

16 Creating Prosperous Communities

Introduction

16.1 Christchurch and East Dorset face significant challenges in stimulating local business growth, inward investment, and facilitating sustainable development of the tourist industry. In meeting the future needs of the economy and local communities it is also important that an appropriate range of retail facilities are maintained across the area.

16.2 This chapter addresses issues associated with establishing sustainable and prosperous communities which include:

- Establishing an employment land hierarchy - the location of employment uses across sites in Christchurch and East Dorset.
- Use of existing employment land.
- Economic development in rural areas and farm diversification.
- Safeguarding local shops and other local community facilities.
- Supporting the tourist economy.

16.3 Core Strategy policies relating to the broad provision of employment land, the town centre hierarchy and the distribution of employment land for Christchurch and East Dorset are set out in Chapter 4 The Key Strategy. The detailed policy approach for the main retail centres in Christchurch and East Dorset is set out in Chapters 5, 8, 9, 10 and 11. Strategic allocations of new employment sites are set out in Chapters 7, 10, 11 and 12.

16.4 For further detail concerning the development of policies for Creating Prosperous Communities please refer to the 'Creating Prosperous Communities Background Paper available at www.dorsetforyou.com.

Key Facts

Value of the Economy

- Total Gross Value Added is around £740 million in Christchurch and £1,170 million in East Dorset.

Business Structure

- There are around 2,020 firms in Christchurch and 4,340 firms in East Dorset.
- Most firms in the area are small but large firms employ one fifth of employees.
- More than half the firms in Christchurch and East Dorset fall within the following sectors: distribution, hotels, restaurants, banking and finance, and insurance.
- The proportion of knowledge intensive firms is in line with the County average in Christchurch and above the County average in East Dorset.

Working age Population

- The working age population is around 22,970 in Christchurch and 44,680 in East Dorset.
- By 2030 it is predicted that for every four people working in the area three people will be retired.

Employment by Sector

- Christchurch has around 18,900 employees in employment and East Dorset has 31,800 (excluding the self employed).

Key Facts

- The majority of employment in Christchurch and East Dorset is in the service sector but manufacturing is also very significant in East Dorset.
- In Christchurch almost half of employment in the Borough is in distribution, hotels and restaurants and public administration, education and health.
- In East Dorset more than two thirds of employment is within 3 sectors: public administration, education and health; distribution, hotels; and banking, finance and insurance.

Self Employment

- About 16% (above county average) of working age employees are self employed in Christchurch and 13% in East Dorset (below County average).

Employment Growth

- Employment growth in Christchurch is predicted to be service sector led especially in distribution, transport and communications and education and health.
- Employment growth in East Dorset is predicted to be service sector led in distribution, other business services and education and health.

Unemployment

- Claimant unemployment in Christchurch as of September 2011 was 1.7% of working age residents and 1.0% in East Dorset.
- August 2009 was 2.7% in Christchurch and 2.0% in East Dorset.

Skills and Qualifications

- Christchurch and East Dorset have an average proportion of working age population with no qualifications compared to Dorset.
- The percentage of 15 years olds gaining five or more A – C grades in Christchurch and East Dorset is above the national average.
- Christchurch has above the County average level of young people not in education, employment or training and in East Dorset the level is below the county average.

Tourism

Tourism and the Economy

- Tourism contributes about £111 million to the local economy in Christchurch and £122 million in East Dorset.
- A large proportion of employment in Christchurch and East Dorset is in hotels and restaurants as part of the tourist economy.
- Christchurch and East Dorset provide 12% of total tourist accommodation in Dorset and there is scope to increase this market share.

Flooding and sea level rise

- Much of Christchurch Town Centre is in flood zone 3a and within Wimborne there are significant areas of flood zone 2 and 3 which restricts development potential.
- Areas at significant risk in Christchurch include Bournemouth Airport Business Park, parts of the town centre, Christchurch Quay, Bridge Street, Purewell and parts of Stanpit and Mudeford.
- The beaches in Christchurch are at risk from coastal erosion from rising sea levels as a result of climate change.

The Natural Environment and Climate Change

16.5 The area is renowned for the quality of its natural environment; these natural assets are a valuable resource for the area and help to sustain our local tourism industry as well as attracting businesses to locate in the area. Growth in employment and tourism must help to support the environment and avoid contributing to the causes of climate change.

Connectivity and Accessibility

16.6 Within the wider sub-region Christchurch and East Dorset are not well connected to the rest of the South West and South East. There is no motorway access and parts of the area are served by limited public transport services which has implications for the level of future inward investment that can be achieved in comparison to better connected areas in the South East.

