

Open Space, Sport and Recreation Study for Christchurch Borough and East Dorset District

Final Report

May 2007



INSPACE PLANNING LTD

Contents

Section		Page
	Acknowledgements and Glossary of Terms	3
1	Introduction and Overview	5
2	Policy and Stakeholder Context	20
3	Overview of Provision	27
4A	Key Findings from Survey and Consultation: Christchurch	45
4B	Key Findings from Survey and Consultation: East Dorset	64
5	The Development of Standards of Provision	82
6	Individual Area Profiles (separately numbered)	134
7	Options, Recommendations, and an Action Plan	136
Appendices		
Appendix 1a	East Dorset site assessment forms	146
Appendix 1b	Christchurch site assessment forms	152
Appendix 2	List of all open space sites in both Districts (N.B. This appendix is stored separately in electronic format)	160

Acknowledgements

Many individuals, groups and organisations have provided information, views and support in preparing this study. This input has been valued greatly.

Base maps used in Part 1 of this report are copyright of the Automobile Association and Kingswood Limited. Base maps used in Part 2 of this report are copyright of Ordnance Survey.

Glossary of Terms

'Technical' reports such as this document sometimes have to use terms and phrases that may be unfamiliar to the lay reader; where this happens they are explained in the body of the text. The following is a quick reference to the terms used.

Term	What it means
AONB	Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (a national landscape designation).
BMX	Bicycle Motor Cross.
DDA	Disability Discrimination Act (1995)
DPD	Development Plan Document (documents which together comprise the Local Development Framework)
Extended Schools Initiative	A national government initiative encouraging the 'opening up' of schools to generate greater use beyond traditional hours and years
GIS	Geographical Information System. (Electronic mapping and analytical software).
LAP	Local Area for Play.
LDF	Local Development Framework (a component of the revised statutory land use planning system).
LEAP	Local Equipped Area for Play.
LNA	Local Needs Area (Defined geographical areas used in this report to consider the detailed supply of and need for open space, sport and recreation opportunities).
MUGA	Multi Use Games Area.
NEAP	Neighbourhood Equipped Area for Play.
NPFA	National Playing Fields Association.
OS,S&R	Open Space, Sport and Recreation
PPG17	Planning Policy Guidance Note 17: Planning for Open Space, Sport and Recreation (National government planning guidance).
QUANGO	Quasi Autonomous Non Governmental Organisation
Ramsar	An internationally important ecological designation. (Named after the place where international agreements were signed).

Schools for the Future	A national government redevelopment programme (based on the Private Finance Initiative) that has the aim of renewing aging school complexes throughout the country.
SAC	Special Area of Conservation (An internationally important ecological designation)
SNCI	Site of Nature Conservation Interest (A UK ecological designation – not international)
SPA	Special Protection Area. (An internationally important ecological designation.)
SPD	Supplementary Planning Document
STP	Synthetic Turf Pitch

1 INTRODUCTION AND OVERVIEW

1.1 Context of the study

This is a report of an assessment of open space and recreation facilities in Christchurch Borough Council and East Dorset District Council areas.

1.2 Aims and objectives

The overall aim of the study was to undertake, research, analyse and present conclusions meeting the requirements of 'Planning Policy Guidance Note 17: Planning for Open Space, Sport and Recreation'. The specific objectives as identified in the project brief have been to:

- Investigate current open space and recreation provision compared to the aspirations and requirements of the population of the study area
- to identify areas where particular facilities are inadequate, in order to inform where the two Authorities should be protecting or improving existing facilities or providing new ones.
- based on the provision survey and needs analysis, to submit recommendations for local standards which will justify relevant developer contributions and other relevant policies for open space, sport and recreational facilities.
- in the above tasks, to assimilate the mixed characteristics of the overall study area, but also to recognise that large tracts of the study area are of high landscape, amenity and ecological value. The concept of sustainable development is the guiding principle of strategic and local planning policy.

The demographic characteristics of much of the study area have also been considered, as these could greatly influence the range of open space and recreation opportunities sought, as well as the nature of local standards recommended.

The planning and other relevant policy context has been examined, and a thorough review undertaken of various information sources identified within the brief.

It is recognised that the study can:

- Provide a comprehensive and robust evidence base for planning policies in the Local Plan and future Local Development Frameworks (LDF) for the study area and any supporting Supplementary Planning Documents (which the client councils may wish to publish subsequently); and,
- Inform other corporate strategies, plans and initiatives as appropriate.

