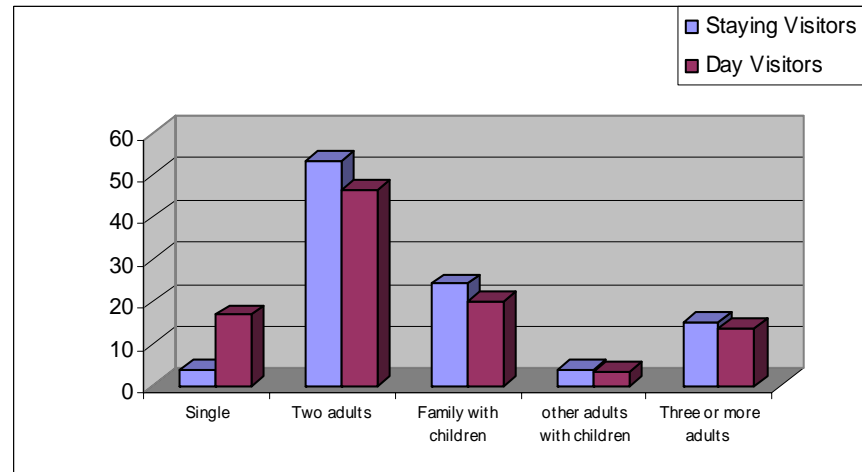
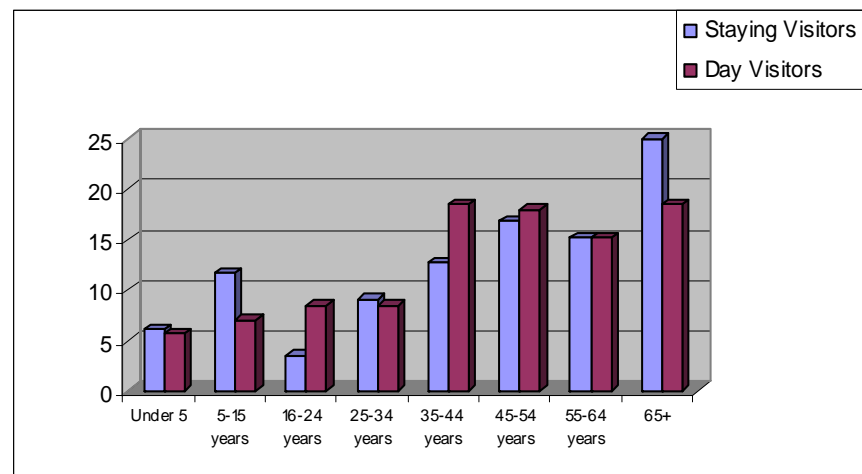


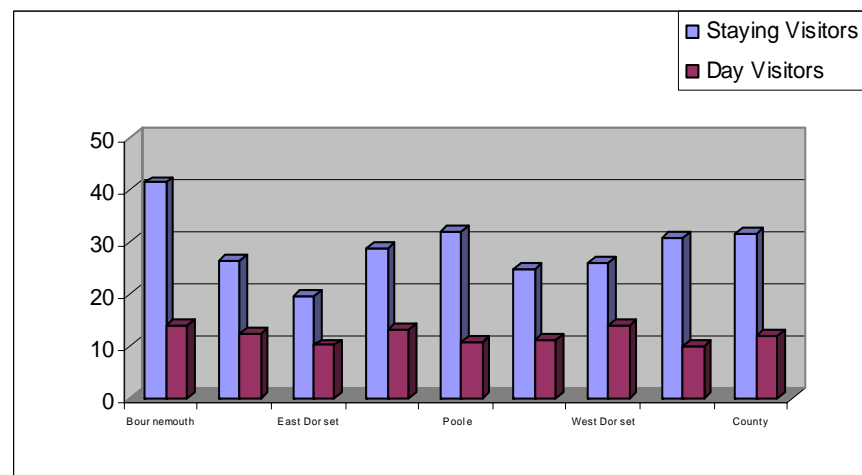
**6.0 Leisure/Visitor Attractions
Appraisal**



Graph.6.1, Group Type Profile of visitors to Christchurch 1999/2000



Graph.6.2, Age Group Profile of visitors to Christchurch 1999/2000



Graph.6.3, Average Daily Spend per head (£) by district

Source: Dorset Visitor Survey 1999-2000, Bournemouth University
 Note: all statistics quoted apply to the Borough as a whole

LEISURE/VISITOR ATTRACTIONS APPRAISAL

Tourism: The Background

- 6.1 Tourism is based on the Borough's location, the quality of its natural environment and its built heritage; all of which combine to produce a high quality tourism 'offer' ⁽ⁱ⁾.
- 6.2 The 2000 Annual Business Inquiry identifies the total number of employees employed in tourism in Christchurch Borough as 1,712 (roughly ten per cent of total employment). This includes employees in the hotel trade, other tourist/short stay accommodation, cultural and recreational services, restaurants etc, public houses, bars and night-clubs ⁽ⁱⁱ⁾.
- 6.3 780,000 day visitors are attracted to the Borough every year, in addition some 230,000 staying visitors. Taken together, these visitors spend in the region of £42.91m per annum, thus showing the popularity of Christchurch as a tourist destination and the value of tourism to the local economy ⁽ⁱⁱⁱ⁾.
- 6.4 Current Development Plan and Tourism Policies encourage and promote tourism in the Borough, including the Town Centre, whilst at the same time safeguarding the quality amenities which make it a popular place to live (Borough of Christchurch Local Plan, March 2001) ^(iv).

Visitor Market Characteristics and Perceptions

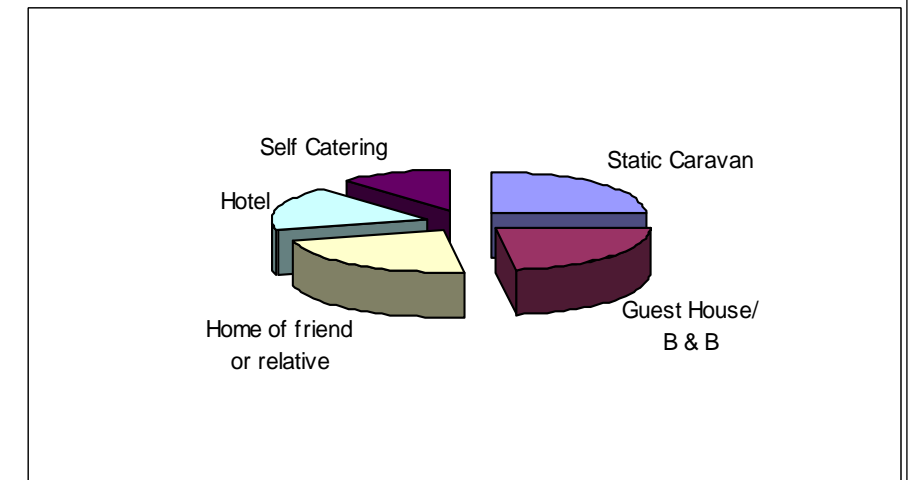
- 6.5 Christchurch is very much a day visitor destination attracting people mostly from the South of England. The busiest season takes place over the summer months and peaks in early August.
- 6.6 Of the day visitors to Christchurch 46% were adult couples, and 20% were families with children. 19% were over 65 years with 33% aged between 45 and 64. The social profile was slightly more varied with 21% being employed in professional occupations and 20% retired. (Dorset Visitor Survey 1999-2000) ^(v).
- 6.7 The profile for those staying in Christchurch was broadly similar 53% were adult couples, and 24% were families with children. 25% of visitors staying in Christchurch were over 65 years and a further 31% were aged between 45 and 64 years, of these 28% were retired. (Dorset Visitor Survey 1999-2000) ^(vi).

6.8 Spend is relatively low in Christchurch. Day visitors spent an average of £12.46 per day and staying visitors spent £26.44 per person on any one day during their visit. (Dorset Visitor Survey 1999-2000) ^(vii).

6.9 There is the belief that Christchurch should be targeting the more 'upmarket' ABC1 socio-economic groupings and retired visitors. Although others believe that families and children should be encouraged particularly those staying in the caravan sites within the Borough.

Accommodation

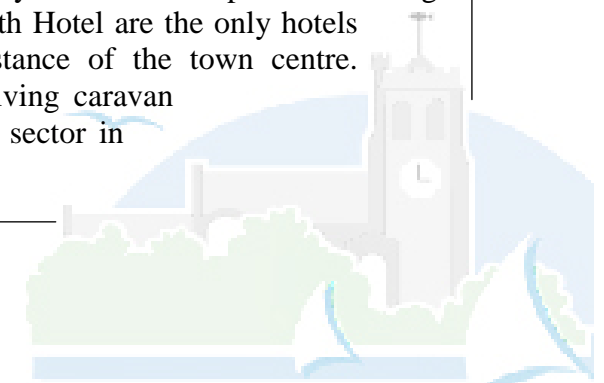
6.10 Visitors stayed in Christchurch for an average of 7 nights. 22% of visitors stayed in a static caravan/chalet, 21% stayed in a guest house /B&B and 21% stayed at the home of a friend or relative. Only 15% stayed in a hotel and 10% in a self-catering house, flat or cottage (Dorset Visitor Survey 1999-2000) ^(viii).



Graph 6.4, Accommodation used by visitors to Christchurch 1999/2000

Source: Dorset Visitor Survey 1999-2000, Bournemouth University

6.11 Accommodation stock does not match the heritage offer as there are, for example very few hotel bedspaces. The Kings Arms and the Avonmouth Hotel are the only hotels located within easy distance of the town centre. Although there is a thriving caravan and 'bed and breakfast' sector in





Restaurants along Bridge Street



Restaurants along Church Street



Sailing in and around Christchurch Borough

the wider area, Christchurch is clearly losing significant potential spend due to the lack of good quality hotel accommodation within the town centre. A high proportion of visitors stay outside Christchurch, but could be attracted to stay overnight which would increase evening activity. This is offset, however, by several excellent guesthouses located in the town centre.

