

14 Creating High Quality and Distinctive Environments

Introduction

14.1 The quality of the built environment, open space and leisure facilities determines how a place is regarded by its own community, visitors and investors. The historic Borough of Christchurch and East Dorset District are very attractive places in which to live with areas of valuable open space and leisure facilities. As a result, there is increasing demand to build new homes and extend existing ones. Faced with possible need for urban intensification it is crucial to ensure that new development schemes enhance local character and building traditions and contribute to the creation of healthy and sustainable environments, that give residents easy access to recreation, green space and sport facilities and secure the provision and enhancement of 'green infrastructure'.

14.2 The provision of leisure facilities and open spaces is important for the health and wellbeing of the population and spaces for the pursuit of formal and casual recreation, they also provide natural relief in built up areas, 'green lungs' for carbon exchange and habitats for wildlife. The routes that connect these spaces also encourage walking and cycling and can contribute to a network of 'green infrastructure'.

14.3 This chapter of the Core Strategy seeks to establish a coordinated approach to design including architecture, heritage conservation, open space, 'green infrastructure' and the public realm. The issues that will be addressed include:

- Enabling future development while conserving and enhancing our historic assets
- Delivering new high quality housing that complements and enhances the character of local neighbourhoods and settlements
- Creating a safer, greener and more accessible environment through the provision of appropriate types of open space and 'green infrastructure'

14.4 For further information concerning the preparation of policies in this chapter please refer to the Creating High Quality and Distinctive Environments Background Paper which is available on www.dorsetforyou.com.

Protection of Buildings of Local Historic and Architectural Interest

14.5 The historic environment plays an important role in the economic wellbeing of the two districts, particularly in relation to tourism. This can place significant pressures on the historic environment. Pressures come from the demand to modernise historic buildings, change their uses, develop within conservation areas, and from the increased effects of traffic and highway improvements.

14.6 An English Heritage report 'Heritage at Risk-Conservation Areas' (July 2009) highlighted the incremental damage that has been caused to conservation areas by uncontrolled small scale developments. The deterioration of the historic building stock in both Christchurch and East Dorset has been confirmed in Conservation Area Appraisals where the erosion of valuable features such as windows, doors and walls was listed as a real threat to the preservation of their character.

14.7 The impact on character of new development within conservation areas is a crucial issue. Carefully designed schemes have the potential to improve historic areas, provided new development complements and enhances the special features of historic buildings and respects the scale, building materials and density of the surrounding built form.

14.8 The historic town centres of both Christchurch and Wimborne are vulnerable to flooding. Existing and new dwellings will need to incorporate flood resistance and resilience measures which may affect the character and setting of central conservation areas. Good design will be crucial to ensure this does not harm the historic features of such buildings.

Key Facts

In Christchurch there are:

- 12 Conservation Areas.
- 287 Statutory Listed Buildings (six Grade I).
- 136 locally listed buildings.

In East Dorset there are:

- 19 Conservation Areas.
- 697 Statutory Listed Buildings (19 Grade I, 41 Grade II*).
- 5 Historic Parks and Gardens.

Relevant Evidence

- Conservation Area Appraisals.

Policy HE1

Protection of local historic and architectural interest

The protection of national and local listed buildings, along with monuments, sites, gardens, landscapes and their settings of historic, archaeological, architectural or artistic interest will form part of the heritage protection strategy. Article 4 Directions will be considered where there are threats to heritage assets. Local lists of heritage assets will identify key buildings and structures which, although not of sufficient quality to meet national listing criteria, have valuable architectural or historic merit and make a positive contribution to local character. Development proposals affecting such sites or buildings will be sympathetic to their character and will respect their key architectural or historic features.

Design

14.9 Christchurch has a diverse built environment, development of which was largely influenced by the Borough's coastal setting, topography and presence of flood plains.

14.10 The urban area represents a predominately modern, post war environment, which has grown up around a historic town centre with pockets of older buildings predominantly in the Town Centre, Purewell and Mundeford. Much of the residential development is good quality and low rise. The densities vary considerably across the Borough, which reflects the historic development of neighbourhoods over the last two centuries, and range from generous plots with low density housing in Walkford and Friars Cliff (average 10dph), to terraced cottage plots in Bargates and Purewell (30-40dph).