1.3 Overview of the Study Area

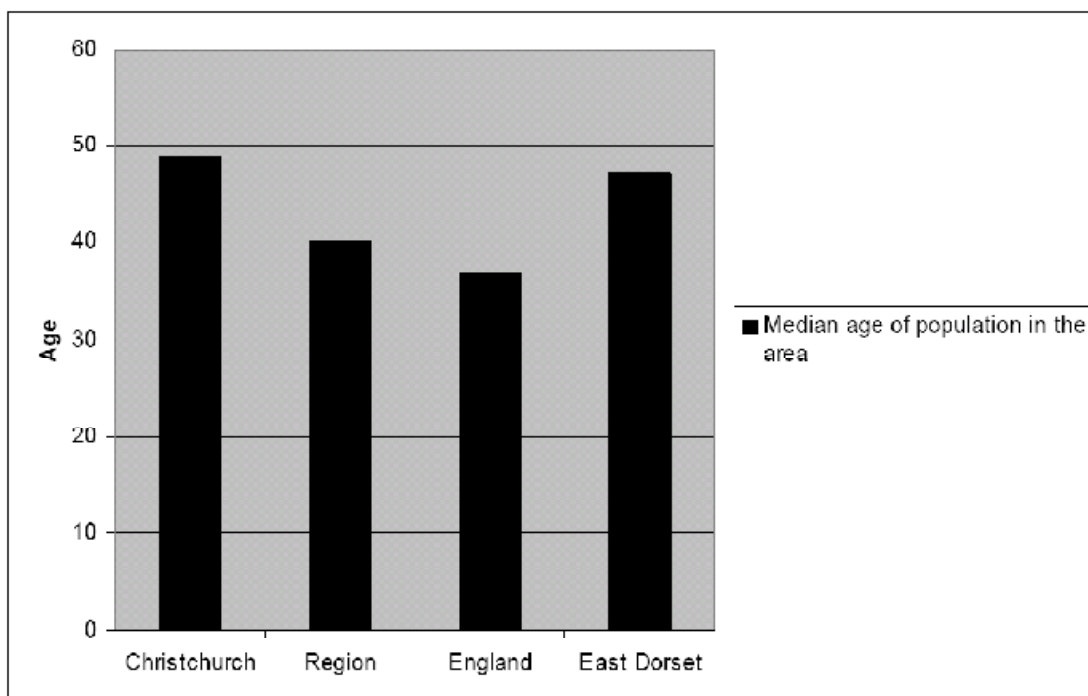
Both Christchurch Borough and East Dorset District are located within the south eastern corner of the South West Region. Wiltshire lies to the north, North Dorset to the west, and the Bournemouth and Poole conurbation to the south and west. Across the regional border to the east lie the New Forest National Park and Hampshire. The following figure shows the general extent and location of the study area.

The study area is shown on **Map 1.1**.

