

Sturminster Newton Community Assets Review

– January 2016, reviewed for submission January 2017

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Background

What we mean by Community Assets

The planning system can play an important role in facilitating social interaction and creating healthy, inclusive communities. Planning policies and decisions can promote opportunities for meetings between members of the community who might not otherwise come into contact with each other, and deliver the social, recreational and cultural facilities and services the community needs.

Community assets can include

- > **community halls and meeting venues** - including places of worship and youth centres
- > **cultural facilities** - such as arts centres, libraries and museums
- > **education and training facilities** - including pre-school centres and adult education colleges
- > **emergency services** – fire and rescue, police, ambulance
- > **healthcare/social service facilities** - such as **doctors’** surgeries and dental practices, daycare centres and hospitals
- > **local centre facilities** - local shops, banking, post offices, public houses
- > **sport and recreation facilities** - indoor and outdoor sporting venues, open space of public value such as parks, cemeteries etc

The Neighbourhood Plan research and consultation process has played a role in assessing if community assets have

- > reached capacity use or are underprovided and therefore provision needs to be made for expansion of buildings or land
- > if assets are of sufficient importance to be considered for registration under the Community Right to Bid legislation

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- > if assets need improvement or replacement but have insufficient funds and should therefore be considered for inclusion on the local Community Infrastructure list

The new Local Plan

The Local Plan includes a strategic policy for Sturminster Newton, as well as general strategic policies on community assets. Policy 14 clearly states that the Council will work with partners and developers to ensure that the level of social infrastructure across the District is maintained and enhanced through the retention and improvement of existing facilities and new provision, where required. The strategy is to protect existing facilities and provide new facilities where there is an identified need.

The Local Plan in particular notes

- > the important role of the Exchange building with its meeting facilities, cinema/theatre and space for community events, which acts as a hub for the community both in the town and the wider area
- > the purpose built medical centre at the Exchange
- > the community managed leisure centre, located off Honeymead Lane which offers a range of opportunities for sports and recreation for local residents
- > the green infrastructure and green spaces around the town, notably the principal recreation ground at the end of Ricketts Lane; the Railway Gardens, the Local Nature Reserve and fields at Butts Pond; the open space in the Rixon development that includes a children play area; and the allotment sites off Filbridge Rise and to the rear of Chinnocks

It also notes that the proposed growth will require some facilities to be extended or improved, in particular:

- > Expansion of the Sturminster Newton High School which can be accommodated on the existing site
- > Expansion of the William Barnes Primary School, which may need to be relocated
- > Upgrading and expansion of the leisure centre
- > Further public open space provision
- > New allotments

The Community Infrastructure Levy and Infrastructure Delivery

The District Council consulted on the community infrastructure charging schedule, which will provide funding for the Town Council to use on delivery of infrastructure locally. The charging schedule was examined in Autumn 2016, and **examiner's** report received 21 December 2016 concluding that, with a minor modification in relation to the prime shopping areas, the levy was appropriate. The District Council anticipate commencing charging by the end of 2017.

The District **Council's** Infrastructure Delivery Plan sets out a schedule of infrastructure currently programmed and / or needed to support new development. It is updated as development and projects come forward and more information is known about the requirements and costs. The latest version (Nov 2014) lists the following (and other infrastructure requirements outside the scope of this review):

- > New 2FE primary school (critical by 2016, no funding secured)
- > Expansion of Sturminster High School (critical after 2017, no funding secured)
- > Replacement library/extension, (essential, in DCC programme, no funding secured)
- > Retention and upgrading of Leisure Centre (critical, no funding secured)

Consideration can be given to CIL priorities through the preparation of the Neighbourhood Plan, particularly in relation to the proportion of funding that will be forwarded to the Town Council.

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The library service has had limited investment as DCC budgets have been cut in this area, so it seems unlikely that this building will be updated in the future. The inclusion of the Leisure Centre on this list probably refers to the period when this was run by NDDC. Now that it is under lease to an independent Trust, they would need to be consulted about their plans for expansion.