16.7 Rural areas only provide limited employment opportunities and shopping facilities. There is a requirement for key rural centres such as Sturminster Marshall, Sixpenny Handley, Cranborne and Alderholt to maintain and possibly expand existing employment, shops and facilities to reduce the need to travel. Nevertheless it is unrealistic to believe that sufficient facilities can be provided in these small settlements to avoid trips to other centres in the area. However, the rise of the Internet now enables rural communities to access goods and services by different means.

Developing an Employment Site Hierarchy

16.8 Policy PC1 provides the opportunity to maximise the market potential of employment sites in Christchurch and East Dorset in a way that is sensitive to the types of business activity currently located on these sites and activity that could be attracted to these sites in the future. The direction of higher order employment uses to higher quality sites across the districts will also assist in encouraging clusters of related activity which promotes economic growth such as with clusters of advanced engineering companies located at the Airport Business Park. The site hierarchy approach needs to be sensitive to the changing economic requirements during the plan period and in this respect a specific approach is adopted to individual sites.

16.9 The approach to provision of employment land is set out in Policy KS5 of the Key Strategy. The employment land hierarchy set out in Policy PC1 identifies the 'Strategic' and 'Other Higher Quality' sites that will be key in delivering sufficient employment land to meet projected requirements to 2028.

16.10 On strategic sites including the Bournemouth Airport Northern Business Parks and Ferndown Industrial Estate it is necessary to consider a range of non employment uses which are ancillary to the main employment uses and necessary to meet the needs of workers. This approach assists in making these locations more attractive for inward investment. Potential ancillary uses have been explored through the Bournemouth Airport Economic Study (2008) and through the Christchurch and East Dorset Employment Land Review process. Core Strategy policy BA2 sets out further detail of ancillary uses which may be required at Bournemouth Airport Business Parks.

16.11 Across the plan area a large proportion of employment sites fall within one market segment of 'general industrial / business activity'. It is important to sustain businesses in the local area but also to encourage inward investment from a more diverse range of business activity. The employment land hierarchy identifies a range of sites suitable for 'upgrading' whereby through on site and off site infrastructure improvements and the delivery of the right mix of premises, opportunities may be generated for inward investment.

Christchurch and East Dorset Employment Land Hierarchy

Policy PC1

Christchurch and East Dorset employment land hierarchy

The following site hierarchy is proposed to influence the location of employment uses across sites in Christchurch and East Dorset. 'Higher order' uses that are economically productive offering highly skilled and well paid employment will be located on 'higher quality' sites which offer the necessary locational attributes. A more flexible approach toward employment uses will be adopted towards other employment sites in the Christchurch and East Dorset hierarchy.

The following sites are considered to be 'higher quality' and offer the necessary locational attributes to attract 'higher order' uses. These sites will be the focus for meeting projected requirements for B1 (Office and Light Industrial uses), B2 (General Industry) and B8 (Warehousing and Distribution) uses as set out in Key Strategy policy KS5. Strategic and higher quality sites set out below will be protected for employment uses within B1, B2 and B8. On these sites employment activity within non B use class (other employment generating uses) will only be considered where it makes a significant contribution to raising levels of productivity and offers skilled employment opportunities. Non employment uses ancillary to core employment functions will be considered on 'Strategic Higher Quality' Sites where such facilities are required to meet the needs of workers.

Strategic Higher Quality Sites

- Bournemouth Airport Northern Business Park (North West and North East Sectors), Christchurch.

Other Higher Quality Sites

- The former BAE site, Grange Road
- Sites located directly off Airfield Way, Airfield Road, and Wilverley Road including:
 - Silver Business Park
 - Airfield Industrial Estate
 - Ambassador Industrial Estate
 - Beaver Industrial Estate
 - Sea Vixen Industrial Estate
 - Somerford Business Park
 - Hughes Business Centre

A more flexible approach will be adopted for the following sites where B1, B2 and B8 uses will be accommodated in addition to a more diverse range of non B employment uses, as well as non employment uses ancillary to core employment functions:

- Avon Trading Park, Christchurch
- Stony Lane South including the Gasworks Site, Christchurch
- Groveley Road, Christchurch
- Somerford Road, Christchurch
- Brook Road Industrial Estate, Wimborne, East Dorset
- Gundrymoor Industrial Estate, West Moors, East Dorset
- Riverside Park Industrial Estate, Wimborne, East Dorset
- Uddens Industrial Estate, Ferndown, East Dorset
- Ferndown Industrial Estate, East Dorset

- Woolsbridge Industrial Estate, Three Legged Cross, East Dorset
- Ebblake Industrial Estate, Verwood, East Dorset
- Bailie Gate Industrial Estate, Sturminster Marshall, East Dorset

The following sites have been identified for upgrading:

- Bournemouth Airport Northern Business Park (North West and North East Sectors), Christchurch
 - In order to realise its potential for attracting business activity this site will require 'upgrading' to ensure it offers the necessary locational site attributes. This will include improvements in transport infrastructure, flood risk management infrastructure, on site environmental improvements and the delivery of new employment units to meet market requirements.
- Sites located directly off Airfield Way, Airfield Road, and Wilverley Road as set out above.

