent the employees used local facilities. For a copy of the survey form see Appendix 2.

Investigating the link between development in a village and changes in the population age structure over time

Housing completion records and officer knowledge were used to identify villages that had received significant housing development over the past four decades. Table 3 shows the selected villages for this part of the study. Information from the census was used to find the changes in the population age structure of the villages over time. The censuses used were the 1971, 1981, 1991 and 2001. The smallest comparable levels for all of the censuses are parish level. This means that for all the villages, the information includes dwellings surrounding the village. For Charminster, this includes the population of the village of Charminster in addition to that of Charlton Down.

Table 3: Selected villages for study of changes in population age structure

Village	When it received most development	Parish used for census data
Litton Cheney	1970's	Litton Cheney
Mosterton	1970's	Mosterton
Crossways	1980's	Crossways
Thorncombe	1990's	Thorncombe
Puddletown	2000's	Puddletown
Charlton Down	2000's	Charminster
Stoke Abbott	Little or no development	Stoke Abbott
Whitchurch Canonorum	Little or no development	Whitchurch Canonorum