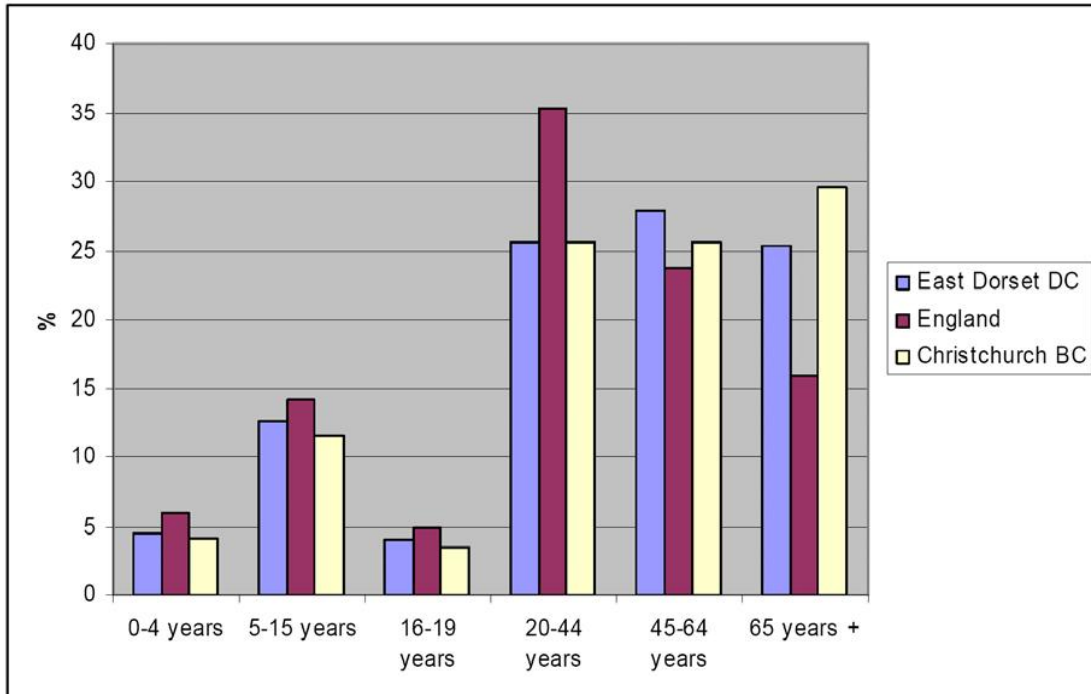
At the time of the 2001 Census¹, the two local authority areas of Christchurch and East Dorset had populations of 45,050 and 85,370 respectively and they cover 5,169ha and 35,441ha in size. However, bald facts and figures do little to convey the diversity found within the overall study area and the relationship of these characteristics with recreation and open space opportunities.

The following figures show the breakdown of the two local authority populations. The figures show that the age structures of both council areas are significantly older than that for England as a whole, especially for those over the age of retirement.

Figure 1.1: Average (median) age of population



¹ Figures from the 2001 Census are used to enable comparison with other areas

Figure 1.2: Breakdown of population (by age group)

1.4 Christchurch and East Dorset: A Joint Approach

The Draft Core Strategy Discussion Paper/Issues and Options/February 2006 states that Christchurch and East Dorset face many similar issues and it is recognised that to adopt a consistent approach to these will help in the good planning of the whole area. It is also anticipated that by working together the Councils will make best use of scarce resources and will also reduce the burden on specific stakeholders, communities, potential developers, and the Planning Inspectorate.

The overall study area benefits from the presence of many international nature conservation sites. These areas are protected by European and National legislation, which prohibits development which could adversely impact upon them. There are also large areas of national and local conservation importance that are protected either through law or existing planning policy. Additionally the area provides habitat for a wide range of flora and fauna, some species being protected in their own right through legislation.

Both areas are significantly influenced by the water environment; the chalk downlands of East Dorset lie in the North West, a network of rivers flow through the district to Christchurch and the Harbour; a wonderful natural asset. The Rivers Avon and River Stour and the Moors River are important nature conservation sites. The coast of Christchurch is a major tourist attraction and a valuable semi-natural habitat.

Approximately 85% of the combined District and Borough area is countryside, the majority of which is used for agriculture and forestry, although there are sizeable areas of heath and land used to keep horses. Set within the countryside are a number of small villages and a loose scatter of residential, leisure, tourism and employment premises.

The majority of the countryside lies within the Green Belt where inappropriate development is resisted. However, the northern part of East Dorset lies outside the green belt. In these areas, there is therefore greater scope to contemplate the expansion of the villages.

The north western part of East Dorset lies within the Cranborne Chase and West Wiltshire Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB). Elsewhere, within the rural parts of East Dorset, Areas of Great Landscape Value have been identified and their character protected through planning policy. To the east of the area lies the newly designated New Forest National Park. Christchurch Borough Council has undertaken a comprehensive character assessment across the whole Borough which considers the landscape and townscape quality of both the rural and urban areas of the Borough.

There are many historic buildings, parks and conservation areas and many country estates, some within the green belt or within the AONB.