- 6.12 Over the past few years the Borough Council has been attempting to facilitate the construction of a new hotel on the former Pontins site at Wick Ferry. The site has recently been acquired by a newly formed local company that has obtained planning permission for a hotel. It is currently anticipated that construction will commence in the mid-summer of 2004. The development will include restaurant, bar, leisure suite, riverside terrace (all of which will be available for public use) and public access to the river frontage. Visitor accommodation is a key factor if Christchurch is to extend its day visitor market into evening activity. Increased variety and provision of accommodation would benefit Christchurch as a tourism centre and add greater benefit to the local economy ^(ix).

Evening Economy

- 6.13 Christchurch lacks a vibrant evening economy despite the number of restaurants and pubs in the town centre. Christchurch Tourism Association believes there is a need for more variety, such as a family pub and affordable/mid range restaurants (such as Pizza Express, Café Rouge). A number of planning applications have been unsuccessful in the town for example an application by Whitbread Heritage Inns (The Toad) within the former Spar block at the bottom of the High Street. This reflects the strong feeling amongst some in Christchurch that care should be taken in the further development of the evening economy. The opening of several good quality licensed restaurants in recent times suggests a change is on the way.

Key Attractions—Borough Wide Provision

- 6.14 There are a number of attractions within the borough which although are not considered to be part of the town centre offer are part of the Borough's tourism portfolio and play an important part in the wider Dorset tourism portfolio. These attractions are promoted by the Council in the tourism website and a new leaflet promoting Christchurch as "the perfect day out" has recently been produced to

encourage more day visitors to the Borough. Figure 6.1 indicates the location of these attractions with the exception of those located around Hurn Airport. However, the Christchurch Visitor Guide includes a specific editorial and pictures to promote Hurn and its attractions.

- 6.15 The wider Borough tourism portfolio includes:

- [The Bournemouth Aviation Museum](#)

The Bournemouth Aviation Museum at Hurn is a ten-minute drive from the town centre and occupies a 30,000sq ft hanger at Bournemouth International Airport. It holds a display of ex-military and civilian vintage aircraft, giving an insight into Christchurch's military and aviation history. It is the only UK charitable museum dedicated to preserving and presenting to the public historic military jets and aircrafts and captures a niche tourism market ^(x).

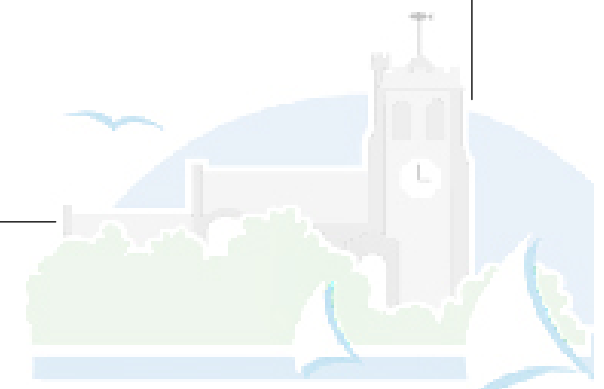
- [The Alice in Wonderland Family Park](#)

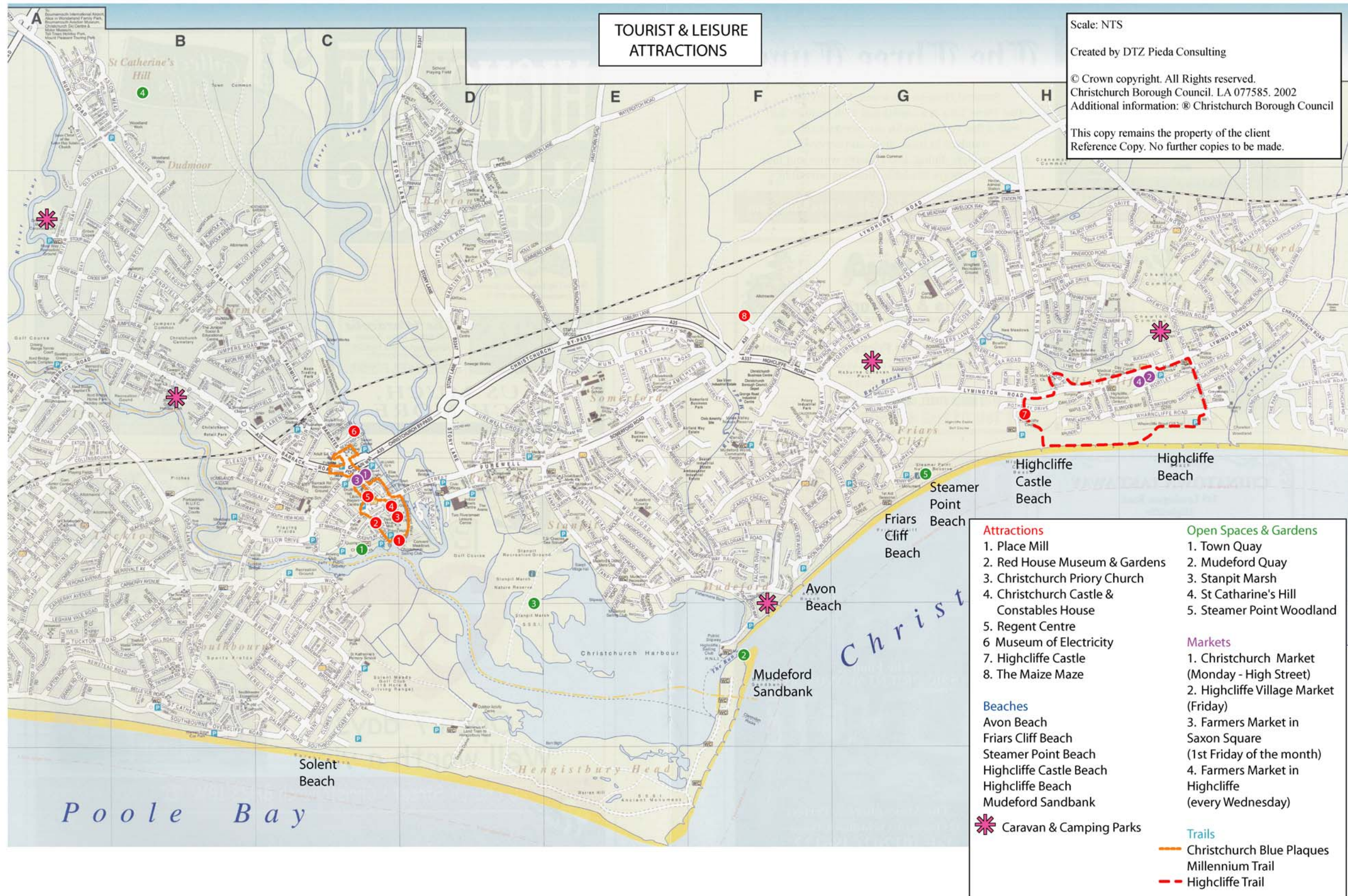
The Alice in Wonderland Family Park also at Hurn is targeted at young children and families. The park serves a sub-regional role and although located within Christchurch Borough is often associated with Bournemouth being positioned opposite Bournemouth International Airport.

Open from March to November visitor numbers are increasing with approximately 125,000 visitors in 2000 (2,000 visitors a day during August the busiest period). During the summer 60% of visitors were from the conurbation and 40% were holiday makers from further afield mainly staying in caravan sites within the Borough ^(xi). The park is advertised in the local press and leaflets are widely distributed throughout the south.

- [Christchurch Maze](#)

In the summer of 2003 Stewarts Garden Centre opened the largest Maize Maze in the world, which has attracted considerable media interest and potential visitors.





- **Serendipity Sam's Play Centre**

A new all-weather indoor play centre in the centre of Christchurch, next to Peeks Party Store in Reid Street.

- **Christchurch Ski and Leisure Centre**

Christchurch Ski Centre is 5 minutes from the town on the edge of the New Forest. It offers public bars, restaurants, ski bobbing, snow boarding, pizza evenings and ski lessons and has also opened an Alpine Park. It is open daily from 9am until 11pm and is seen very much as a local facility.

- **Highcliffe Castle**

Highcliffe Castle is a Grade 1 listed mansion owned by Christchurch Borough Council. The Castle has undergone a programme of extensive external repairs with funding from a successful Heritage Lottery Fund application. A manager was appointed to oversee the development of the Castle as a visitor attraction and in 2000 the size of the visitor centre was further increased.

Significantly visitor numbers are expected to reach an estimated 44,000 in 2003/04 (xii). This figure would include paid admissions, season ticket holders, wedding guests and event admissions. The Castle now offers a Visitor Centre with regularly changing exhibitions, tea rooms and is licensed for Civil wedding ceremonies. Regular guided tours are undertaken which include the unrestored interior parts. Admission charges are made although the grounds are free for walkers and cyclists.

The Castle has very few parking spaces on site (100 spaces) and visitors are encouraged to use the Wharncliffe Road cliff-top or Steamer Point car parks where the Highcliffe Village Trail and Coastal Path can be followed to the Castle. Plans to widen the entrance gates to the castle to allow a coach drop off and pick up point have now been completed. The Castle has very few connections with Christchurch town centre at present and there is potential to redirect those visiting the castle into the town.

Following a recent unsuccessful 'Stage 1' bid to the Heritage Lottery Fund, a revised bid is being prepared by the Borough Council. Submission is anticipated in late summer 2004. If successful, the available funding

would lead to the Penleaze Wing providing a permanent location for a stained glass exhibition, additional exhibition rooms and space for relocation of the existing shop and Visitor Centre. A first floor would be created and used for a research and resource area, education suite and offices. This further phase of restoration and development would allow the Castle to diversify its functions, attract additional revenue and operate more efficiently as a Visitor Centre and weddings venue.

- **Highcliffe Coastal Park**

The Local Plan contains policies to retain the Castle grounds as public open space and to acquire land to permit a public footpath across private land to link Steamer Point woodlands and complete the coastal footpath from Mundeford Quay in the west to Chewton Bunny in the east. Private land has recently been acquired around the proposed access and a coastal park created on Highcliffe cliff top.