Following the decision to prepare a Neighbourhood Plan for the parish of Sturminster Newton, the 'issues' consultation held in late 2014 provided a useful insight into local **people's** concerns and aspirations for the town. As a result of all the feedback, the objectives for the neighbourhood plan were drafted which included reference to ensuring that development **"is matched by the necessary services and facilities - sports, leisure and community facilities, footpaths and cycle-ways, health and care services, schools and shops"**

However it is clear from the funding gap of £94M evidenced in the Community Infrastructure Levy examination (which even if just critical elements of infrastructure are delivered retains a shortfall of £66M) will not be met by the anticipated income from the levy, which is predicted to produce an income in the region of £4.5M for the period to 2031.

The "Community Asset Review" and what this covers

A review of community assets was undertaken in Summer 2015 specifically to identify the places and spaces that are used by the community, possible threats and potential needs. The aim of the review was to provide some basic information to inform the capacity of provision necessary in light of the likely changes in population, produce a list of **"community assets"**, and identify future needs which may need to be accommodated in the Neighbourhood Plan.

Task	What this covered	Main outputs
Review of existing standards	Research on recommended provision per head of population adopted locally / nationally, in liaison with NDDC and DCC and through online research	List of existing local / national "standards" that could be considered
Survey of service providers to establish current levels of provision / capacity and future plans	Identification of main facilities and organisations, followed by questionnaire / interviews to establish base information about the location / use / standard of their facilities, capacity to deal with growth.	Map of existing known assets and service providers Assessment of how existing community assets perform against existing standards (where applicable) List of current issues, future needs and plans

Following on from this it was recognised that further exploration of potential opportunities to deliver needed facilities in relation to new development sites would be needed, leading to potential ideas and requirements to test in relation to specified locations, and key facilities to protect

Review of existing standards

Method

The following measures were taken to identify relevant existing standards (national or local) for provision of infrastructure of kinds relevant to this review:

- Advice was sought from planning policy staff at North Dorset District Council and infrastructure planning staff at Dorset County Council;
- Internet searches were made using common search engines; and

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- The questionnaires submitted to the owners/managers of community assets included the following question: **“what standards do you use (if any) in planning for future needs or changes?”**

Findings

The main space standards found for local community facilities are given in the following table, and how these would apply to Sturminster Newton

Community Asset	Standards	Sturminster Newton
Community halls and meeting venues	No relevant space standards found	n/a
Cultural facilities	Arts Council England recommends space standards for four types of facility expressed as square metres per 1,000 people as follows: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Library – 30 m²/1,000 > Art galleries – 45 m²/1,000 > Museums - 28 m²/1,000 	@ 4,410 population (2013) these standards would require: Library: 132m ² Arts centre: 198m ² Museums: 123m ² <i>Provision in the parish is broadly adequate</i>
Daily facilities - local shops, cash machines, post offices, public houses	Government minimum access criteria: 95% of the total “rural” (which, as defined, includes Sturminster Newton) population to be within 3 miles of their nearest Post Office branch.	<i>Post Office branch standard provision in the parish is adequate</i>
Education and training facilities	Area guidelines for mainstream schools (Building Bulletin 103) June 2014 provides guidance but their application depends on how the schools are run. Individual school governing bodies set various policies / class size limits etc.	n/a
Emergency services	No relevant space standards found	n/a
Healthcare/social service facilities	No relevant space standards found. Some websites refer to statistics indicating a national average provision of two GPs, 0.75 nurses and 3.25 administrative staff per 3,000 patients.	n/a
Sport and recreation facilities	Fields in Trust standards of provision: 1.6ha playing pitches / formal sports per 1,000 people available to the wider public 1.2km of people’s homes 1.4ha per 1,000 people of parks, gardens and amenity green space within 700 metres of people’s homes	@ 4,410 population (2013) 7ha formal sports pitches required <i>Approx 5ha provided at Honeymead Lane, War Memorial and Rixon recreation grounds</i> 6.1ha informal / amenity open spaces required <i>Approx 1.2ha provided</i>

