CHAPTER 5: Discussion and Conclusions

Supporting development in villages with facilities is more sustainable

In the six villages with a shop, an average of 65% of the resident population carry out their top up shopping in the village. This ranged from 52% in Mosterton to 85% in Charlton Down. This journey was predominantly carried out on foot or by bicycle (54% on average), but again the actual proportion varied between villages from 33% in Mosterton to 85% in Charlton Down. This variation in this figure may be related to the compactness of the settlement. For the other four villages, top up shopping is not carried out at the location closest to the village. It is likely that this activity is combined with journeys to other destinations.

For food shopping and visits to the doctors, residents do tend to travel to the nearest settlement to them that has a supermarket and a doctor's surgery respectively. In eight out of the ten settlements, the majority of residents were using their nearest settlement to them that met the needs for these services.

But development in villages does not necessarily mean that facilities will be retained

The desktop study of changes in household numbers and the retention of facilities over time (page 70) shows that there does not appear to be a relationship between these two factors. Despite an increasing number of households over time in all the villages, there were losses of some facilities in seven of the eight villages, including Crossways, which has received a significant amount of new households since 1981. This village had also gained the most facilities over time (three since 1981). The evidence implies a substantial amount of development is required to support new and existing facilities. This has become evident recently through the announcement that 2,500 post offices in the country will need to close by 2009 due to financial losses[47]. Population levels are just one factor that defines whether new development will support a store. Other factors include competition from other stores in the area, the accessibility of the store in relation to its surrounding catchment area and customer behaviour and lifestyle[48].

A key reason for moving to West Dorset is its environmental quality

The most popular reason overall given for moving to rural Dorset was to live in a nice area. West Dorset is well known for its beautiful countryside. 71% of the district is a designated Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, and the coastline is a World Heritage Site in recognition of its outstanding geological interest. The importance of moving to a nice area did vary between villages from 25% of responses in Stoke Abbott, to only 13% of responses in Puddletown. Aside from a change in personal circumstances, two other popular reasons for moving to the villages were for work, and to retire (See Appendix 5). This, combined with the fact that people want to move to a nice area, indicates that a move to rural West Dorset is seen as a lifestyle choice and the influx of people from outside of the district continues to contribute to the affordability problem

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[47] http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk/6176929.stm
[48] Durbin-Wood, S. (2007) Personal email to L. Watson. (Feb 28th 2007)

When relocating to a village, moving to be nearer to shops and facilities is not an important factor

The least popular reasons for moving to the villages were to be near schools or to be nearer to shops and facilities. Moving to be near to shops and facilities was not important because most of the villages do not have a shop or related facilities. Mosterton and Puddletown, which do have shops, achieved the highest percentage of 3% each, while half of all villages had no people moving to them to be nearer to shops and facilities. This shows that people in these villages do not view travelling to shops and facilities as a reason to relocate.

There is no evidence to suggest that an ageing population will form in a village where there is no development

It was hypothesised that there might be a pattern in the age population structure over time from when a village received development. If this were the case it would be possible to see how the needs of a village change over time. The comparison of age structures of selected villages showed that there was no clear link between when a village received development and changes in the age structure over time (See Chapter 3). For some villages it was possible to see a group move through the age profile over the decades, but the data does not show whether these are the same individuals living in the village and growing older, or whether they move out and are replaced by individuals of a similar age.

There is a high reliance on the private car for journeys

The private car was the dominant mode of transport for all journeys. For activities that take place outside of the village this may be unavoidable, but even where there was a bus service available it was rarely utilised by the residents.

People are willing to travel further to meet their individual needs for non-food shopping and recreation

People generally travel to their nearest supermarket to carry out food shopping, but for non-food shopping the trend for people to travel to the nearest settlement that would meet their needs is less pronounced. For only seven of the villages did the majority of residents visit the nearest non-food shopping town. For four of these the proportion of people visiting the town was less than 50% of respondents, meaning that although the most popular destination, a significant proportion were carrying out their non-food shopping in other towns.