- **The Beaches**

The identity of Christchurch is defined by its relationship to the water; not only is it positioned at the confluence of the rivers Stour and Avon, but is adjacent to the coast and its beaches. These beaches are part of the unique offer of the Borough being particularly favoured by tourists for their unspoilt beauty and natural settings. Each has its own identity suiting a plethora of needs. They all have car parks set back from the beaches

Avon Beach is down from Mundeford Quay and the centre of the local fishing industry. The beach is suited to families having its own car park and facilities including a café, beach shop, public conveniences, day beach hut hire, pleasure rides and deck chair hire, weekly barbeques take place throughout the main season. The beach is also popular with board sailors.

Friars Cliff Beach is ideal for families offering safe bathing and sandy beach, facilities include a café, public conveniences and beach huts available for let.

Steamer Point Beach is a short stretch between Friars Cliff and Highcliffe it can be reached from Friars Cliff Beach or Steamer Point Woodland.

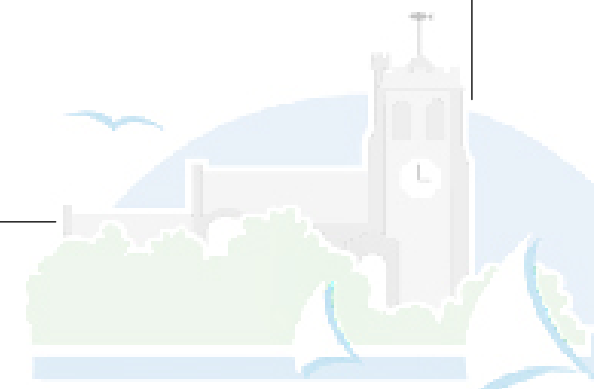
Highcliffe Castle Beach is accessed down a steep wooded cliff from Highcliffe Castle or from the Car Park at Warncliffe Road. It is an unspoilt, quieter, sandy beach with a natural setting.

Highcliffe Beach is a short walk from Highcliffe Village Centre or Warncliffe Road car park. It offers a sandy family beach with views of the Isle of Wight.

Mundeford Sandbank is a spit of land adjoining Hengistbury Head, with Christchurch Harbour on one side and the sea on the other. It is accessed by ferry from Mundeford Quay and Christchurch Quay or by landtrain or foot from Hengistbury Head. It is a quiet beach with café and shop enjoyed mainly by chalet owners ^(xiii).

- **Sailing**

During the season Christchurch harbour and coastline are the centre of weekend open meetings and often host national and international championships. The addition of two new sailing schools in the harbour underline the importance of this water sport which brings specialist visitors into the town.





Constable House and the Priory



The Castle and the Priory



The Red House Museum

Town Centre Provision

6.16 There are a number of visitor attractions, described below that are located within the town centre. The general perception is that they would greatly benefit from being marketed as an integrated offer and backed up by a well signposted town trail which can build on the success of the Local History Society's Millennium Blue Plaque Trail. Figure 6.2 indicates the location of these attractions and their relationship to public open space and settings.

- **Christchurch Priory Church**

Dorset's churches and chapels are of great architectural and cultural value. The greater churches – including Christchurch Priory are of national significance and all contribute to this important religious heritage ^(xiv). A major stone repair, cleaning programme is underway at present and is part of a phased programme of major works to the Priory.

The historic Priory is reputedly one of the longest parish churches in England. It dominates the towns skyline with its huge tower. It functions both as a living church and visitor experience with a gift shop, guided tours, the tower being opened on appointment for views of the town, and St Michael's Loft Museum which contains the history of the priory Chapel. It also has an extensive programme of classical concerts and organ recitals and a number of exhibitions throughout the year. The Bournemouth Shakespeare Players perform open-air productions in the ornamental Priory Gardens in July each year.

There is no entrance charge into the Church but visitors are invited to make a donation of £1 (the church receives 60p per visitor). The Church costs £600 per day to run a cost subsidised by church members and donations. Visitor numbers have fallen slightly since 1999 and 80,000 visitors were recorded in 2000 ^(xv). While the Priory is very much marketed as a single entity to religious sectors there is significant potential to integrate it into the town centre tourist package.

- **Christchurch Castle and Constables House**

The Castle, originally built in the 12 century, was known as Twynham Castle. The Constable was left in

charge when the Lord Mayor was absent and in about 1160 the Constable's House was built. After the Civil War in 1649 the castle keep was partly destroyed. All that now remains of the castle are parts of the walls of the keep on an artificial mound and the ruins of the Norman house where the Constable lived. These ruins are now owned and maintained by English Heritage.

The ruins are not staffed and no admission charge is required. Little has been done to interpret the Castle's history and the Local History Society are trying to persuade English Heritage to put a roof on the Constables House as it is falling into disrepair. At present the site is used as a playground for children and few visitors to Christchurch are made aware of this historic asset.

- **Red House Museum**

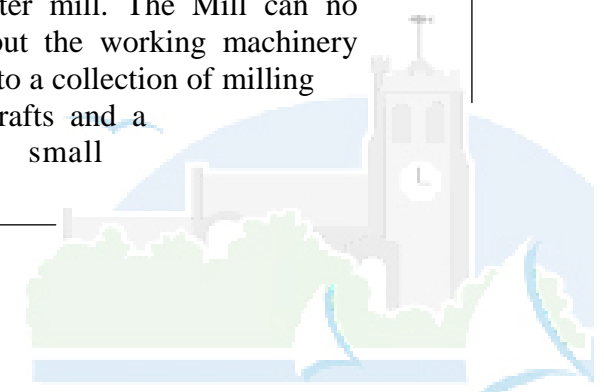
The Red House Museum is a Hampshire County Council, Dorset County Council and Christchurch Borough Council partnership (ownership split into thirds).

The Red House Museum was originally the local workhouse and is now a locally themed museum containing displays following local history, archaeology and natural history. It has formal gardens with many types of herbs, and secluded informal gardens with old fashioned English roses, shrubs and trees.

Visitor numbers are falling with 19,328 recorded in 2000 ^(xvi). There is a small admission charge for visitors outside the Borough but it is currently costing the Council £10 per visitor. Some believe the Museum is too serious in its approach and has not been proactive in encouraging more events which have been successful in the past attracting 2,000 guests to the Garden Party. Again there is the need and opportunity to link this facility with the Priory and Castle historic core.

- **Place Mill and Town Quay**

Place Mill is a carefully restored building on the site of an Anglo-Saxon water mill. The Mill can no longer grind flour but the working machinery provides a backdrop to a collection of milling artefacts, arts and crafts and a souvenir shop. A small





Place Mill



The Regent Centre



The Museum of Electricity

donation fee is requested on admission. Visitor numbers have increased from 66,904 in 1999 to 75,381 in 2000^(xvii). The Mill is very much part of the Town Quay experience but is poorly sign posted from the High Street and again needs to be linked into a wider visitor experience.

- **The Regent Centre**

The Regent Centre is owned by Christchurch Borough Council and run by Regent (Christchurch) Ltd. It contains a joint auditorium for the cinema, theatre and concert hall. As part of the ongoing programme of improvements at the centre, a new community studio has been jointly financed by Christchurch Borough Council and the Regent (Christchurch) Ltd. Providing a versatile multi-purpose area for community activities, small-scale theatre, dance and comedy shows. New dressing rooms and a green room have also been added.

The Business Plan aspires to expand the facility further perhaps into the car parking area behind. Although the Regent Centre primarily serves the local area it is very popular with visitors significantly being the only non-eating and drinking establishment open in the town after 5pm. There are clearly opportunities to widen the facilities use and appeal with the creation of a woodland town park in Druitts Gardens.

- **Two Riversmeet Leisure Centre**

The Two Riversmeet Leisure Centre offers a 25-metre pool with a sunbathing patio and learner pool. A multi purpose sports hall, roller disco, four squash courts, capacity for 5 badminton courts, crèche and fitness suite. The centre also has an 18 hole pitch and putt par-3 golf course, the environs of which provide for excellent views of the Priory and the eastern part of the town. Christchurch Borough Council is committed to invest £1.3million in improving the facilities over the next 10 years taking the facility back into direct Council management.

- **Museum of Electricity**

Housed in the old power station in Bargates, the museum is owned by Southern Electric and exhibits historical electrical equipment, hands on experiments, working models and contains the original

Bournemouth Tram.

Over 7,000 people visited the museum last year and numbers are increasing, significantly 30% are repeat visitors. The Museum has a local educational role with 60% of visitors being school children^(xviii). Although the Museum advertises in the local chronicle people often state that they didn't realise it was there the Museum being hidden off Bargates. It has been quoted as the 'best kept secret in Christchurch'. The development of a signposted town trail and joint promotion of attractions would greatly assist the marketing of this facility and linking it more closely with the historic core.

Its remoteness could encourage the provision of some themed transport (themed road train) that could connect the main town centre attractions and give an historical overview of the historic town centre.