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	<p>Small play areas for very young children within 100m and Locally Equipped Areas for Play (LEAPs) within 400m of most homes. Skateboard parks / multi use games area within 700 metres of people's homes.</p> <p>1.8ha publically accessible natural greenspace per 1,000 people within 700 metres of people's homes</p> <p>NDDC standard of 16 allotments (0.4ha) per 1,000 people</p>	<p><i>excluding the above sites</i></p> <p>2 LEAP, 1 skate park / MUGA (centrally located) and multiple local toddler play areas required 2 LEAP (War Memorial Recreation Ground and Rixon Close), no skate park / MUGA and insufficient toddler play areas</p> <p>7.9ha natural greenspace required Approx 5.7ha provided at Butts Pond, Mill & Newton</p> <p>1.7ha allotments required Approx 0.6ha provided</p>
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Commentary

Using these standards, the provision in Sturminster Newton appears to be broadly adequate in areas other than allotments, **children's** play areas, and informal green spaces in general. It needs to be determined if these standards are appropriate for adoption by the Neighbourhood Plan. In particular, the standards for open spaces may be more suited to an urban area and not one with a rural surround. The under provision of allotments has been identified by respondents in consultations and in the Local Plan and the Neighbourhood Plan should either allocate sites or require developers to include these in areas of new housing. A skate park is likely to be built during the period of the Plan. The latest update is a tender for the skate park has been awarded to a commercial partner and consultation will start in February regarding the location on Town Council land at either Rixon recreation ground or the War Memorial recreation ground at Rickets Lane.

Survey of service providers

Method

A list of community assets was compiled to assess both issues of capacity and suitability for protection. Given the size and nature of the area, the data obtained from the public consultations already undertaken and the local knowledge of those involved in this review, no complex process was required in this respect. Using the list of kinds of relevant facility (as set out in the table in the review of existing standards section above), a more detailed master list of individual community assets (including buildings, other premises, facilities and services) was prepared. In each case, contact details for the person or organisation responsible for managing the asset or delivering the service concerned were collated in that master list.

A questionnaire was then prepared designed to elicit the basic information being sought. Consideration was given to the alternative options of employing a single form and designing multiple forms adapted to suit the differing types of facility involved. In the event, it was concluded that whilst **"tailored"** questionnaires might secure a marginally improved return rate, the benefit of this would be offset by the delay that would inevitably arise from having to design multiple forms, ensure their appropriate use and the greater complexity of tabulating responses.

It was appreciated from the outset that the design of the questionnaire needed to reflect the potentially competing requirements of achieving a high response rate and comprehensive information (i.e. the more information was asked for, the less likely recipients would be to take the trouble to provide it with care). The questionnaire was therefore designed to include the critical information essential for this review and no more. It was expressed as plainly as possible and suitable questions were **"open"**; respondents could answer briefly or at length, as they chose. The

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form of questionnaire used is attached as an Appendix.

The questionnaires were issued in accordance with the master list, mostly by email but in some cases by post. After that initial mailing, some alternative or additional contacts became known and questionnaires were issued to these also. In an effort to improve response rates, the Town Clerk also contacted every recipient to explain the purpose, “official” nature and importance of the exercise.

It was anticipated from the outset that recipients were likely to need prompting to respond and that in some cases it might be necessary or desirable to interview them by telephone or in person in order to secure a response. In the event, the majority of questionnaires were returned without the need for meetings though, in some cases, after several reminders. 17 questionnaires were returned out of the 31 assets listed. Of the 14 non-returns:

- 3 related to County Council owned facilities about which some relevant information is available in the public domain anyway;
- 3 related to ambulance or hospital facilities outside the parish which serve the community but are unlikely to be directly affected by its Neighbourhood Development Plan policies and provisions; and
- Another 3 relate to public houses which were the subject of a public information event held in the town by the owner, Hall & Woodhouse, in 2015.