Generally the shortest average distance travelled to recreational activities was 5km, and the longest average distance was 50km. Whilst all the villages accommodated a number of leisure activities, they cannot meet the needs of everyone due to the diverse range of hobbies that people follow.

Remoter villages have a higher proportion of home working, but those who do commute to work travel longer distances

The results showed that there was a significant proportion of home working in some of the villages. Whitchurch Canonicorum had 53% of the working population employed within the village, and Thorncombe had 40%. Figure 76 shows the results for home working from the 2001 census, which shows that these villages had a high proportion of home workers at that time also. These are some of the remoter areas in the district. The village survey also highlighted Stoke Abbott and Alton Pancras as having a high proportion of home workers. Working from home is a more sustainable option especially in those areas in the countryside less well served by public transport. Puddletown and Charlton Down had the lowest proportion of home workers, possibly because they are closer to larger settlements with good transport connections.

Figure 76: Number of people who work at, or from, home (Source data: 2001 Census)
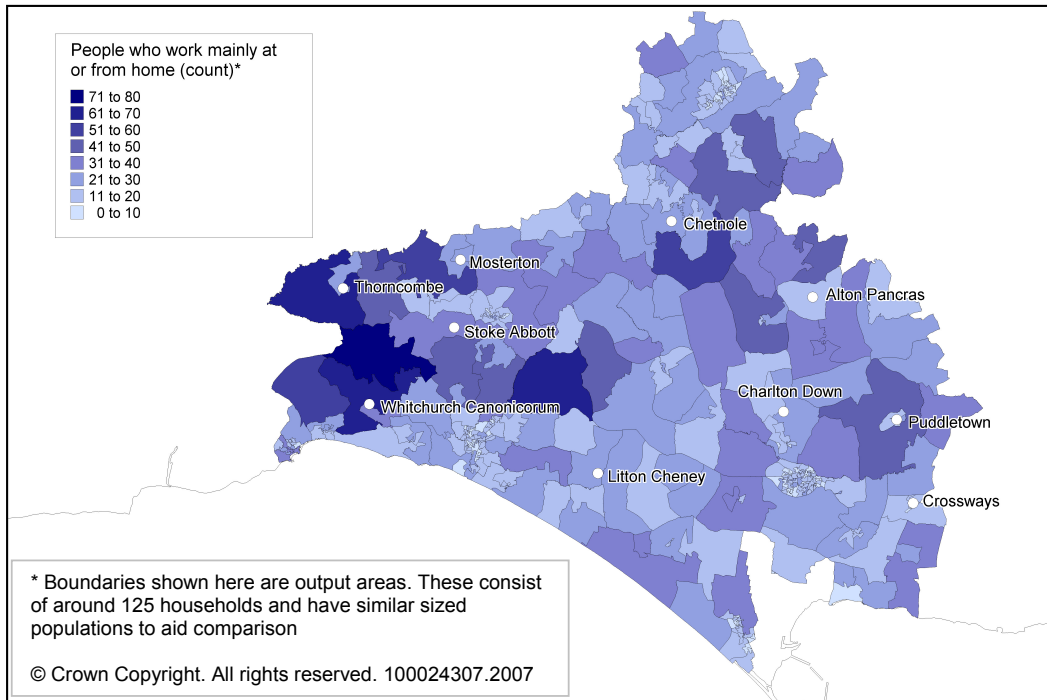
Whilst the percentage of people travelling more than 100km to work was not high, there are a number of individuals who are willing to travel this distance to work. Stoke Abbott and Whitchurch Canonicorum had the highest proportion of long distance commuters accounting for 12% and 10% of the working population respectively. The survey did not reveal whether this trip was being made on a daily basis or if the commuters were living away from home during the working week. There could be a number of reasons for the decision to commute this distance, for example the type of work that the individual is employed in is only found at specific locations some distance away or the commuter originally lived where his place of employment was, but moved to West Dorset as a lifestyle choice.