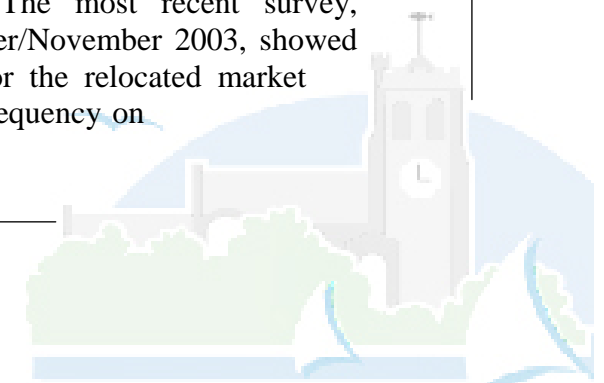
Events

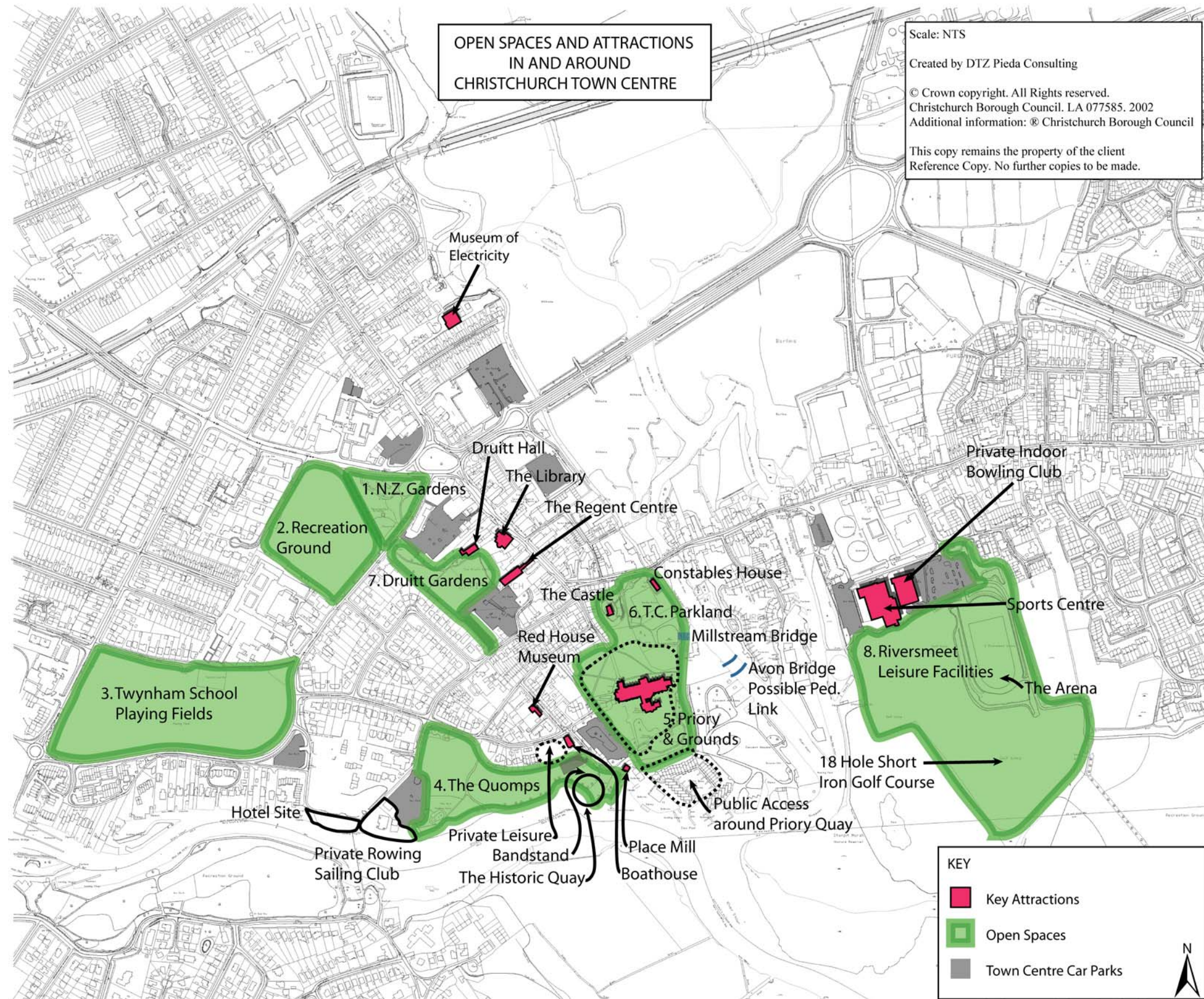
- 6.17 Over the past five years the Council, working in partnership with the Chamber of Trade and the Tourism Association, has become much more proactive in encouraging events in the town. The present events programme includes:

- **Christchurch Market**

Christchurch's weekly market is held every Monday in the High Street and Saxon Square. Although buses currently run through the Market, the County Council has resolved that, for reasons of safety, buses should no longer be permitted into the High Street on Mondays. Subject to the provision of transportation improvements (bus shelter on Fountain Way, detector 'loop' at the northern end of the High Street and publication of an integrated public transport booklet), the Market will become traffic free from early summer 2004 — except for vehicles requiring access into Millhams Street from the south.

Successive surveys have shown that moving the Market into the High Street from its previous site in Bank Close car park is popular with the majority of residents and local businesses. The most recent survey, undertaken in October/November 2003, showed continued support for the relocated market and for its weekly frequency on







The vibrancy of this years Food and Wine Festival

Mondays^(XX). The survey also advised that if the market is to increase its popularity, it will be necessary to improve transport infrastructure (well located and signed Monday bus stops and taxi ranks, more car parking, less traffic congestion), market layout (at least some stalls trading in the road, more pedestrian space in front of shops and more crossing points between stalls) and quality of stalls (more variety and less down market).

Given the imminent removal of buses, the Borough Council can now positively address the above points together with other matters, including the need to improve the entrances to the market from the A35 and Castle Street, which will be addressed as part of design improvements to the streetscape and the opportunity to design a new 'place' for the market in the High Street around the Town Hall.

- **Christchurch Food and Wine Festival**

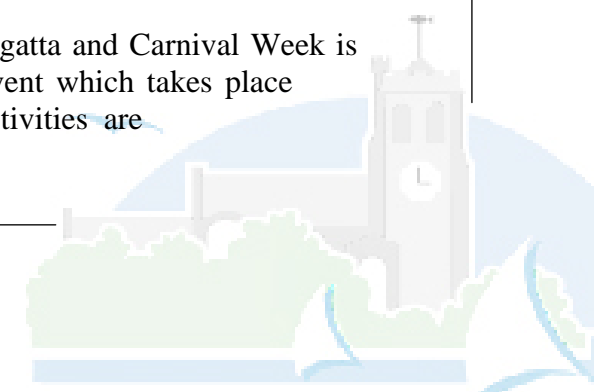
Christchurch FoodFest4 took place between 8 and 16 May this year. The International Food Market, organised by Christchurch Council, held over the first weekend of activities and attracted market traders from twin towns, Scotland and local food producers. Events such as champagne breakfasts, food quizzes, cookery demonstrations, themed evening dinners and a Belgian beer festival all formed part of the programme.

The event has been running for five years and has increased in popularity attracting locals and visitors alike. The town is used well into the evening during the week of activities. Potential exists to extend shopping hours during this period in future years.

The success of the Food Festival suggests that food could become a niche market. However, Christchurch has still along way to go to provide the right range and number of restaurants to be compared with leisure and tourist destinations of a similar size along the south coast.

- **Christchurch Regatta and Carnival Week**

The Christchurch Regatta and Carnival Week is a well-established event which takes place in mid August. Activities are



concentrated on the Quomps with rowing competitions, a procession and fair. There is potential to expand this event throughout the weekdays which are generally void of activity and to integrate the event into the town centre through events and extension of shopping hours managed by volunteers.

- **Late night shopping and events**

Late night shopping has been successfully run for five years and takes place on a Friday evening in early December. The event now includes a French Christmas market, farmers' market, hot food stalls, carols, bands, choir, procession, children's rides, street entertainment, snow machine and Father Christmas. The evening has proven very successful for town centre shops, restaurants and pubs. This is seen as a potential role model for other times of the year, such as Food and Wine Festival and Regatta and Carnival Week.

- **Christchurch Festival**

The annual Christchurch Festival is run by a local voluntary group in early July. The main music event is held on the Town Quay. Folk Dance Teams perform in the town centre at various sites. The emphasis is on the arts; live music, folk dance and crafts. Proceeds are donated to the Mayor's Charities. The event is strongly supported by local pubs, traders and the community. Some 8,000 people attended the event in 2003.

- **Stomping on the Quomps**

Stomping on the Quomps is run by the Regent Centre for one day in early August from Christchurch Quay bandstand. It is a long running event (8years) and has proven very successful having broadened to a full day in 2001. There is significant potential to expand this event although there are some conflicts with local residents associated with noise levels, managed by volunteers.

- **Britain in Bloom**

Christchurch has earned the national accolade of Best Town in Britain in Bloom and is a regular winner of Southern England in Bloom. Three successes were achieved in 2003:

- Silver-Guilt Award for Christchurch (Large Town Category);
- Silver-Guilt Award for Highcliffe (Coastal Resort Category); and
- Gold Award for New Zealand Gardens (Best Park Category).

It will be important for the town to remain in Britain in Bloom as this competition has an important national platform for town destination marketing, particularly in smaller, historic market town locations.



Future Opportunities

- 6.18 Christchurch needs to encourage the development of niche markets building on the area's distinctive assets. The 'heritage' product is a fundamental part of the appeal to visitors in general and to particular niche markets. There are obvious links to market segments focused on walking, literary and film and TV connections and local history^(xix). The Town Centre Forum is currently looking at a strategy to produce leaflets which target niche markets in particular to attract people out of season and ideas have revolved around themes such as walking, bird watching, aviation, defence history.

- 6.19 The Dorset Heritage Strategy 2001 recognises the potential for improving Dorset's 'product' in terms of further development of events, guided walks, information and attractive printed documents. Christchurch in particular has significant potential to increase the vitality of the town through a more extensive and structured events programme. There are a number of opportunities including:

- **Farmers' Market**

A new farmers market is being held on the first Friday morning of each month in Saxon Square. This has been the culmination of partnership work between the Council's Tourism Department and Dorset Food Links. Currently, consideration is being given to increasing the frequency and size of the market in 2004 and beyond.

- **Craft Market**

From April 2004, a weekly Craft Market has been introduced into Saxon Square, held on Thursdays.

- **Late night shopping**

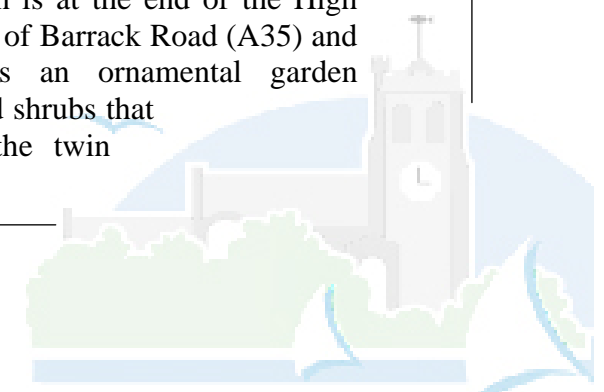
There is significant potential for the town to expand its late night shopping particularly in conjunction with existing events e.g. during the Regatta week and the Food and Wine Festival.