14.11 Even though the Borough does not currently have specifically designated 'character areas', the 2003 Christchurch Borough-wide Character Assessment carried out a series of urban neighbourhood studies and specifies the essential qualities which give each area in the Borough its special character, and how these areas are sensitive to change with regard to conservation and heritage policy. In particular, the Borough-wide Character Assessment emphasised the importance of waterside areas to the character of the Borough.

14.12 East Dorset has witnessed rapid growth in the last 50 years. The area contains a number of suburban developments, often built at low density, with a scattering of houses in the remainder of the countryside. The housing stock is relatively new, with Wimborne Minster and the smaller villages being the exception in having an older and higher density building stock.

14.13 Taking into account development pressures it is inevitable that the area will need to face and adapt to change. The aim of the emerging policies should be to preserve valued features in the towns, which give them their distinctive characters and sense of place. New development should respect the prevailing characteristics of a local area and, where possible, enhance those neighbourhoods in need of improvement both within the existing urban areas and within the rural countryside. New development will be expected to be attractive, functional, sustainable and of the highest quality, optimising the site potential and respecting the scale of the locality.

Key Facts

- Both districts are built at low density with a high proportion of bungalows and detached dwellings (64.4% in East Dorset and 42.5% in Christchurch).
- Christchurch, at 20.8% has a higher number of flats than East Dorset (9.9%), mainly concentrated in Highcliffe, the Town Centre and Grange wards.
- There are 17 designated Special Character Areas in East Dorset.

Relevant Evidence

- The Christchurch Borough Wide Character Assessment (2003).
- East Dorset Special Character Area Assessments.
- The East Dorset Rural Design Summary.

Policy HE2

Design of new development

Within Christchurch and East Dorset the design of development must be of a high quality, reflecting and enhancing areas of recognised local distinctiveness. To achieve this, development will be permitted if it is compatible with or improves its surroundings in:

- Layout
- Site coverage
- Architectural style
- Scale
- Bulk
- Height
- Materials
- Landscaping
- Visual impact
- Relationship to nearby properties
- Relationship to mature trees.

This is within the context of the Christchurch Borough Wide Character Assessment. In the East Dorset rural area, design should accord with the Rural Design Summary. In Special Character Areas development must respect the identified features and characteristics. Careful design to reduce the risk of crime will be required.

Delivery and Monitoring

14.14 This policy will be delivered by:

- The development management process.
- Architect's Panels will be used to inform decisions.

14.15 The policy will be monitored through:

- Building for Life Assessments.

Landscape Quality and Character

14.16 The Plan area contains nationally and locally important landscapes. The aim is to ensure that development does not harm these areas, but adds to their attractive character. Additionally, outside designated landscape areas the quality of development will need to ensure that the character and visual amenity of settlements, their setting and the countryside are protected and enhanced.

Key Facts
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 45% of East Dorset is covered by the Cranborne Chase and West Wiltshire Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. • A further 23% of the District is covered by Areas of Great Landscape Value.

Relevant Evidence

- The Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty Landscape Character Assessment.
- The Areas of Great Landscape Value Landscape Appraisal.
- Christchurch Borough Wide Character Assessment (2003).

Policy HE3

Landscape Quality

Development will need to protect and seek to enhance the landscape character of the area.

Proposals will need to demonstrate that the following factors have been taken into account:

1. The character of settlements and their landscape settings.
2. Natural features such as trees, hedgerows, woodland, field boundaries, water features and wildlife corridors.
3. Features of cultural, historical and heritage value.
4. Important views and visual amenity.
5. Tranquillity and the need to protect against intrusion from light pollution, noise and motion.

Development proposals within or affecting the setting of the Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty will need to have regard to the relevant Management Plan.

Within the Areas of Great Landscape Value development will be permitted where its siting, design, materials, scale and landscaping are sympathetic with the particular landscape quality and character of the Areas of Great Landscape Value.

Delivery and Monitoring

14.17 This policy will be delivered by:

- The development management process.
- The Cranborne Chase and West Wiltshire Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty Partnership.

14.18 The policy will be monitored by:

- The Cranborne Chase and West Wiltshire Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty Partnership.
- Landscape assessment in association with the Green Infrastructure Strategy.