Employment was the activity for which villages showed the least affiliation to any one destination. For only four of the villages in the study was the nearest town the most popular work destination. Of these four, the proportion of the population working in the town was less than 50% of the working population, showing that the majority of people travel to a range of other destinations. This highlights the fact that settlements cannot cater for the employment needs of everybody. Some people are willing to travel significant distances to be employed in a job of their choice.

The settlements around Dorchester act as dormitory villages for the town

The villages of Puddletown, Charlton Down and Crossways are dormitory villages to Dorchester. Dorchester meets the employment and shopping needs of the majority of the residents of these villages. This is reinforced by the Functional Analysis of Settlements[49], which found that Dorchester was a significant in-commuting settlement. It was also noted that Dorchester draws employees evenly from a surrounding area of 15 miles, but had a firm relationship with Crossways.

Rural business sites do not support the local area as much as they could

The Local Plan[50] sets out an objective to support a prosperous economy that sustains a range of business enterprises, including in particular the diversification of the rural economy and promotion of the district's tourism industry. The employment policies were formulated based on national policy guidance. PPS 7, "Sustainable Development in Rural Areas"[51] in particular, sets out some guidelines relating to rural business sites. In paragraph five it is recognised that a wide range of economic activity in rural areas should be supported by local planning authorities who should;

> *"(i) identify in the LDDs suitable sites for future economic development, particularly in those rural areas where there is a need for employment creation and economic regeneration*
> *(ii) set out in LDDs their criteria for permitting economic development in different locations, including the future expansion of business premises, to facilitate healthy and diverse economy activity in rural areas."*

The document also notes that limited development may be allowed in or next to rural settlements that are not designated as local service centres to meet the needs of local businesses and communities. In the survey sent out to local businesses, 'local' was interpreted to mean anything within three miles of the site, although some of the businesses at Pineapple Business Park (Salway Ash) interpreted this to include Bridport, which is located slightly further away.

The response to the business surveys was limited, but the information provides an indication of working patterns at the sites. The results show that the rural business

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[49] Roger Tym & Partners (2005) *South West Regional Authority: Functional Analysis of Settlements*
[50] *West Dorset District Local Plan* (2006)
[51] ODPM (2004) *Planning Policy Statement 7: Sustainable Development in Rural Areas*

sites were not being wholly effective in providing employment for local people, or supporting the local economy. None of the employees surveyed at Piddlehinton lived within 5km of the site, and some were commuting from between 20 and 50km away. The businesses at Pineapple did employ more people from the local area, but 56% of people commute from 6-10km away, with one person travelling between 20 and 50km to reach the site. For both the sites there are a number of villages within 5km that could provide employees. The location of business sites in rural areas may set out to address local employment need, but this does not mean that the jobs created will be taken up by the people living in the local area. The evidence also suggests that the local economy is not always supported by the business sites. The village shop in Piddlehinton has closed, despite it being the nearest shop to Piddlehinton Enterprise Park. The nearest shop is now located in Piddletrenthide, but none of the businesses or their employees use this shop. Planning policies can provide opportunities for employment in rural areas but there are other factors that govern whether policies achieve what they set out to, such as the skills of the local workforce and market forces. The results of this study highlight the potential for further study in this area.

Comparisons with other studies

A similar study for comparison was carried about by Vale of White Horse District Council[52] undertaken as part of their work on the review of their Local Plan. It found that rural residents travelled over 30km to carry out their main food and non-food shopping. The journey to school was smaller with only a small percentage travelling over 15km. These are greater distances than have been found in this survey.

The conclusions from this study mirror those of the Land Use Consultants' work for the Countryside Agency[53]; that residents make different patterns of use for different types of shopping, other services and social interactions; residents appear to lead different 'service' and 'work' lives and, in particular, work destinations are more numerous and distant; and village residents lead lives characterised by high mobility and car dependence.