Open Spaces & Gardens

- 6.20 Part of Christchurch's strength lie in a series of open spaces and gardens around the town centre. The Dorset Heritage Strategy 2001 recommends that urban parks and open spaces should be restored and improved. There is significant potential in the town to enhance the quality of these spaces particularly those by the water's edge, which can contribute more fully to the vitality of the town centre. Issues also exist in terms of improving the legibility of pedestrian networks between these areas.

- **New Zealand Gardens**

New Zealand Garden is at the end of the High Street at the junction of Barrack Road (A35) and Sopers Lane. It is an ornamental garden containing plants and shrubs that are indigenous to the twin





New Zealand Gardens



Tree Avenue running through the Recreation Ground



The Bandstand and Town Quay

town Christchurch in New Zealand. The garden is not regularly visited but its location may offer potential to relate to development opportunities on the Magistrates Court Site, as highlighted in para. 4.32 under Urban Design Issues.

- **Recreation Ground**

Barrack Road Recreation Ground contains two football pitches plus one junior pitch and an all-weather cricket square, with changing accommodation also available. The ground is used for some events including a fun fair, but use is restricted by covenants to those traditional events associated with a village green.

- **Twynham School Playing Fields**

Twynham School Playing Fields is well used being hired to both private and community societies. It also hosts a number of events including the Commercial Car Show in May and the Caravan Club's campsite in July.

- **Town Quay**

The Town Quay offers views of the confluence of the rivers Stour and Avon as they flow into Christchurch Harbour. The Quay attracts many visitors to the waterfront with ducks and swans and activities during the summer months in the bandstand. The Boathouse on the Quay is one of very few restaurants offering outdoor seating and spill out space beside the water and proves overwhelmingly popular during the summer.

- **The Quomps**

The Quomps area adjoins the Town Quay and is intensively used for recreational purposes with boat hire, childrens' amusements and hosts a summer fun fair. A regular ferry service runs from the Quomps to Mundeford Sandbank and Tuckton. Improvements need to be made to the area focusing on extending tourist facilities to be compatible with its Green Belt status. The site is now owned by the Council and is essential to any strategy attempting to encourage the utilisation of waterfront activities/vitality. As suggested under the transport audit, water transport links to proposed water places should be encouraged.

- **Church/ Churchyard/Riverside (Avon)**

The Convent Walk follows the western side of the Mill Stream which feeds Place Mill, leading from Castle Street, past Place Mill to the Town Quay. There are a number of possibilities to increase the permeability of this area creating a bridge link at the ornamental garden north of the Priory to link both sides of the stream.

A further opportunity exists to create a bridge connection between the 'Island Site' and the new public realm associated with the recent residential/marina development.

- **Quiet Garden/Environs of Castle/Environs of Constables House**

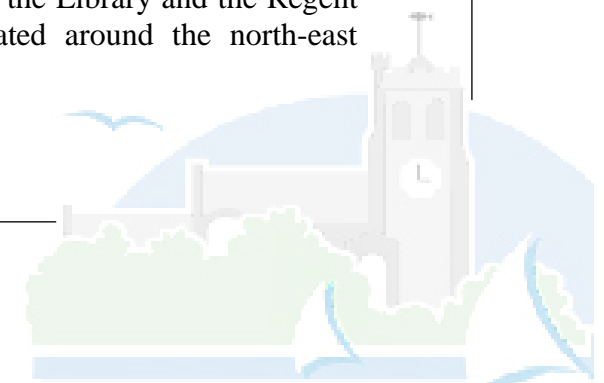
There is a need to improve the link of public spaces from the historic town quay south of the Priory along the western bank of the Mill Stream through the quiet garden to the area occupied by the Castle/Bowling Green to join Castle Street.

There is also the need to improve links and interpretation of the churchyard, church, castle and its related spaces, in effect at the heart of the Saxon town.

- **Druitt Gardens**

Druitt Gardens is formally designated public open space. The designated area includes the additional area of land adjoining the north-western boundary (Local Plan 2001). The Borough Council is committed to maintaining this 'green lung' within the town centre and this is very much supported by residents of the town. However, there are concerns that the Gardens are poorly managed having become a threatening place to walk through.

There is a unique opportunity to upgrade and manage this important open space as an attractive woodland garden that would create a new setting for new community, niche retail and residential development in the Lanes, as well as connecting the three public facilities Druitt Hall, the Library and the Regent Centre that are located around the north-east edge of the Gardens.





View from the recent marina development to the 'Island Site'



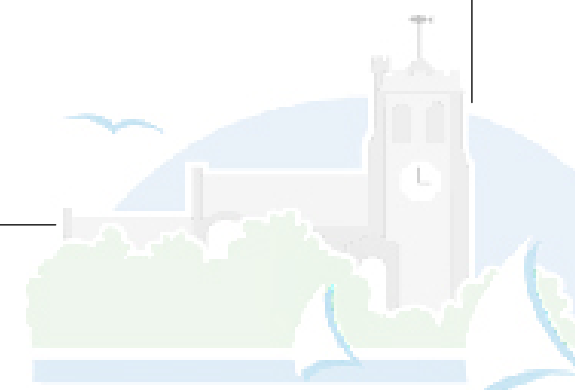
Quiet Gardens

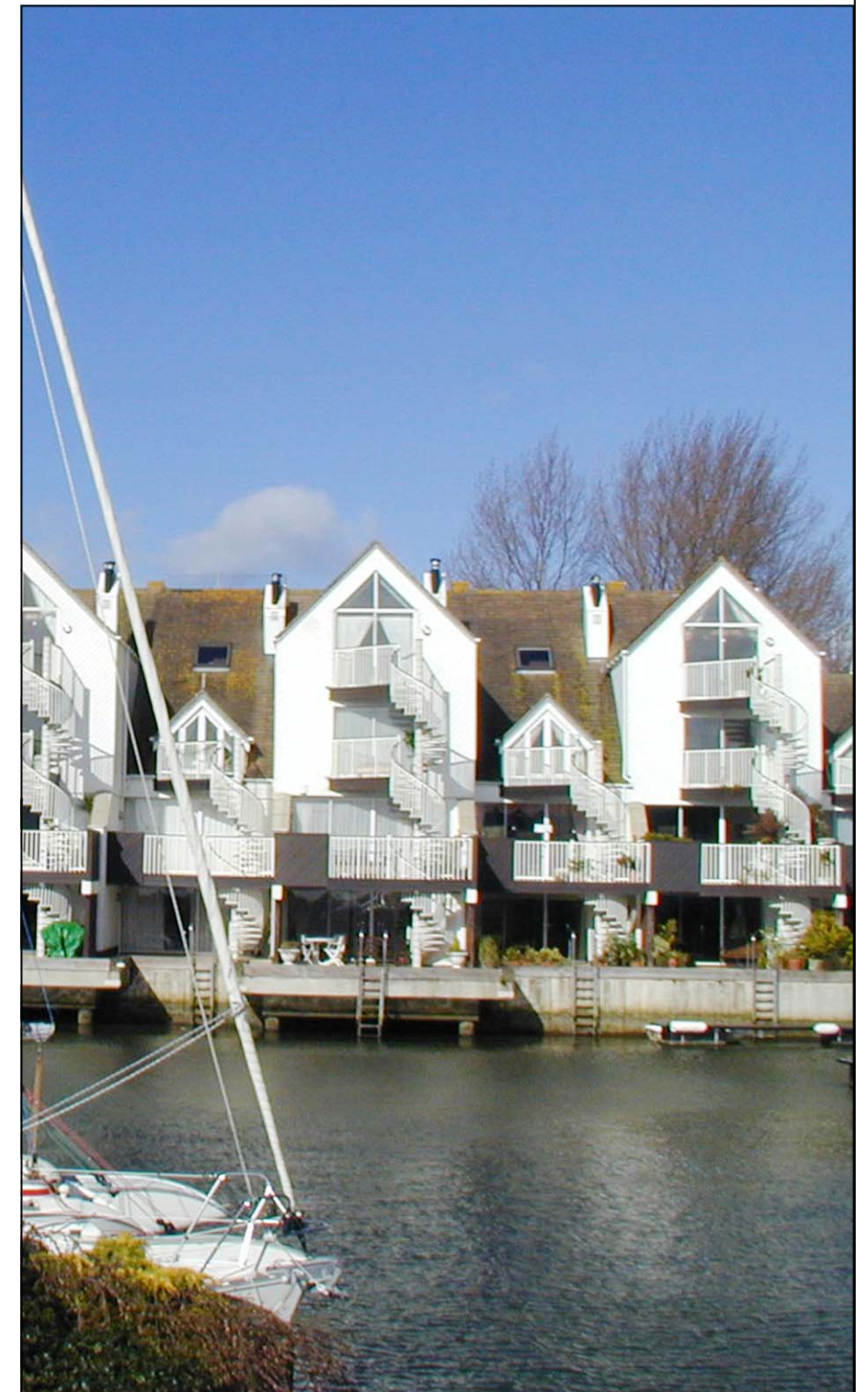


Druitt Gardens

Footnotes

- (i) Best Value Service Review: Development Control and Planning Enforcement
- (ii) NOMIS, Annual Business Inquiry: Employment Analysis, 2000
- (iii) Jeff Brown Associates on behalf Dorset Tourism Data Project Economic Impact Model, 1999.
- (iv) Christchurch Borough Council, Borough of Christchurch Local Plan, Adopted March 2001
- (v) The Market Research Group, Bournemouth University on behalf of the Dorset Tourism Data Project, Dorset Visitor Survey 1999-2000 Interim Report, Produced October 2001
- (vi) The Market Research Group, Bournemouth University on behalf of the Dorset Tourism Data Project, Dorset Visitor Survey 1999-2000 Interim Report, Produced October 2001
- (vii) The Market Research Group, Bournemouth University on behalf of the Dorset Tourism Data Project, Dorset Visitor Survey 1999-2000 Interim Report, Produced October 2001
- (viii) The Market Research Group, Bournemouth University on behalf of the Dorset Tourism Data Project, Dorset Visitor Survey 1999-2000 Interim Report, Produced October 2001
- (ix) Christchurch Borough Council, Borough of Christchurch Local Plan, Adopted March 2001
- (x) <http://www.aviation-museum.co.uk>
- (xi) Sue Harmon-Smith, Manager of Alice in Wonderland Family Park
- (xii) Manager of Highcliffe Castle
- (xiii) Christchurch Borough Council, Christchurch Official Guide
- (xiv) Dorset County Council, Dorset Heritage Strategy 2001
- (xv) Tony Ruth, Chairman of Pilgrims and Tourism Committee, Christchurch Priory
- (xvi) English Tourism Council, Sightseeing in the UK 2000.
- (xvii) ETC Research & Intelligence, 2000 *Visits to tourist attractions*.
- (xviii) Curator of the Museum Electricity
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**7.0 Property Market Review and
Development Opportunities**