Consequently, reasonably adequate information has been obtained in respect of 23 out of the 31 listed community assets (74%).

Findings

The following table summarises the key community facilities that were identified. The final column comprises issues facing the asset and an assessment of its potential for some form of protection. This assessment has been made using criteria employed by the District Council when registering facilities on their register under Right to Bid and under the Community asset transfer programme namely benefit to the well-being of the community and potential for future community use and management.

Ref	Site name	Main function	Current usage	Assessment and issues
B1	Barclays Bank	Banking	Closed 2016	
B2	Lloyds Bank	Banking		
B3	NatWest Bank	Banking	Closed 2016	
C1	Sturminster Newton Library	Cultural - library	Spare capacity	Has been under threat of closure, may qualify for registration as a community asset for purchase or asset transfer
C2	Museum	Cultural - museum	Spare capacity	Already in public ownership but may qualify for registration as a community asset
C3	Sturminster Newton Mill	Cultural - museum	Spare capacity	Tenure issue, may qualify for registration as a community asset
CV1	Youth Centre	Community Venue		Threatened with closure, being transferred to High School for community management
CV2	Royal British Legion Club	Community Venue	Spare capacity	

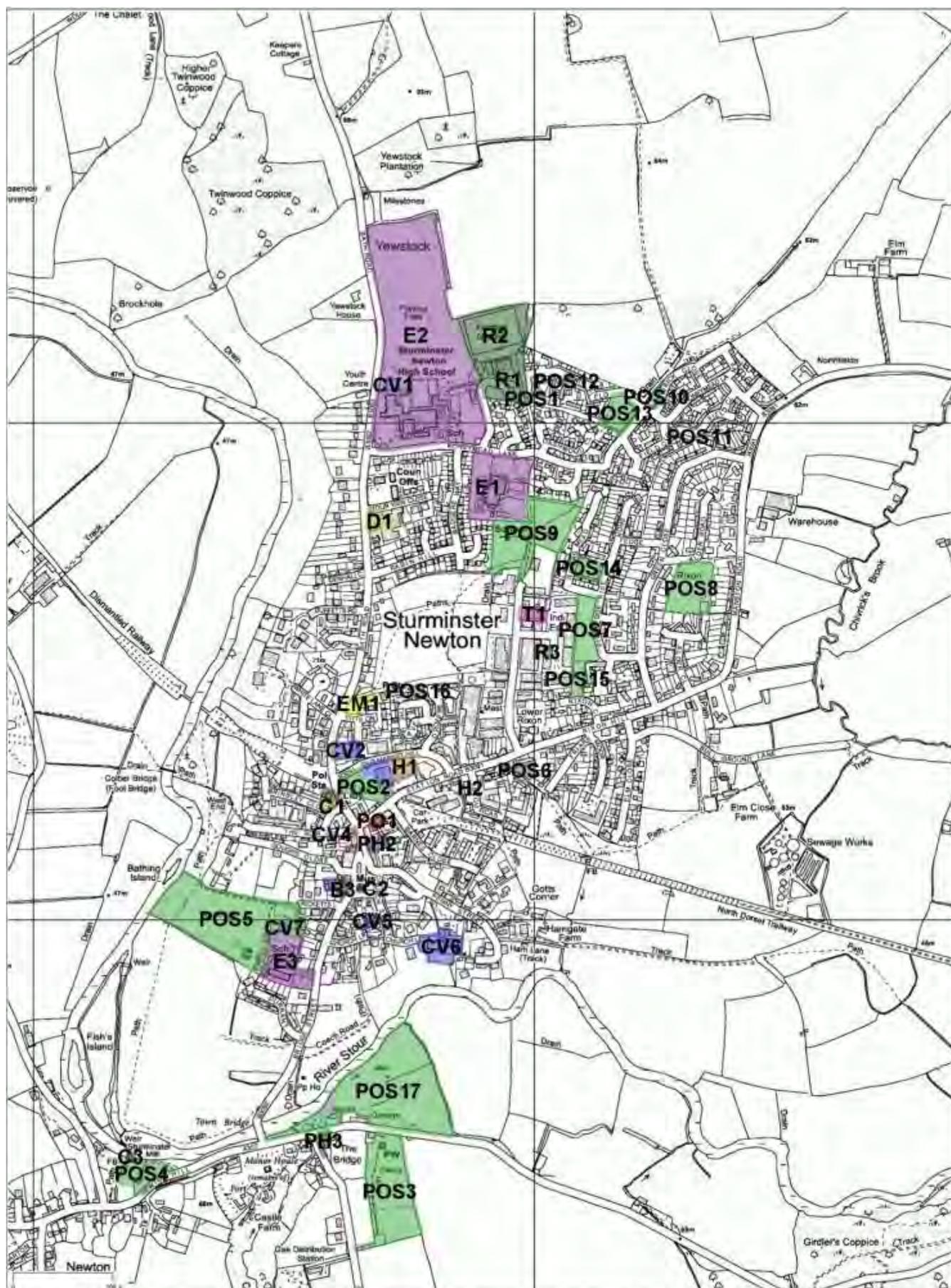
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Ref	Site name	Main function	Current usage	Assessment and issues
CV3a	The Exchange	Community Venue and Arts Centre	Spare capacity	Already in public ownership
CV3b	Town Council Chamber	Community Venue	Spare capacity	