Open Space, Leisure and Green Infrastructure

14.19 The provision of attractive, accessible and functional open space is important for the well being and health of residents and the support of our valuable wildlife. The Councils seek to ensure that local residents have access to open space to meet their needs.

14.20 The provision of large open spaces and green infrastructure also serves to divert recreational pressure away from the sensitive Dorset Heaths. The mitigation benefits of sites provided in support of the heathland policies will be enhanced by green infrastructure through improved connectivity with other open spaces, thereby promoting informal recreation (such as cycling and dog walking) and facilitating access by alternative forms of transport to the car. Green infrastructure will also be designed to protect and enhance sites of biodiversity value.

Relevant Evidence

- The Christchurch and East Dorset Open Space, Sport and Recreation Studies (2007) set out in detail the existing provision throughout the Plan area. It also identifies the level of provision that should be available and where shortfalls exist.
- The SE Dorset Green Infrastructure Strategy (2011) identifies large scale, cross boundary needs.

Policy HE4

Open space provision

The open space standards and Local Need Area boundaries provided by the 2007 Open Space, Sport and Recreation Studies will be applied throughout the Plan area (amended as necessary to take account of recent open space developments and new areas allocated for housing in the Core Strategy). Contributions will be directed towards meeting the quantity, quality and accessibility shortfalls for each of the Local Need Areas. The aim is to deliver a combination of new facilities and improvements to existing ones, depending on the unique needs of the Local Needs Areas and the availability of land.

Existing open spaces and leisure facilities identified on the Proposals Map will be protected and their loss will not be permitted unless their whole or partial redevelopment would result in greater benefits to the community than retaining that facility. On such occasions the replacement must be provided in close proximity, unless it can be shown that the open space, sport or recreational facility was not required.

Recommended Open Space Standards from the 2007 Open Space, Sport & Recreation Study:

Open space type	Recommended accessibility standard (straight line distance).	Recommended quantity standard (hectares per 1000 population)	Recommended quantity standard (square metres per person)	Total recommended provision
Recreation Grounds & Public Gardens (includes parks)	450m	0.5 ha	5.0 sq m	3.75 ha per 1000 population / 37.5 sq m per person
Amenity Green Space	450m	0.5 ha	5.0 sq m	
Natural & Semi-natural Green Space	600m	1.0 ha	10.0 sq m	
Active (outdoor) Sports Space	600m	1.25 ha	12.5 sq m	
Children & Young People's Space	450m	0.25 ha	2.5 sq m	
Allotments	600m	0.25ha	2.5 sq m	

Children's play provision, which forms part of the children and young people's space category, must be provided on the basis of the standards set out in Appendix 1.

Where appropriate in terms of location and the nature of the development, and where a local need for small scale facilities has been identified, on site provision will be preferable. It may be appropriate for earlier developments to provide the land upon which later developments pay for structures or equipment. Financial contributions towards off site provision of open space may be acceptable where it is impractical for provision to be on site. In this instance contributions should be in line with the standards set out in this policy.

The policy will aim to deliver a combination of new facilities and improvements to existing ones, depending on the unique needs of the 'Local Need Areas' and the availability of land.

Delivering new and enhanced provision

The Councils will produce an 'implementation and delivery plan' which will include a list of the priority needs and objectives for each local Needs Area and specific opportunities for new or enhanced provision. It will identify opportunities to maximise the use of existing sites and potentially re-designate sites for alternative leisure uses, in line with local needs.

Location of new provision

When considering sites for new open space and leisure provision, priority will be given to sites which are easily accessible by a range of transport modes and which can be integrated into a network of green infrastructure. Sites for new open space provision will be identified through an implementation and delivery plan and considered for allocation through the forthcoming Site-Specific Allocations Development Plan Document.

Green Infrastructure

Where appropriate, the Community Infrastructure Levy will be used to ensure that elements of green infrastructure will be incorporated into their design such as 'permeability', with green foot and cycle paths running through the development, connecting with existing routes wherever possible.

Delivery and Monitoring

14.21 This policy will be delivered by:

- The development management process.
- Investment through the SE Dorset Green Infrastructure Strategy.
- Investment to support the Councils' Open Space, Sport and Recreation Strategies.

14.22 The policy will be monitored by:

- A two yearly measurement of the change in provision as a result of the development management process.
- A review of the Open Space, Sport and Recreation Study.