The settlement hierarchy according to 'Functional Analysis of Settlements (2005) (Roger Tym and Partners) is as follows:

Principal Urban Area

Christchurch and Highcliffe (Christchurch)
Corfe Mullen (East Dorset)

Other significant settlements

Ferndown, West Parley, Verwood, West Moors, Wimborne, Colehill, St Leonards, and St Ives (East Dorset)

(Christchurch, Highcliffe, Ferndown, Verwood, West Moors and Wimborne are identified as the six main towns in the area)

Main Villages

Burton (Christchurch)
Alderholt, Cranborne, Sixpenny Handley, Sturminster Marshall, and Three Legged Cross (East Dorset)

Small Villages with Local Plan settlement boundaries

Gaunts Common, Hinton Martell, Holt, Horton, Longham, Shapwick, Whitmore, Woodlands (East Dorset)

Small Villages with no settlement boundaries

Hurn and Winkton (Christchurch)
Wimborne St Giles and Witchampton (East Dorset)

Hamlets

Edmonsham, Gussage All Saints and Gussage St Michael (East Dorset)

In 2002 there were 21,925 dwellings in Christchurch and 35,300 in East Dorset. Proposed locations for major new residential development (as identified in the Draft Regional Spatial Strategy) include an area to the north of Christchurch, east of Burton (600 dwellings); and 2400 dwellings to be located in areas of search covering:

- north west of the main urban area of Corfe Mullen;
- north and west of Wimborne; and,
- east and south east of Ferndown.

1.5 Challenges for the Report

The overall study area has several important characteristics that need to be considered by this report:

- Its mixed urban and rural character. Whilst Christchurch Borough has a population density of 0.114 hectares per person, East Dorset District has a comparable figure of 0.415 hectares per person.
- The very attractive countryside and coastal areas, many of which have special landscape and nature designations, including heathland that is subject to intense pressures from recreation use.
- Pressures of urban expansion and the impact this has both upon the need for all manner of recreation outlets; as well as the potentially negative effect it may have on natural habitats acknowledged to be of national and international importance.
- Proximity to Bournemouth and Poole and the effect of this on patterns of recreational and sporting activity.

Whilst these are recognised issues for planning authorities, they have not necessarily been reflected in the planning and provision of different kinds of open space and recreation opportunity. Recognition of these facts raises the following questions:

- How can open space, sport and recreation opportunities best be planned to be more sensitive to the needs of older citizens, whilst ensuring that the needs of children and young people are properly recognised and fulfilled?
- Is it possible to achieve equality in access to opportunities between urban and rural areas through provision of new facilities, or is it better to focus on improving the recreation assets which already exist within many rural areas?
- In an area of population growth, how can opportunities be provided to best meet the needs of new residents, whilst protecting acknowledged areas of high ecological and landscape value?
- How can an appropriate mix of open space be achieved within the study area? The concept of 'open space' should not imply a homogeneous commodity. A child's or footballer's perception of 'good' open space will be completely different from that of a rambler or bird watcher, or even (perhaps) a resident in a neighbouring house. How can an equitable balance of opportunities be struck so that the interests of one group

do not become a genuine nuisance to others, but on the other hand don't lose out to the majority?

- Woodland, heathland, and coastal water is very suited to many forms of recreation- but they are also valuable natural habitats and the two are not necessarily good companions. How can such potential conflict best be addressed?
- How can the planning process react to changes in expectation for all types of open space over time?

1.6 The benefits of open space, sport and recreation

Notwithstanding these issues, the philosophy that underpins this study is that open space in its many forms should be seen as a 'Force for the Good'.

The benefits of good quality open space, parks and sport and recreation provision are now well extolled and promoted, and covered extensively in other literature.

In summary, open space provides the following benefits:

For people, open space:

- Gives an area for recreation and play
- Enables lifelong learning and education
- Encourages equality and diversity
- Promotes community development and regeneration
- Establishes community cohesion and social inclusion
- Tackles community safety issues
- Empowers communities

For the environment, open space:

- Encourages biodiversity
- Provides wildlife habitat
- Promotes education
- Contributes to sustainable environmental resource management
- Creates a natural amenity
- Gives safe, sustainable transport routes
- Alleviates flood risk
- Regulates the local microclimate
- Can instil unique character to an area, and provide a sense of place and local identity.

For health, open space:

- Improves physical health through exercise
- Contributes to good mental health and well being
- Provides positive community health through sense of space

For the economy, open space:

- Attracts economic development and local investment
- Provides local employment

- Increases land and property values
- Encourages ongoing revenue streams through tourism
- Improves the image and standing of an area
- Influences location decisions for both employers and employees

1.7 Definitions of open space sport and recreation used in this report.

The scope of this study in terms of the kinds of open space and recreation opportunity being covered is largely determined by guidance contained in Planning Policy Guidance Note 17: Planning for Open, Space Sport and Recreation, together with its companion guide.