CV3c	Community Office (the Exchange)	Community Venue	Spare capacity	Use not protected
CV4	Christian Fellowship Hall	Community Venue		
CV5	Methodist Hall	Community Venue		
CV6	St Mary's Church	Community Venue		
CV7	Scout Hall	Community Venue		
D1	Stour View Centre and Stour Castle Social and Education Centre	Daycare		
E1	Yewstock School and College	Educational (Special Needs)	Close to / at capacity	Recent additional buildings completed
E2	Sturminster Newton High School	Educational (Secondary)	Close to / at capacity	Extend and replace some accommodation. Expansion possible on existing site
E3	William Barnes Primary School	Educational (Primary)	Close to / at capacity	Re-location to new site by autumn 2018. New site to be allocated
EM1	Fire Station	Emergency Services		
EM2	Police Station	Emergency Services		No access for public, possible closure within 5 years.
H1	Sturminster Newton Medical Centre	Healthcare		
H2	Sturminster Dental Care	Healthcare	Spare capacity	Recently moved into new building
H3	Old Market Dental Practice	Healthcare		
PH1	The White Hart	Public House		All 3 under Hall and Woodhouse management who have been consulting on how to improve the offer across all three pubs.
PH2	Swan Hotel	Public House		
PH3	The Bull Tavern	Public House		
PO1	One-Stop Post Office and Store	Post Office		
R1	Sturminster Newton Leisure Centre	Leisure Centre	Spare capacity, although will be nearing capacity on projected population increase	Potential to be registered as a community asset, although DCC supportive of shared use. Issues with lease impede fundraising for extension
R2	Sturminster Newton United Football Club	Football Club	Close to / at capacity	Expanded training facilities needed, site and funding to be found
R3	Sturminster Newton Amateur Boxing Club	Boxing Club		

