

02 BACKGROUND CONTEXT





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Introduction

This section provides a brief background to the work undertaken to date and the decisions that have led to the areas of search being identified. It does not seek to cover background policy as this is covered later in the report.

Initial Background Work

In 2005 the Strategic Planning Authorities (SPA) - comprising Dorset County Council, Bournemouth Borough Council and the Borough of Poole - put forward "First Detailed Proposals" for the South East Dorset sub-region to the South West Regional Assembly (SWRA) - the body responsible for preparing the South West Regional Spatial Strategy (RSS). Although the RSS has now been revoked by the Secretary of State (SoS), much of the evidence and findings of this piece of work is still highly relevant today.

In considering possible future growth in the region, thought was given to a number of background factors. The South East Dorset sub-region is located in the South West Region of England and the region as a whole is renowned for its high environmental quality. It is also the fastest growing region in terms of population, with high in-migration levels. Whilst most of the region's employment is focussed on the larger urban centres, the existing population and housing is more scattered in the wider towns and villages. Unfortunately, many of these smaller, more rural communities have lost their key services and facilities as well as employment, resulting in longer journeys to work.

Although the consensus at the time was to focus new housing development in the larger urban areas to create a better balance between jobs/ homes, it was considered that there would be continued housing growth outside of these areas in locations such as the larger market towns and villages.

At the time the emerging RSS's strategy (in line with the Regional Economic Strategy) was to promote further economic growth in the region and population growth was seen as a major driver of this. SWRA required SPAs to test the implications of different levels of growth, including the existing Regional Planning Guidance (RPG10)

levels; RPG10+25% and RPG10 +50%. SWRA required the SPA's to demonstrate why they could not achieve the higher levels, including the consideration of revised Green Belt boundaries.

This level of growth raised a number of issues, including questions over the quantum of growth; how this growth could be accommodated in an area which is particularly environmentally sensitive and matters relating to transport infrastructure. However, the SPAs were required to examine growth and sought, in accordance with SWRA's advice, to focus development on the major urban areas of Bournemouth, Poole and Christchurch as well as the outer commuter towns in East Dorset and Purbeck. However, the approach of targeting the urban areas only raised concerns that large amounts of development could damage the existing urban environments.

Furthermore, a "brownfield land only" approach would not deliver the levels of affordable housing that the area so desperately requires (indeed, parts of the area comprise some of the least affordable areas in England). In East Dorset, in particular, affordable housing has suffered from an existing local plan policy requiring affordable units only on sites that are over 15 dwellings in size and many brownfield sites are too small to deliver this many homes. Land values on brownfield land are high and, therefore, the added cost burden associated with affordable housing often makes such sites unviable. The situation has been further exacerbated by the recent international protection given to the Dorset Heathlands (see later in the report) which has meant that large parts of the existing urban areas can provide no further residential development. However, it is commonly accepted that the most effective way of providing significant affordable housing numbers is through the delivery of larger housing schemes.

The above issues led to the SPA considering minimal release of Green Belt land around certain towns on sites that had no overriding constraints and were well related to the existing service centres. The process to identify these is explained below. This approach led to the SPA proposing 40,400 dwellings (2006-2026) in South East Dorset. This figure fell short of the RPG10 existing growth levels and significantly short of the RPG10+ 25% and 50% scenarios. In arriving at this figure, it was considered that in East Dorset 3,000 dwellings could be accommodated on urban sites and a further 2,400 on small urban extensions to the main settlements. The SPA made it clear that this was not an ideal scenario, but emphasised their need particularly in relation to the delivery of affordable housing.

The First Detailed Proposals

To identify potential urban extension locations, the SPA undertook an in-depth analysis of large areas around the settlements. These were then refined through the identification of key constraints and a rigorous assessment examining, among other matters, factors relating to environment, function, location etc.

This led to a number of the areas being discounted or refined. At the end of this process, the information was fed into a report entitled "The South East Dorset Strategy", which was published in November 2005. The study indicated the potential capacity of each of the proposed development areas, for each of the proposed urban extensions, with these being:

Pardy's Hill, Corfe Mullen	Up to 700 dw's
Wimborne North	Up to 600 dw's
Cuthbury, Wimborne	Up to 200 dw's
Parley Cross, West Parley	Up to 900 dw's
Total	Up to 2,400 dwellings

In addition, land at Roeshot Hill in Christchurch was identified for up to 600 dwellings, to accommodate a total of 3,000 new dwellings in urban extensions. A further site on the north western side of Ferndown was identified as an employment site (20ha).

RSS and the Current Situation

Between 2006 and 2008 the RSS went through various stages of consultation and by July 2008 the Proposed Modifications were published. This document set a requirement of 2,400 homes in the urban extensions in East Dorset. This figure was, therefore, in line with what the SPA considered to be realistic based on the technical work undertaken at a local level.

Despite its advanced stage the RSS was revoked by the Secretary of State in July 2010. At the time of writing this report, no plans have been put in place to fill the "policy void" left by the revocation of the RSS.

However, East Dorset District Council (EDDC) is aware that failure to plan for housing now will only exacerbate the acute shortage of affordable housing in the District. Failure to provide both affordable and market housing will have an impact on the local economy as there will be a lack of housing (particularly family housing), thus restricting choice in the area and resulting in people either commuting long distances to get to employment opportunities in the District (and the subsequent impacts on the local transport network) or seeking opportunities elsewhere and closer to areas with a greater housing choice (thus affecting the local labour force pool).

Therefore, despite there being no "top-down" driven housing figure for the District, there is still a great need to provide homes in the area. Furthermore, seeking to provide these homes within the urban area only will create problems of delivery and town cramming (thus affecting character).

It is, therefore, considered essential that EDDC firstly plans for future housing in the District and secondly, considers land outside of the urban area for such development.

Selecting the Areas of Search

The areas originally identified by the SPA are still considered to be robust and based on sound, locally derived evidence, thus providing a good starting point. However, it is considered that the housing figures put forward by the SPA for each of the locations requires further refinement. Indeed, it could be questionable as to whether locations such as Corfe Mullen can really accommodate 700 dwellings (due to availability of land and the nature of the settlement – lacking certain services and facilities). Other locations, such as Wimborne Minster, do have these higher order services as well as potential land to accommodate more development than the 800 previously put forward – particularly in the east of the town.

In order to test this further EDDC appointed planning and design practice Broadway Malyan to examine in greater detail the development opportunities in the following areas of search

- Land to the north and west of Wimborne Minster
- Land to the east of Wimborne Minster
- Land to the north and west of Corfe Mullen
- Land to the south and south west of Ferndown and West Parley