In essence the following opportunities for the community are being considered:

Open Space type	Definition	More detail see section
Recreation Grounds and Public Gardens	All sites that might be thought of as recreation grounds, parks, and public gardens	3.6
(Accessible) Natural and Semi Natural Green Space (including Green Corridors/recreation routes, and accessible Beaches)	Sites such as beaches, meadows, river floodplain, woodland and copse - managed for wildlife value but open to public use and enjoyment.	3.7
Amenity / Informal Green Space	Spaces open to free and spontaneous use by the public, not managed for a specific function such as a park, public playing field or recreation ground; nor managed as a natural or semi-natural habitat.	3.8
Allotments and Community Gardens	Formal allotments or other areas for people to grow their own produce and plants.	3.9
Outdoor Active Sports Space	Grass or synthetic pitches or surfaces for outdoor sport such as football, rugby, tennis or lawn bowls.	3.10
Equipped play provision for children and young people	Formal children's play areas or teenage facilities such as skate parks and youth shelters/clubs.	3.11
Other Open Space	Churchyards and cemeteries, golf courses, large private gardens or spaces, amongst other things. Not of central concern to this study given their specialist and (often) private nature.	3.12
Sports halls and swimming pools	Dedicated sports halls. Publicly accessible swimming pools.	3.13

Built facilities	Indoor venues accommodating sports and recreational activities – includes sports halls, swimming pools and leisure centres.	3.14
Education Outdoor Sports facilities	School playing fields and other outdoor facilities	3.15
Country Parks	Planned and dedicated venues providing a natural, rural setting and informal recreation opportunities for visitors who do not necessarily want to go out into the wider countryside	3.16

1.8 'Accessible' open space:

In terms of the above types of open space and recreational opportunity the study is restricted largely to those areas and facilities that are physically accessible by the community; either informally or on some sort of managed basis. The main focus of the study does not therefore include consideration of sites that may be attractive to look at, or of notable ecological value but are not generally accessible to the community. However, in the course of undertaking this project a large amount of information has been collected on features and facilities of all kinds, a significant number of which are not generally considered to be physically accessible by the community. There has been value in collating and recording all this information on one large database for future ease of reference. The location of all such sites has been identified through the audit process, but it is only where they are open to community access have they formed part of the analyses within this study.

Some sites currently not open to public access may, in fact, offer potential for overcoming identified shortfalls of provision. An example might be in the case of some school sites that could be opened to wider community use through appropriate agreements.

1.9 A practical definition of open space

The existing or potential recreation utility of a site is a function of its:

- size
- location
- shape, topography and internal site features.

Even very small sites are potentially large enough to accommodate meaningful recreation activity. For example, a site of 0.1 ha is still sufficiently large to accommodate an equipped play area, tennis court, or 'pocket park' to name but some possible uses.

The location of a space will have a profound impact on its recreation utility for reasons of safety, accessibility, security, and nuisance (for example.) An unenclosed space immediately adjacent to a very busy road might not be considered to have any practical

recreation utility for safety reasons. Similarly, a space adjacent to open plan private gardens (as often occurs in many modern housing estates) might generate concerns from residents and effectively stop it being used actively for this purpose. However, if it were a large site, parts of it may be considered to be a safe distance from the road, or sufficiently remote not to cause actual or perceived nuisance to residents.

A site may in theory be open to use by the public, but in practice might be too heavily vegetated, or sloping, hilly, marshy etc to be used for any recreation purpose. A large site may be of such an awkward shape as to exclude any meaningful recreation use; and, apart from safety issues, much highway land cannot be considered to be open space for such reasons.

In short there can be no hard and fast rules for determining the recreation utility of a site for the community. This has meant that judgements - made by experienced officers and based on professional opinion and community feedback - have been made on a site by site basis as to what should be included and excluded for these purposes. In general this has been easy to achieve in a consistent way for the very large majority of sites.