7. PROPERTY MARKET REVIEW & DEVELOPMENT OPPORTUNITIES

7.1 This section provides a detailed overview of the key trends impacting on the property market at a broad strategic and local level, to help inform the delivery of a robust and comprehensive town centre strategy. This element of the research is a fundamental input to the overall study, as it means the strategy will be sustainable and achievable over the long term based on current and future market conditions. This section also sets out a commentary and appraisal of the development potential of a number of key town centre sites. These development opportunities will form an integral component of the emerging strategy and will be assessed in more detail in the final sections of this study.

Strategic Review

Town Centres and Retailing

7.2 Britain's retail and urban landscape has changed dramatically over the last two decades. The traditional High Street, which was once so dominant, now competes with a variety of new trading locations and attractions, ranging from shopping malls to leisure parks. Today the High Street accounts for less than 45% of Britain's total retail floorspace, compared with 75% at the beginning of the 1980s. The key forces and trends driving these changes are briefly described below.

7.3 During the early 1980s Britain was in deep recession and the Government adopted fiscal policies and a more 'laissez-faire' planning approach to help revive the economy. This created the climate for a significant and dynamic change in the retail and urban geography of Britain. Other key trends driving change, included rising consumer mobility and affluence; the depopulation of many of Britain's decaying towns and cities; and increased demand from occupiers and investors for more space in more accessible, low-cost locations. This resulted in the so-called "three waves" of retail decentralisation, beginning with food retailing, followed by stand-alone retail warehouses and more sophisticated retail park formats, and culminating in the large free-standing regional shopping centres, such as Lakeside and Meadowhall.

7.4 During the early 1990s Britain once again was in recession and the development pipeline slowed. This period was

characterised by rising interest rates, business failures and negative equity. It resulted in the rise of a new "fourth wave" of value-led retailing, namely factory outlet shopping, as well as the emergence of discount food and non-food operators, such as Peacocks, TK Maxx, Matalan, Aldi, Lidl and Netto. There was also a period of consolidation in the industry, which resulted in several major players emerging to dominate market share. This is illustrated by the grocery sector where five retailers now account for a 70%+ share of the UK market.

7.5 Out-of-centre retail development continued apace during the 1990's. By the end of the decade there were an estimated 575 retail parks in Britain, representing over 6 million sq.m. of retail space, and 41 factory outlet centres, equivalent to 420,000 sq.m. of new space. By the mid-1990s, however, the Government's political and policy commitment to sustainability and the urban renaissance began to place a break on new planning permissions. Beginning with PPG13 on transport, followed by PPG6 on retailing and culminating in the Urban and Rural White Papers, the Government has firmly committed itself to the regeneration of Britain's town centres. Subsequent Ministerial Statements on the 'need' test, as well as the 'sequential' and 'class of goods' approaches to new development, have made it clear that the onus of proof rests with the market to demonstrate why new development and investment should not occur in town centre or edge-of-centre locations as a first priority. As a result, the number of permissions for new out-of-centre development has slowed to a trickle. Research shows that for the first time in more than two decades there is more town centre floorspace in the development pipeline than in out-of-centre locations.

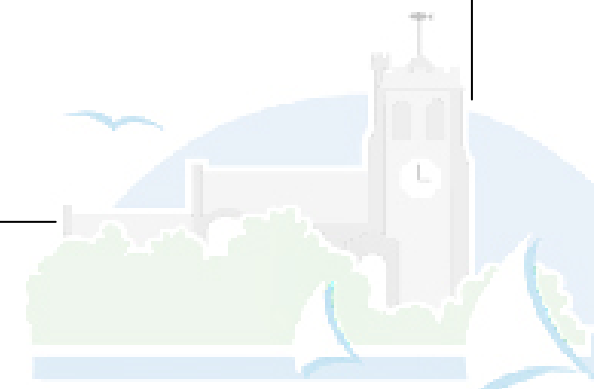
7.6 The retail industry has responded to these changes in the political and policy climate through the introduction of new brands and formats. At the forefront of change is the food sector, which first pioneered the move out-of-town, and is now returning to town centres through the development of smaller, more efficient high street formats (such as Sainsbury *Central* and Tesco *Metro*) and new innovative convenience stores linked with petrol filling stations (such as Tesco *Express*). But these operators have not abandoned their out-of-centre stores. Over recent years there has been a flood of applications for extensions to existing free-standing stores. These extensions are primarily aimed at increasing the space for non-food goods and/or improving

the quality, range and presentation of the food offer. Other marketing innovations, such as home delivery and internet shopping, are also being tested by the main food operators.

7.7 The fortunes of the non-food retail industry has waxed and waned over the last decade, largely as a result of changes in consumer spend, lifestyles and aspirations. The electrical goods sector, for example, has been a star performer, reflecting the dynamic changes in new technology, particularly computers and mobile phones, and home entertainment. As a result, retailers such as Dixons/Currys and Comet have expanded rapidly in both high street and out-of-centre locations, and new niche businesses have emerged, particularly mobile phone shops.

7.8 In the fashion sector some retailers, such as Marks & Spencer and the Arcadia Group, fell from grace during the late 1990s but have recently managed to re-establish themselves in the marketplace through better management, re-branding, consolidation and diversification of their offer. Other retailers, such as C&A, have disappeared from the high street altogether, to be replaced by new and popular entrants from Europe and America, including Mango, Zara and Gap. In the face of this increased competition, some traditional UK retailers (such as Next and Boots), have been able to sustain growth and maintain their presence on the high street, although many are now looking for larger stores in both town centre and out-of-centre locations. The 1990s was also characterised by an improvement in the fortunes of the department store, which is now regarded as a vital and 'sexy' anchor to new shopping centre and town centre developments. This is illustrated by the opening of Harvey Nichols in Leeds and the new Selfridges in Birmingham.

7.9 In the 'bulky' goods sector, the tightening of planning policy has resulted in many operators being forced to squeeze value out of their existing stores through extensions and by experimenting with mezzanines. Nevertheless, some operators have continued to pursue aggressive acquisition and development programmes and are looking for larger stores, sometimes referred to as 'category-killers'. For example, B&Q has introduced its 'Warehouse' format of up to 12,000 sq.m. in some locations.



- 7.10 These changes in the political, economic, planning policy and retail climate over the last 5-10 years has had a dramatic impact on Britain's town and cities. The regeneration of our urban areas as places to live, work, shop, visit and be entertained can be seen in many centres across the UK, including Southampton, Portsmouth and Bournemouth. On the downside, this urban renaissance has by-passed many of Britain's smaller and less glamorous centres, and has almost exclusively been concentrated in the larger towns and cities, mainly because they represent a more commercially attractive and low-risk proposition for developers, investors and occupiers. The recent DTZ research report, entitled *Retail Landscape 2000*, identified the growing 'polarisation' of retail investment and rental growth within the 'Top 100' UK centres. This is illustrated by the fact that Bournemouth has improved its retail ranking, as measured by Experian Goad, from 155th to 112th in the last twelve months, whereas Christchurch is ranked outside the top '400' UK centres.
- 7.11 As the larger centres become increasingly more dominant in the UK hierarchy, so the smaller centres are struggling to maintain and enhance their vitality and viability. Long term trends such as the increased use of the car, changes in shopping habits, the growth of out-of-centre retailing, the potential threat of e-commerce and the decline of small shops and businesses, are all conspiring to undermine the health of Britain's smaller centres. Furthermore, the consequences of decline – an increase in vacancies, declining economic growth, falling rents, lack of investment, poor town centre environments and limited choice of shops and services – will be felt by those sections of the community who are most vulnerable to change, particularly the elderly, the less mobile and small businesses.
- 7.12 Many smaller towns therefore are at a crossroads and are in danger of being left behind by the new wave of town centre renaissance. This underlines why the emerging strategy and vision for Christchurch is so important. As with many other smaller centres in the UK, this strategy will help to redefine the town centre's role in the context of current policy and competition, and make it a more attractive place for shoppers, visitors, residents and businesses, as well as a more attractive proposition for new investment and development, so that it becomes a viable and thriving centre over the longer term.

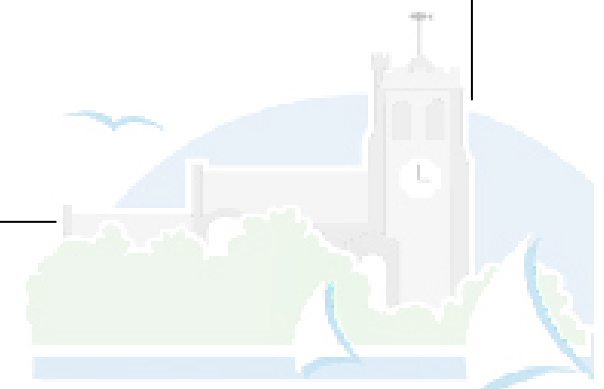
- 7.13 In terms of future prospects for the retail sector, although the UK economy potentially faces the prospect of downturn over the short term, it is still in a better position compared with the recessions of the late 1980s and early 1990s. For example interest rates are well below the peak of 15% in the late 1980s, while inflation is significantly below the 10% high of the early 1990s. Despite pessimistic forecasts, the UK's retail and leisure markets have performed better than expected over the last 12-18 months. In the context of the wider UK economy, consumer spending and the service sector have continued to show strong growth, whereas the manufacturing sector is in the deepest recession since 1992. However, the rate of household debt to personal income is at an all-time high and well above the previous peak seen in 1990. Thus, over the short to medium term, the retail sector is vulnerable to the risk that the household sector will abruptly reduce debt growth and consumer spending if faced with either a large rise in unemployment or significant hikes in interest rates.