Parallels can also be drawn with Roger Tym & Partners' work for the South West Regional Assembly[54]. They too found that many residents are willing to travel long distances to shop at quality and value locations in the western arc of South East England and elsewhere.

The conclusions of a research note published by the Countryside Agency[55] also reflect the findings for the Rural Functionality Study. After considering a range of studies into rural areas and villages, they concluded that;

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[52] Vale of White Horse District Council (2006) *Analysis of travel patterns for the identification of sustainable development locations within the Vale of White Horse*
[53] The Role of Rural Settlements as Service Centres
http://www/countryside.gov.uk/livinglandscapes/positiveplanning/themes/sustainabalecommunities/rural_settlements_final_report.asp
[54] Roger Tym & Partners (2005) *South West Regional Authority: Functional Analysis of Settlements*
[55] The Countryside Agency (2002) *Are villages sustainable?* (CRN 47)

"Long-standing assumptions that adding development to larger villages will make them more sustainable appear to be misconceived."

They too found that a more complex range of factors than simply settlement size, the state of existing services and facilities or the addition of new development, influence the maintenance of village services and facilities, the provision of local jobs and the reduction of private car travel. In particular they cited work carried out in West Oxfordshire that found that locating new employment development in larger rural settlements failed to recruit local employees and generated large numbers of commuting journeys by private car. The same study also found that over 70% of residents do not work and shop in their home settlement[56].

Conclusions for rural functionality and sustainability

Sustainability is concerned with meeting the social, economic and environmental needs of the current population, without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. On the ground, sustainability becomes about balancing the social, economic and environmental needs. A system that is truly environmentally sustainable is unlikely to be meeting the social and economic needs of the community.

One of the key policies influencing planning in rural areas is PPS7 Sustainable Development in Rural Areas[57]. This states that;

"… local planning authorities should be aware of the circumstances, needs and priorities of the rural communities and businesses in their area, and of the interdependence between urban and rural areas."

The last point, the interdependence between urban and rural areas, is key. Rural areas can never be sustainable in themselves. In order to meet people's social and economic needs there has to be some movement between urban and rural areas.

As identified by the Countryside Agency[58], the maintenance of village services and facilities, the provision of local jobs and the reduction of private car travel, are key elements of rural sustainability. The long-standing assumption that adding development to villages will make them more sustainable appears to be misconceived and there are a more complex range of factors involved.

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[56] The Countryside Agency (2002) *Are villages sustainable?* (CRN 47)
[57] ODPM (2004) *Planning Policy Statement 7: Sustainable Development in Rural Areas*
[58] The Countryside Agency (2002) *Are villages sustainable?* (CRN 47)

Glossary and abbreviations

Food shopping – Trip to purchase major grocery items usually from a supermarket or smaller independent retailers

Geographical Information Systems (GIS) – A computer system that is used to collate, manage and analyse spatially referenced information and associated data

Local Development Documents (LDD) – The documents making up the local development framework, including both 'development plan documents' and additional 'supplementary planning documents'.

Local Development Framework (LDF) – The replacement to local plans. The LDF will comprise a 'portfolio' of 'local development documents', some of which will have full development plan status (development plan documents) and some of which form supplementary planning guidance (supplementary planning documents).

Non-food shopping – Purchase of any non-edible items including clothes, electronics and gifts

Planning Policy Guidance Note (PPG) – Information prepared by the government to explain statutory provisions and provide guidance to local authorities and others on planning policy and the operation of the planning system. Being replaced by Planning Policy Statements

Planning Policy Statement (PPS) - Information prepared by the government to explain statutory provisions and provide guidance to local authorities and others on planning policy and the operation of the planning system. Replacing Planning Policy Guidance Notes.

Regional Planning Guidance (RPG) – Published by the government to provide a framework for the preparation of structure plans in each individual region.

Structure Plan – The current statement of planning policies at county level, in the process of being replaced by the Regional Spatial Strategy (RSS)

Top up shopping – Shopping for groceries that run out in between the usual food shopping trip, such as bread and milk