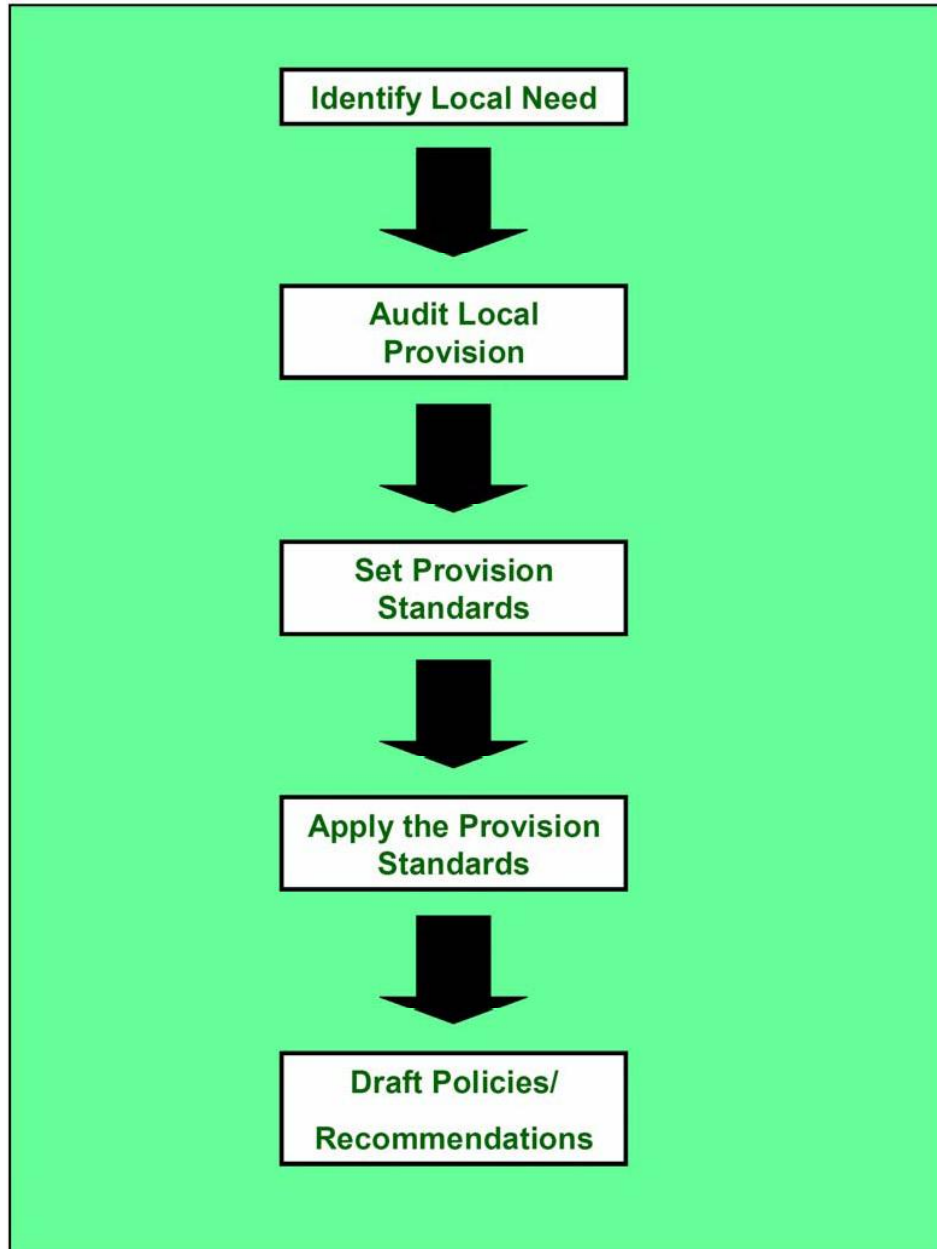
1.10 Summary of methodology

The starting point for this study has been the government's Planning Policy Guidance Note 17 'Planning for Open Space, Sport and Recreation' (PPG17), and its companion guide "Assessing Needs and Opportunities". PPG17 places a requirement on local authorities to undertake assessments and audits of open space, sports and recreational facilities in order to:

- identify the needs of the population;
- identify the potential for increased use; and,
- establish an effective strategy for open space/sports/recreational facilities at the local level.

The companion guide to PPG17 recommends an overall approach to this kind of study as summarised below.

Figure 1.3: PPG17 Study Process



Within this overall approach the companion guide suggests a range of methods and techniques that might be adopted in helping the assessment process, and these have been used where considered appropriate to local circumstances. These methods and techniques, where they have been used, are explained at appropriate points in this report. However, in general terms they include the following:

Consultation:

- Household questionnaire surveys.
- Club and community group questionnaire surveys.
- Focus groups and workshops.
- Meetings with Council officers and other external organisations.