The Leisure Sector

- 7.14 Britain's leisure industry has also experienced dramatic changes and growth during the last decade. Leisure spending currently stands at 14% of total UK spend and is the most rapidly expanding sector of the economy. Because it is so dynamic, it lags behind the retail sector in terms of research which identifies and predicts the capacity for and location of new forms of development. The lack of research reflects the highly volatile nature of a market where fashion is the major determinant of demand, rather than any researchable long-term social or economic trends.
- 7.15 Despite the downturn in the UK economy, many market analysts have a positive outlook for growth in the leisure sector over the medium term. Relatively high rates of growth in leisure spend, low inflation and interest rates, coupled with the offer of relatively long leases has made the leisure industry an attractive destination for investment funds. There is, however, evidence of structural change and consolidation in many of the key leisure markets which will impinge on the performance of the sector over the medium term. The following provides a brief commentary on the growth potential of certain sectors of the national leisure market that could be most relevant to the emerging strategy for Christchurch town centre.

Cinemas

- 7.16 The fickleness of the leisure sector to changes in lifestyle and fashion is most clearly illustrated by the changing fortunes of the cinema industry. During the 1970s and early 1980s Britain's cinemas were experiencing long-term decline and attendances almost halved between 1980-1984, to just over 50 million. This trend was dramatically reversed during the 1990s, such that by the end of the decade attendances had increased to 142.5 million and the number of new screens had increased by 40%+ since 1994. This dynamic growth was partly driven by the revival of the Hollywood 'blockbuster' and the development of high quality state-of-the-art multiplex cinemas, often in association with other types of leisure and A3 uses.
- 7.17 As with the retail sector, the Government's planning policy guidance has impacted on the sector over recent years, with most new development proposals occurring in town centre locations. This has provided a boost to town centre evening economies, as cinemas attract a mix of age groups and also generate increased visits, footfall and spend. However, whilst the cinema industry has been the main driver of the commercial leisure sector in both the town centre and out-of-centre markets, audiences have not grown as rapidly as forecast over recent years, partly due to the growth of sophisticated home entertainment systems. Consequently the industry has undergone a period of consolidation: Rank has sold their Odeon cinema to Cinven, which also owns ABC, and Virgin has disposed of their cinemas to USG of France. Nevertheless, there have also been a number of new entrants to the UK market, including Ster Century and Cinemark.
- 7.18 There is an increasing body of evidence to suggest that the cinema market is becoming more mature and that saturation is fast approaching in a number of locations. Competition among the multiplexes is intensifying and operating margins are being squeezed. Market experts have predicted a limited growth in the cinema market over the next few years. Total visits per head are declining and the opportunities for major 'leisure box' developments in strategic locations, such as Birmingham's Star City and Manchester's Printworks, is becoming more limited.



Health & Fitness

- 7.19 The health and fitness sector has experienced a dramatic growth in the last five years. Recent figures indicate that membership has increased from 1.6 million in 1994 to over 3 million today. The main operators in this sector can be divided into three main groups based on the cost and quality of their offer. At the top end of the market, targeted at a more affluent customer, are a number of 'premium' operators (including David Lloyd Leisure, Esporta and Holmes Place), in the 'mid-range' are businesses such as Cannons and the 'value end' includes Fitness First and LA Fitness.
- 7.20 Despite the downturn in the economy, market experts still predict potential for growth in this sector, although it is understood that some of the more ambitious expansion plans are currently being reviewed. Nevertheless, comparisons with America show that during its last recession the industry went sideways rather than downwards. Also, the UK has some way to go before it matches membership levels in America. Figures indicate that 7% of the US population belong to fitness clubs, compared with just over 3% in the UK. Analysts predict that membership could treble by the end of the decade, which means significant potential for growth.
- 7.21 Rents in this sector have risen steadily over recent years, generally in line with inflation. For example, rents quoted at the end of 2001 range from £86-£97 per sq.m. (£8-9 per sq.ft.) in smaller provincial towns, to £119-£161 per sq.m. (£11-£15 per sq.ft.) within the M25. However, with 90% of turnover derived from membership fees, it is argued that there is a limit to the amount of rent that can be charged.
- 7.22 Although new players will continue to enter the market, there will inevitably be increased consolidation in the sector, through mergers and acquisitions. This will mean that possibly no more than five businesses will dominate the health and fitness sector by the second half of the decade. Recent activity in the sector includes the purchase by Crown Sports of Dragons, Fitness Express and Axis. Areas for growth include the "grey market" (over 55 year olds), which remains largely untapped, and women, who make up around 65% of members.
- 7.23 Over recent years there have been marked changes in the location and format of new health and fitness clubs. In

location terms the market has traditionally been split into two distinct sectors – smaller in-town clubs of less than 930 sq.m. marketed at the immediate workforce and residents and larger out-of-centre facilities, serving a wider residential market. In light of current planning policy guidance, operators are becoming more flexible and innovative in their development formats. For example, Fitness First recently opened a club in a former Waitrose store in Godalming and LA Fitness converted a cinema in Newbury town centre. Recent trends also indicate that health and fitness clubs will increasingly be integrated into mixed use schemes in town centre locations, as they can help to create a wider range of activity, particularly in evenings and at weekends. More flexible planning policies will therefore need to be introduced which help to encourage an element of such uses within or on the edge of town centres.

Hotels

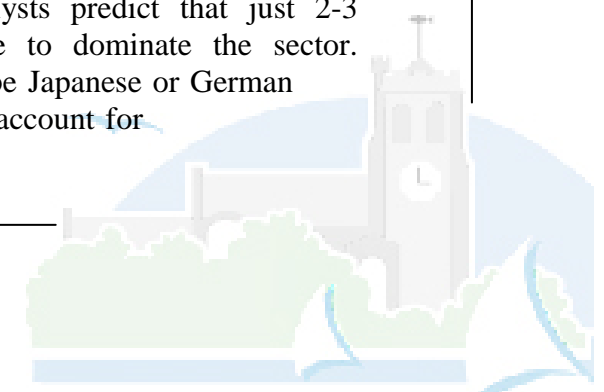
- 7.24 The hotel sector has also changed dramatically over the last decade. There has been a significant reduction in the number of hotels, as many older and smaller hotels have closed due to competition from larger hotels offering better facilities. The industry can be broadly divided into four different sectors - luxury, boutique and resort hotels; 4-star commercial business hotels; mid-sector 2/3-star hotels; and budget hotels and lodges;
- 7.25 However, during 2001 the hotel industry suffered badly from the triple impact of the foot-and-mouth crisis, a slowing of the economy and the terrorist attacks of 11th September. Figures released at the end of 2001 by Pricewaterhouse Coopers indicated that the hotel sector was experiencing its worst downturn since 1977. London's hotel sector has performed particularly poorly, as many of the capital's hotels rely on a steady trade of American and foreign visitors. For example, both Thistle Hotels and the Hilton Group experienced a substantial decline in occupancy rates and sales. Although there have not been any high profile fall-outs in the sector as yet, a number of hotel groups have reported a marked drop in profits, including Millennium & Copthorne and Jurys Doyle. 2001 was also significant as it involved the break-up of the Forte Group and the sale of its 125 luxury hotels, Le Meridien, to the Japanese investment bank, Nomura. The downturn has resulted in a number of investors purchasing older hotels in need of refurbishment and converting them into

apartments.

- 7.26 This downturn has resulted in the increased market share of budget hotels. The growth of the budget hotel sector has been particularly significant. Figures show that the number of budget hotels increased from 175 to 600 between 1990-98. The main operators are Travel Inn (Whitbread), Travelodge (Granada) and Premier Lodge (Scottish & Newcastle) who are actively seeking locations in town centre and edge-of-centre locations. The potential for further growth in this sector is demonstrated by the fact that at the start of the millennium only 5% of hotel rooms in the UK were budget, compared with 15% in France and 25% in USA (Intel International Report, 2000). In general terms, the budget hotel operators do not provide restaurants and leisure facilities as part of their offer, and therefore tend to be developed in association with A3 uses and health and fitness centres.
- 7.27 The budget hotel sector offers a clearly defined product at low price that appeals to an increasingly value-conscious customer. Many budget hotels, including Premier Lodge, have experienced an increase in occupancy rates over the last 12 months and many chains are continuing with their expansion plans, despite more pessimistic forecasts. Premier Lodge, for example, has an aggressive acquisition programme to look at every major town and city in the UK. There are also a number of new entrants to the UK market, including Golden Tulips, which is looking to introduce the "Tulip Inn" brand.
- 7.28 Market experts believe that low interest rates will help to protect many operators in the sector from receivership.

Food & Beverage Market

- 7.29 Since the beginning of the new millennium the British pub industry has been characterised by increased consolidation. In 2001 it is estimated that over 11% the UK's pub stock changed hands. Major deals included Whitbread selling its 3,000-pub portfolio to Laurel to concentrate on the hotel side of its business; Punch buying 1,500 pubs from Bass and 2,700 from Allied Domecq; and the purchase by Pubmaster of 1,200 pubs that make up the Inn Partnership from Nomura. Analysts predict that just 2-3 companies will emerge to dominate the sector. Moreover, these could be Japanese or German owned, as they already account for



approximately one-quarter of pubs in the UK.

