



Forward

The Borough of Christchurch forms the eastern most section of the county of Dorset. With a natural harbour and the beaches of Christchurch Bay, the area is well known as a maritime and coastal centre.

The historic Priory church forms a dominant focus to both the harbour and surrounding built up area. The church is set within an attractive and well preserved historic quarter in which Saxon and Medieval features, street forms and buildings still remain. Outside of the historic core, rapid post war expansion of the built up area has all but joined a series of local neighbourhoods into one extensive urban area.

The built up area lies between the coast and open countryside. The rural area is divided in two by St Catherine's Hill, a ridge running north/south between the valleys of the Rivers Avon and Stour.



The Borough contains a fine range of high quality environmental assets including the attractive coastal environment, nature conservation sites of international importance, Scheduled Ancient Monuments, historic buildings and townscape along with areas of open countryside. These are generally well recognised, defined and protected by designation. The settings to these assets within the local landscape or townscapes are fundamental to the sense of place and a key part of how the environmental quality of the Borough may be perceived. However, the precise extent and nature of these more widespread settings is more elusive - inevitably they are not so well defined or protected.

This study has been undertaken to help define the character of the Borough as a series of distinct areas or character zones. Each area is described in terms of the common physical characteristics along with an analysis of how the areas may be seen to possess any distinct identity or sense of place.



While areas may reflect a common character, some may be in better condition than others. This study provides an assessment of the condition of each character area as a guide to the general environmental quality of the Borough. The description of each area also includes a commentary on the current influences or potential threats to character.

The identity of Christchurch as a Borough is due in part to the diversity provided by the range of coastal, urban and rural

landscapes. There are important relationships between these areas that help define the overall character of the area. This overall character is also influenced by the degree to which areas may be accessed or viewed. The perceived character is also dependant on the way in which people move through the Borough and the condition of key gateways and vistas alongside the principal routes.

The further expansion of the built up area is currently tightly constrained by a range of important environmental designations. Further development within or adjoining the urban area could have significant impact on the character of individual areas or the Borough as a whole. The study therefore includes an assessment of the capacity of the main character areas to assimilate new development and consideration of the wider implications that such changes would bring. The assessment of capacity will form an integral part of the urban potential study being undertaken as part of the structure plan review process.

The character assessment has been undertaken on behalf of Christchurch Borough Council as one part of a larger project. The other elements of the project encompassed the preparation of an integrated strategy for the Town Centre and a development brief for one of the key redevelopment sites within the Town Centre. The combined project requirements were defined by a Borough Council Brief issued in December 2001. The objective for all three elements of work is for each to form Supplementary Planning Guidance for adoption by the Authority.

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NB: Each urban neighbourhood is described in general terms followed by individual character area descriptions. At the end of each neighbourhood section there is a description of the Capacity for Development. The following sections deal with individual neighbourhoods:

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