Site audits and assessment:

- An audit, assessment and 'scoring' of relevant sites and facilities, which largely involved on-site inspection.

Analysis:

- Mapping and analyses of provision using Geographic Information Systems (GIS).
- Examining and interpreting the findings of the site/facilities audit.
- Examining and interpreting the findings of the various questionnaire surveys, focus group/workshops, and other consultation.

The two local authorities worked closely in ensuring there was consistency in approach between the two areas as appropriate.

1.11 Local Areas of Need

Many of the open space, sport and recreation opportunities that are covered by this report will serve local needs and therefore have local catchments. Play areas and nearby parks are obvious examples of such opportunities.

For the study to embrace these varying needs and opportunities it therefore has to consider provision and need in terms of both small and large geographical areas. Accordingly, surveys and analyses of provision have been based on the following levels:

- Local Authority 'Local Need Areas (LNAs)'
- Local Authority wide/ sub regional.

Similarly, much of the information arising out of the survey of needs can also be broken down to (or built up from) a very local level. For example:

- The findings of surveys provide locally relevant information.
- The clubs/organisation survey can allow respondents to be linked to geographical areas that they cover (as appropriate).
- Responses to the various surveys conducted through this study can be linked to the general location of the respondent users of open space and recreation facilities.

For very local analyses the following LNAs have been established by the two local authorities. Each LNA has been drawn to reflect as much as possible the geographical characteristics of discrete local communities within the two Council areas. Where appropriate, LNA boundaries follow physical barriers to people's movement (such as main roads or rivers) or define the edge of the urban area.

Map 1.2 shows these LNAs

1.12 How open space, sport and recreation sites are defined in the local plans.

The two adopted local plans for the study area have a range of policies and designations relating to open space, sport and recreation. In addition there are policies and proposals relating to landscapes, green belt, and natural habitats, and such sites can also be used for recreation activity.

East Dorset District: has a general policy designation 'Open Space/Recreation', as well as other policy designations covering:

- Motor Sport Boundary Use
- Community Use
- New Schools

Christchurch Borough: has a wider range of relevant designations, including:

- Existing Open Space
- Proposed Open Space
- School Playing Field
- Proposed Parks
- Private Open Space
- Alternative Cemetery Sites
- Community Uses

Thus, whilst there is already a strong and explicit recognition in both plans of the importance of open space, sport and recreation as land uses, the way in which they are treated in policy terms is markedly different. To reiterate, 'Open Space' covers a wide range of different functions and this study and accompanying audit helps clarify the particular activities hosted by existing sites and their capacity to cope with multiple uses. This categorisation of open space within an overall typology may be used to inform the review of the development plans.

1.13 Town and villagescape

Although this report is fundamentally an assessment of the supply of and need for different forms of open space and other facilities for community recreation it is important to recognise that open space also serves other functions. In particular it can contribute to the overall quality of the urban and village form. An appropriate balance and harmony

between open space and buildings can instil unique character into an area, and provide a sense of place and local identity.

There are many examples demonstrating how open space can contribute to the quality of the built environment on a much smaller scale in towns and villages:

- In many large housing areas well designed and managed local space can inject interest and diversity where there may otherwise be monotony and homogeneity in the built environment.
- In rural settlements housing facing onto village greens may, apart from 'looking nice' and providing recreational opportunities, provide a focus for generating community feeling where this can all too often be lacking.
- Open space managed in a natural way within urban areas will help to provide opportunities for wildlife and biodiversity where it would not otherwise occur. It can offer proximity between people and nature with all the attendant (and proven) benefits for emotional well being.

Some pictures showing how open space can contribute to the wider setting

- Open space managed in a natural way within urban areas allows proximity between people and nature.



- Well designed and managed local space can inject interest and diversity where there may otherwise be monotony and homogeneity.



- An appropriate balance and harmony between open space and buildings can instil unique character into an area.