The upgrading of these sites will involve the provision of an enhanced range of higher quality employment premises to meet market requirements and to attract a more diverse range of business activity to the Borough. This may also include business park environmental enhancements and improvements to broadband infrastructure. Transport infrastructure improvements will be delivered on Stony Lane as identified in the Key Strategy.

Delivery and Monitoring

16.12 The Councils will work closely with landowners concerning the delivery of key infrastructure improvements. Infrastructure improvements will be funded by a range of sources including private business, developer contributions and public funding which may be used to support infrastructure such as transport improvements for key strategic sites. The delivery of on site and off site infrastructure serving Bournemouth Airport Business Park is set out in the Key Strategy Policy KS10 and in the Bournemouth Airport & Business Park Chapter.

16.13 The 'upgrading' of sites will be achieved over the plan period with more detail set out in the Site Allocations Development Plan Document. Changes in the composition of premises on sites identified for upgrading will be achieved over time through planning consents.

Existing Employment Land

16.14 There is a shortage of available employment land in the sub region and key strategic sites such as Bournemouth Airport Business Park and Ferndown Industrial Estate face infrastructure constraints which restrict the level of development that can come forward. In this respect it is important to retain employment sites in sustainable locations well served by infrastructure that enable the future employment land requirements of the housing market area to be met. In adopting a flexible approach to changes in economic circumstances the loss of employment land will be considered where there is strong evidence to demonstrate that a site is not required by the market to meet projected land requirements over the plan period. In some instances mixed use schemes may be considered where this is necessary for reasons of development viability to enable a site to come forward for development.

Policy PC2

Alternative uses for employment land where justified by market evidence

Where there is strong evidence of the lack of market demand over the plan period (2013 – 2028) employment land may be considered for non B use classes. High quality mixed use schemes may also be considered to ensure a site can be brought forward for development.

Delivery and Monitoring

16.15 The Council will work closely with landowners and neighbouring authorities to ensure that sufficient employment land is brought forward across the Bournemouth and Poole Housing Market Area to meet projected requirements set out in the Bournemouth, Dorset and Poole Workspace Study (2012). This will require a cross border approach to the use of contributions through the Community Infrastructure Levy for key infrastructure required to enable strategic sites of sub regional importance to come forward. The Employment Land Review and Workspace Study will be monitored and reviewed to ensure the policy is performing.

The Rural Economy

16.16 The rural economy performs a significant role in the sustainable economic growth of the plan area and particularly in East Dorset. The Core Strategy will strictly control economic development in open countryside away from existing settlements and the new strategic housing and employment allocations identified in the Core Strategy. There are however, opportunities for economic development to come forward in or on the edge of existing settlements including Alderholt, Cranborne, Sixpenny Handley and Sturminster Marshall where employment, housing, services and other facilities can be provided close together. Additionally, the Core Strategy will consider favourably proposals for sustainable rural tourism and leisure developments that benefit rural businesses, communities and visitors and which utilise and enrich, rather than harm, the character of the local countryside, towns, villages, buildings and other features.

Policy PC3

The Rural Economy

Although economic development will be strictly controlled in open countryside away from existing settlements, in order to promote sustainable economic growth in the rural area, applications for economic development will be encouraged where development is located in or on the edge of existing settlements where employment, housing, services and other facilities can be provided close together. Such proposals should be small scale to reflect the rural character. This includes the settlements of Alderholt, Cranborne, Sixpenny Handley, and Sturminster Marshall.

Proposals for the conversion and re-use of appropriately located and suitably constructed existing buildings in the countryside (particularly those adjacent to the villages set out above) for economic development must ensure:

- The proposal supports the vitality and viability of market towns and other rural service centres.
- Proposals must not adversely impact the supply of employment sites and premises and the economic, social and environmental sustainability of the area, when considering proposals which involve the loss of economic activity.

- Proposals do not have a materially greater impact on the openness of the Green Belt and the purpose of including land within it.
- The benefits outweigh the harm in terms of:
 1. The potential impact on countryside, landscapes and wildlife.
 2. Local economic and social needs and opportunities not met elsewhere.
 3. Settlement patterns and the level of accessibility to service centres, markets and housing.
 4. The building is suitable for the proposed use without major re-building and would not require any significant alteration which would damage its fabric and character, or detract from the local characteristics and landscape quality of the area. Any necessary car parking provision should also not have an adverse impact on the setting of the building in the open countryside.
 5. The preservation of buildings of historic or architectural importance/interest, or which otherwise contributes to local character.