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Ref	Site name	Main function	Current usage	Assessment and issues
T1	EQ Skills Base	Training	Spare capacity	April 2016 update: likely to close
POS1	Long Close play area	Equipped play area	Spare capacity	
POS2	Railway Gardens	Informal open space	Spare capacity	
POS3	Cemetery	Cemetery	Spare capacity	
POS4	Mill Picnic Area	Informal open space	Spare capacity	
POS5	War Memorial Recreation Ground	Recreation Ground and equipped play area	Spare capacity	
POS6	Chinnock Garden Plots	Allotments	Close to / at capacity	Additional sites and funding to be found
POS7	Filbridge Rise Allotments	Allotments	Close to / at capacity	
POS8	Rixon Recreation Ground	Recreation Ground	Spare capacity	
POS9	Butts Pond LNR	Natural greenspace	Spare capacity	
POS10	Chivrick Close play area	Equipped play area	Spare capacity	
POS11	Field Close play area	Equipped play area	Spare capacity	
POS12	Long Close open space	Informal open space	Spare capacity	
POS13	North Fields Open Space	Informal open space	Spare capacity	
POS14	Rivers Mead Open Space	Informal open space	Spare capacity	
POS15	Rixon Close Open Space	Informal open space	Spare capacity	
POS16	The Gavel Open Space	Informal open space	Spare capacity	
POS17	Newton Nature Area	Natural greenspace	Spare capacity	

Commentary

The above shows a broad range of facilities which are serving both local and in some cases much wider needs. In most cases there appears to be capacity to accommodate a rising population. However the primary and secondary schools are already at or close to full capacity and would struggle to cope with any significant population increase in the town or the surrounding villages. They have plans to meet the increasing needs that are projected and resourcing these plans will be a key priority for the County Council however the Neighbourhood Plan should take into account siting of the primary school and ensure aspects such as access are addressed. The only other community asset unequivocally stated to be at full capacity is the provision of allotments. Provision of a suitable site or sites is the key constraint on growth of this asset and this ought therefore to be a key priority for the Neighbourhood Plan.

Most of the cultural, sports, leisure and recreational community assets have varying degrees of spare capacity. This suggests that they could cope with and even benefit from population growth. However, the responses should be treated with some caution since they lack rigour and consistency (there is little correlation between the assessments of current capacity and the assessed quantity of growth that would be beneficial). The leisure centre is likely to be nearing capacity towards the end of the Plan period, and is looking to expand, and the football ground is looking to expand its training facilities, and their close proximity to each other and the school highlights a potential opportunity to explore to ensure they remain fit for the future. Respondents also mentioned the need for items of refurbishment for their facilities.

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Many of the assets are in public ownership (e.g. the Exchange) or held in trust (e.g. the Methodist Hall) and so have some measure of protection. However, continuing cuts in public sector funding could put in jeopardy such facilities as the library and the police station and the Town Council may wish to consider the potential to register such buildings as community assets or in the case of those owned by a local authority under the Community Asset Transfer programme. Privately owned or commercial facilities (e.g. pubs and banks) can also be given some measure of protection but such a project will require a sound business case and a team of willing volunteers. The Neighbourhood Plan can indicate facilities for protection in line with the overarching Local Plan policy.

Potential recipients of CIL money on this list would be those assets that are near or over capacity that do not have funds readily available for expansion. The Leisure Centre and football club look to be in this position, and also allotments. Toddler play areas appear to be underprovided against the District Council standards, but this was not highlighted as a key concern through the Neighbourhood Plan consultation, and a focus on the larger multi-age play areas is therefore proposed.

Potential criteria for assessing the weight to be given to safeguarding community assets were tested at the November 2015 consultation. These related to the level of use (the higher usage the more important it would be to retain the facility), the availability of alternatives locally, their proximity to the population they served and also other facilities that benefited from their co-location, and has helped in the definition of 'critical' facilities - those considered to be the most important because of the impact the loss of such a facility would have on the social well-being of the community. The consultation also highlighted the need to consider whether car parks and the land behind the fire station should be included in the list of assets. The former overlaps with transport issues and is considered through the town centre proposals. The latter refers to the proposed development site in the Local Plan and therefore cannot be safeguarded in its entirety, but a development of this size would be expected to include some public open space in its layout.

Key conclusions

The report has helped identify the main community assets in the neighbourhood plan area, how these are currently operating, future plans and potential capacity issues.

Of potential concern is the current shortfall in public open spaces, particularly allotment provision, and also the lack of school capacity. In the longer term there is also likely to be a more noticeable shortfall in formal sport / leisure provision. The various service providers are looking to bring forward plans to address these issues. Much of this activity is centred on the north of the town, around the High School, and a coordinated approach can be assisted through the Neighbourhood Plan. Consideration has also been given to the role the various development sites could and should play in providing on-site play areas and allotments, and how the standards are applied or adapted.