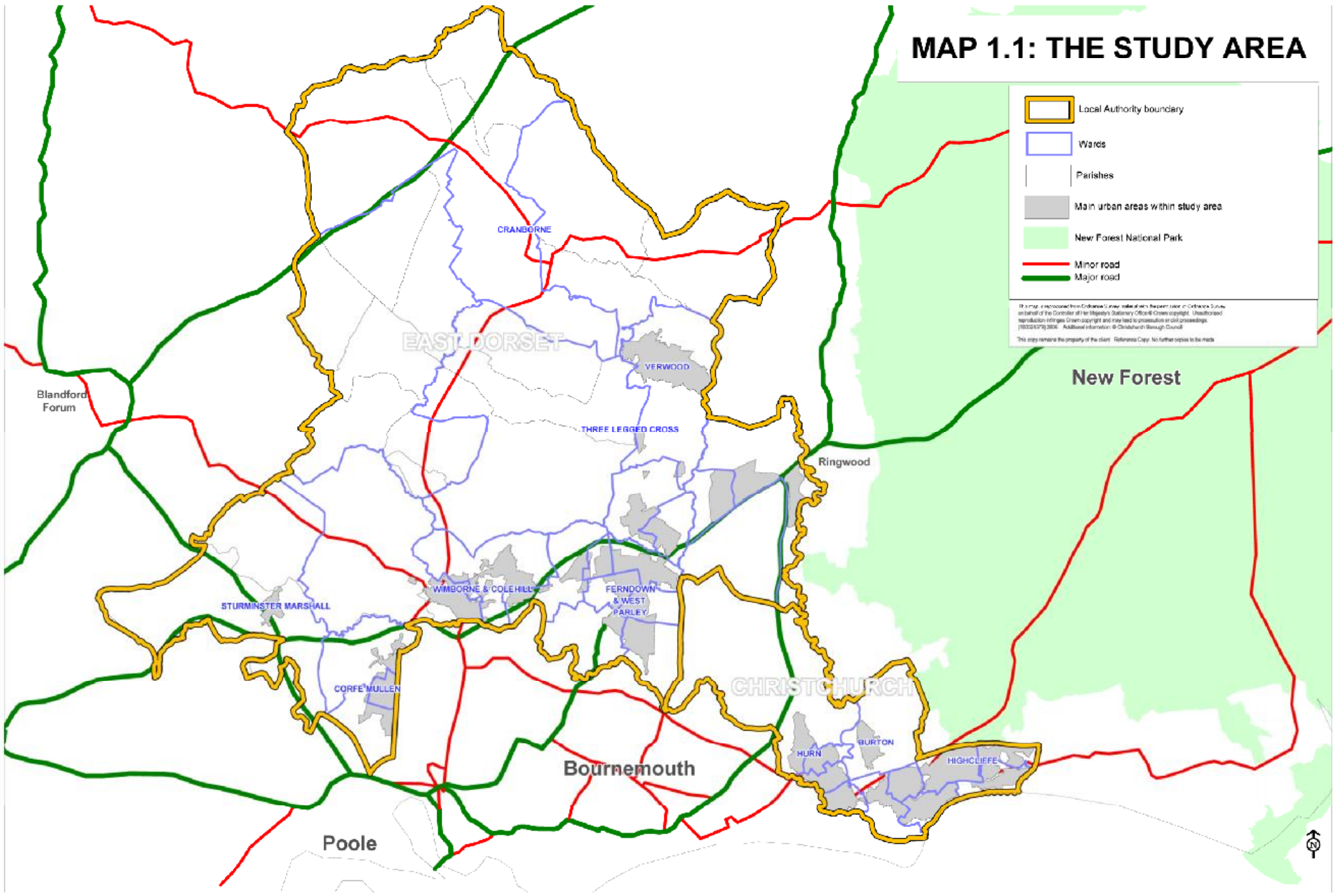
- Well designed open space can help to bind rural communities together through creating a village green atmosphere and areas for local events.

1.14 Format of report

The following sections within this report:

- Summarise local policy of relevance to this assessment, and identify some of the implications. (Section 2)
- Present an overview of the different types of open space across the two authorities (Section 3)
- Review the results of relevant surveys and consultation into local needs. (Section 4)
- Examine the quantity, distribution and (wherever possible) quality of existing recreation and open space opportunities (Overview in Section 5: detail within Section 6)
- Make recommendations, including standards designed to reflect the needs of both existing residents, as well as the likely demands resulting from housing development. These recommendations also include an Action Plan. (Sections 5 and 7).

MAP 1.1: THE STUDY AREA



MAP 1.2: LOCAL NEEDS AREAS