Proposals for rural diversification will be supported which meet the criteria set out in the National Planning Policy Framework and also that:

- Are consistent in scale and environmental impact with their rural location avoiding adverse impacts on the Cranborne Chase and West Wiltshire Downs AONB, sensitive habitats, Areas of Great Landscape Value and landscapes identified through landscape character assessments and the openness of the Green Belt.
- Do not harm amenity and enjoyment of the countryside through the impact of noise and traffic generation.
- That minimise additional trips on the highway network and are accessible by sustainable modes other than the car.

Subject to compliance with criteria set out above acceptable uses for rural diversification include:

- Tourism
- Leisure and related activities
- Equestrian
- Small offices
- Light Manufacturing
- Renewable energy
- Retail (farm shops and pick your own)

Support will be given to new forms of working practises, which include the creation of live/work spaces in rural areas. The assessment of these proposals will be made in accordance with rural housing need and potential affordable housing exception sites as well as access to services.

Delivery and Monitoring

16.17 Implementation of the policy will be through the development management process.

The Safeguarding of Local Shops, Services and Facilities

16.18 Christchurch and East Dorset have a range of local commercial facilities that provide for the basic needs of the community, including shops, pubs, post offices etc. Most of these are in the urban area. Some rural communities, particularly in East Dorset lack convenient access to basic facilities. The rural settlements and villages are vulnerable to the loss of non profitable facilities.

16.19 Monitoring of the Christchurch and East Dorset Local Plans has demonstrated that maintaining retail uses has been important in maintaining the vitality and viability of local centres. Additionally the Joint Retail Study (2008) identifies the importance of shopping parades and village shops and that these facilities should be maintained as fulfilling a vital function for the community.

Shops and Community Facilities in Local Centres and Villages

Policy PC4

Shops and community facilities in local centres and villages

In local shopping areas and villages planning applications which propose improvements to the provision of shops which provide for people's day to day needs, leisure uses including public houses and facilities for local communities will be supported in principle.

The loss of existing retail premises, leisure and other local facilities will be resisted unless it is clearly demonstrated there is insufficient demand and it is not feasible and viable to support their continued existence and the loss would not result in a substantial decline in the range and quality of services for local people.

Delivery and Monitoring

16.20 Implementation of the policy will be through the development management process and the performance of the policy will be monitored on an annual basis during the plan period through the Annual Monitoring Reports.

Supporting the Tourist Economy

16.21 The historic Town Centres of Christchurch and Wimborne have the potential to enhance tourism and the evening economy through the provision of restaurants and cafés in appropriate locations. Tourism is a key part of the local economy which employs 1,700 people and is a growing sector which plays an important role in creating jobs and sustaining the local economy. The area serves as an important base for visiting tourist destinations within the districts and elsewhere, such as The New Forest National Park, The Jurassic Coast and Bournemouth and Poole.

16.22 The Core Strategy adopts a sustainable approach to tourism in avoiding harmful impacts on important natural features which make the area attractive to visitors and in reducing recreational pressure on sensitive habitats, the Dorset Heathlands and the New Forest.

Policy PC5

Tourism

The Core Strategy will protect and enhance the unique features of Christchurch and East Dorset that attract visitors to the area whilst encouraging investment. This will be achieved through the following measures:

- Protection of the beaches, river front and Christchurch Harbour and supporting appropriate sustainable tourist related development.
- Tourist related development must avoid increasing visitor pressure on the Dorset Heaths. Appropriate mitigation measures will be identified through the Heathlands Supplementary Planning Document (2012 - 2014) and subsequently by the Joint Heathlands Development Plan Document.

- By protecting visitor attraction sites unless it can be proved the use is no longer economically viable, and promoting new visitor attractions and accommodation in sustainable locations.
- By encouraging sustainable transport to tourist and cultural sites.
- By supporting the aims and objectives of the Cranborne Chase and West Wiltshire Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty.

Tourism and culture in Christchurch and East Dorset will develop in the context of the wider sub- regional strategy (Towards 2015 – Shaping Tomorrow’s Tourism), by improving planning and use of resources through collaboration across Dorset, Bournemouth and Poole, which values local distinctiveness and diversity.

Delivery and Monitoring

16.23 The Council will continue to maintain the beaches, the river fronts and Christchurch Harbour with key stakeholders such as the Environment Agency and Natural England. The Council will also work with other South East Dorset authorities in identifying and taking forward heathland mitigation projects to avoid increased recreational pressure on the heathlands through the Heathlands Supplementary Planning Document and the subsequent Joint Heathlands Development Plan Document.