Most of the community assets identified are likely to warrant a degree of protection due to the social well-being benefits they provide to the local community. However it is clear that there are some facilities where there are multiple venues providing similar services, and in these cases the weight to be given to their protection should take into account their past levels of use, their location in relation to the population they serve and any links to other community facilities in the locality. In all cases the on-going viability of any such asset is likely to be a determining factor in whether it can be 'saved'.

The Town Council will be responsible for determining which community facilities should benefit from some of the local proportion of the Community Infrastructure Levy funds. This research provides some guidance on the matter, but other factors may come into play and further public consultation on priorities may be appropriate. Where there is a clear link between the impact of development on infrastructure capacity, projects to address this issue can also be funded from the District Council's share of the CIL, or may warrant a site-specific planning obligation. Similarly the Town Council or other community groups such as Sturquest can consider requesting the District Council to register a building as a Community Asset under the Community Right to Bid legislation.

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Appendix – Consultation questionnaire

STURMINSTER NEWTON COMMUNITY FACILITIES QUESTIONNAIRE

The first line gives an example of the type of data we would like to collect. You can answer on a separate piece of paper if there is insufficient room in the boxes. Please also mark on the attached map the land in your ownership/Lease, with the reference number clearly showing where you may run more than one facility

Q: can you list the facilities you run, and how they are used, using the prompts in the table below?

Ref	Land and buildings (name and location)	Main use	Other uses	Public access	Availability
<i>Eg: 01</i>	<i>St Peter's Leisure Centre and sports field off Peter's Crescent</i>	<i>Sport – football, hockey, badminton and tennis</i>	<i>Meeting rooms available to hire Visitor cafe</i>	<i>Use of café free. Fees for use of sports facilities and meeting rooms.</i>	<i>9 to 5 all year, closed on Sundays</i>

Q: where do most of your clients come from?

It would also be useful to understand how far the main catchment area extends for people coming to use your capacity. Ie – just the town, the town and surrounding villages, or a much larger areas (for example, extending to Stalbridge or Blandford)

We are also trying to understand whether there may be any national or local standards that you take into account in planning for the future (e.g. users per 1000 population, space per 100 users)

Q: what standards do you use (if any) in planning for future needs or changes?

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Q: Is your organisation

- Commercial
- Public
- Not-for-profit charity
- Other (please describe)

The District Council treats privately run community facilities differently from public / charitable organisations, so it would be useful if you can confirm the status of your organisation

Looking to how your facilities meet current needs and demands, and also looking the future, you may already have some ideas of the type of changes you are looking to make, or possible opportunities it may be useful to consider. If you are running more than one facility, please answer the following questions for each element.

Q: can you say whether the facilities need modernising to be fit for the future? (Yes / No)

Q: can you indicate whether the levels of use of your facilities at the current time mean that they are -

- under capacity (there is considerable under use)
- broadly at capacity
- over capacity (you are turning away bookings)

Q: can you indicate what level of growth in population you think your facilities could absorb, before you would be over capacity? (please indicate in percentage terms)

Q: what plans do you have to upgrade or modernise your facilities - please describe in brief

- What changes you are hoping to make
 - What are the timescales for these upgrades
 - Whether you have a business plan and funding in place
 - Whether the changes are on land in your ownership, or whether you need to extend your site or find another site
-

We are hoping to look at these results, and if there appear to be areas where our neighbourhood plan might help you make changes, either through physical changes that may require planning consent, opportunities that may spin of other planned developments, or funding that the Town Council might be secured from new homes.

Q. Is there any other information about the Leisure Centre that you think might be important to our plan?

Q: would you be happy to come to a meeting to discuss possible opportunities in more detail? Yes/No

Q: please can you confirm you contact details and position in the organisation