- 7.30 The 1990s was characterised by an unprecedented growth in pub branding. Names like Rat & Parrot, Hogshhead, Firkin and O'Neils were as common on every high street as the more traditional retailers. In recent years, however, market experts argue that there has been a "backlash" against these themed pubs. This has resulted in many operators refurbishing their pubs in an attempt to "soften" their brands. This 'soft branding' has created an opportunity for the independents and new pub companies, who are able to think locally and adapt their product to suit current tastes much more rapidly than national companies. For example, 'The Living Room' from Living Ventures is a prime example of an emerging soft brand, based on a bar/restaurant theme. This has impacted on the big players who have virtually stopped the acquisition of branded portfolios and are looking to change their under-performing assets to mimic the successful local independents.
- 7.31 Experts predict that there will continue to be consolidation in the sector and a trend toward tenancies, as they will be better able to manipulate their brands to meet shifting consumer trends. Some market experts believe that because of changes in fashion, boredom with high street brands and a dip in consumer confidence, there will be a resurgence of "community pubs". One other potential area for growth is the "gastro-pubs", as the food offer has emerged as a particularly strong driver of success in the pub industry, and has resulted in more varied menus to cater for different tastes.
- 7.32 The large breweries and leisure operators have also moved into the restaurant sector during the 1990s and Six Continents, Whitbread, Wolverhampton & Dudley and Rank all expanded restaurants as part of their portfolios. However, as with the pub industry, there has been a recent backlash against the brands. Companies such as Chez Gerard, Garfunkles, Café Uno and City Centre Restaurants have all experienced a decline in their market value and certain groups are beginning to shed parts of their portfolios. Market evidence would also seem to confirm that few of the branded restaurants have successfully expanded across the UK. The benefactors are likely to be independent multiples that will move away from branded products. Nevertheless, those brands that combine quality with value, such as Pizza Express and Ask Pizza, have performed well.

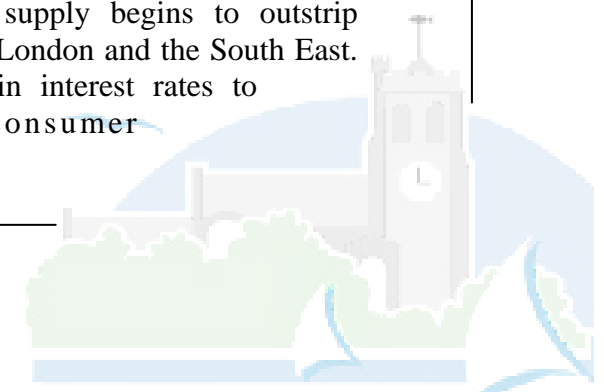
Gambling

- 7.33 Although the bingo and bowling sectors have stagnated over recent years, market experts predict strong growth for the gambling industry. This will depend on the proposed changes in legislation set out in the recent report prepared by the Gambling Review Body (otherwise referred to as the Budd Report), which will lead to significant market adjustments in the sector and a rapid expansion in UK casinos.
- 7.34 At present around three-quarters of Britain's casinos are controlled by just three companies – the Rank Group, Gala Group Holdings (purchased Ladbrokes from Hilton in December 2000) and Stanley Leisure. When similar liberalisation of gaming regulations took place in Australia, total gambling expenditure was three times greater in 1998 (at £4.2bn) than 15 years previously. In Britain legal gambling had a turnover of £0.6bn in 1999 and employed 11,700 people, compared with £35bn and 20,000 people in Australia.
- 7.35 The question is whether the liberalisation of Britain's casino market will result in a similar expansion as has occurred in Australia. There are four significant changes identified by the Budd Report which could see a dramatic growth in new casinos in Britain's towns and cities over the next few years. First, the 30-year permitted areas policy, which restricts casinos to just 53 UK locations, will be abolished. Second, the demand test for bingo halls and casinos will also be abolished, meaning it will no longer be necessary for developers to demonstrate unfulfilled demand within a permitted area. Third, the licensing of premises will pass from local magistrates to local authorities, and will operate on a similar basis to the planning system. Fourth, the report proposes the abolition of the 24-hour membership rule. These changes will make opening and using new casinos a less challenging prospect than at present.
- 7.36 The likely result of this overhaul of gambling legislation will be an increase in the number and size of casinos. Market experts forecast an increase from 123 to 450 venues, although it is difficult at this stage to predict on the potential increase in total casino floorspace. One of the likely changes is the introduction of resort casinos, which may help to regenerate some of Britain's declining resort towns. The most advanced is Blackpool, where the local

authority is promoting a vision to reinvent and re-brand the town as a Las Vegas-style destination.

The Housing Market

- 7.37 In the last 30 years, booms in UK house prices have tended to be led by London and the South East, where prices rose not only earlier but also faster than other regions. East Anglia and the South West followed these trends, with the West Midlands, East Midlands and other regions some way behind. This is often called the 'ripple effect', with London and its affluent commuter belt at the centre generating waves. By way of illustration, it is estimated that UK house prices have risen by 269% since the Halifax Price Index began in January 1983, with the South East (+328%) outperforming the South West (+298%) over this 19 year period. However, over the past three years growth has been slightly higher in the South West (+60%) than the South East (+59%), ranking it third out of the 12 UK regions.
- 7.38 The residential market is driven by three principal factors - buyer confidence, the supply of residential property and the perception that residential property offers an attractive investment option. Following the housing slump in the 1990's and the damaging effects of negative equity on consumer confidence, the residential market has experienced unprecedented growth since the mid-1990s. Over recent years the shortage of housing stock in the south of England, combined with consumer confidence and low interest rates, has fuelled the rapid growth in the residential market. In London and the South East this recovery has been apparent at the top end of the market in the more attractive locations.
- 7.39 The slowdown in the world and UK economies since 2001, accelerated by the terrorist attacks of 11th September, is slowly beginning to impact on the house price boom in London and the South East, particularly at the top end of the market. Market experts tend to agree that the housing market will continue to slow in 2004. The Bank of England also commented that the dramatic growth of house prices was unsustainable over the long term. There are also signs that the buoyant buy-to-let investment market is also beginning to slow as supply begins to outstrip demand, particularly in London and the South East. Nevertheless, any cut in interest rates to help stimulate consumer



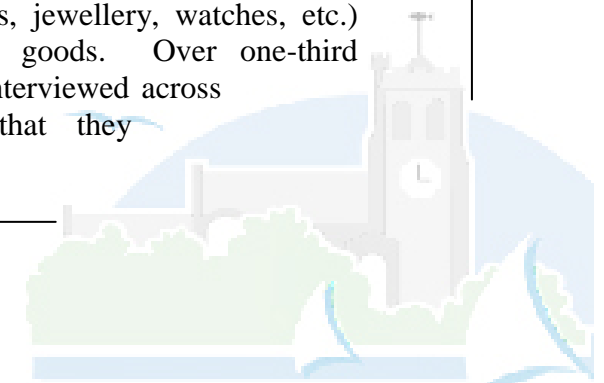
confidence may also help to generate new growth over the short term.

- 7.40 Although it is difficult to predict regional variations, analysts predict that London and the South East will be the worst affected regional housing market, as the ratios of house prices to earnings are substantially above historical averages.

THE LOCAL CONTEXT

Location & Economy

- 7.41 Christchurch is a busy, historic coastal town situated some five miles to the east of Bournemouth town centre. The town lies at the confluence of the River Stour and River Avon and enjoys an excellent position on the shores of its own harbour. The town is situated on the A35 coast road, three miles from the main A338 dual carriageway that leads to the M27 and M3 motorways and the wider national motorway network.
- 7.42 The town is served by a mainline railway station, situated on the London to Weymouth line, and is under two hours travel time to London Waterloo. It is also located some four miles from Bournemouth International Airport, which lies within the Borough and which provides passenger flights within the UK and operates scheduled passenger flights to the Channel Islands and charter services to Mediterranean, Alpine and other holiday destinations. In addition, the airport is also an important centre for industry and provides employment for approximately 3,500 people. The Local Plan has also identified some 80 hectares of land for employment purposes and it is expected that the airport will make a significant contribution to the area's economy.
- 7.43 The town's location on the edge of the New Forest, its heritage assets, pleasant aspect and sailing facilities in both harbour and river locations make it an attractive place for holidaymakers. It is estimated that Christchurch attracts approximately half-a-million visitors and tourists each year. These attractions, combined with its accessibility and proximity to Bournemouth, have created a relatively strong, diverse and prosperous local economy. Not surprisingly, employment in the Borough is largely dominated by the service sector, particularly distribution and catering (27% of the District's workforce), which reflects the area's importance as a tourist destination. In contrast,
- manufacturing industries having below average representation compared with national average. The Travel-to-Work-Area (TTWA) statistic for unemployment (which includes Bournemouth) is replaced by DCC estimated unemployment for the Borough, i.e. 1.1% in October 2003.
- #### The Retail Market
- 7.44 Christchurch town centre has three distinct areas of retail activity. The first is the High Street, to the south of the A35, which is the town's prime shopping area and commands the highest Prime Zone A rental levels. There are a variety of smaller independent and larger multiple retailers in this area and its retail offer is anchored by Saxon Square at the top end of the High Street. This open pedestrianised precinct comprises 8,100 m² (87,000 sq.ft.) of net lettable space and is tenanted by most of the town's major multiple retailers, including Somerfield, Boots, WH Smith, Dorothy Perkins, New Look and Argos. The second area of retail activity is focussed on Church Street, which is close to the Castle ruins and Priory, and comprises mainly small tourist-orientated shops, restaurants, cafés and other A3 uses. The third area is Bargates, which is situated to the north of the town centre and separated from the High Street by the A35. This area comprises a mix of more secondary retail, A3, office and residential uses. The main car parking in the town centre is in Saxon Square (267 spaces), and this is supplemented by a further 207 spaces serving the Pioneer supermarket across Fountain Way, along with a number of smaller car parks on the western side of the High Street.
- 7.45 Assuming a 10-minute off-peak drive time broadly reflects Christchurch's primary catchment area, it is estimated that there was a population of 103,750 in 2000. Compared with national averages, this catchment population is older, more mobile and affluent. The lifestyle profile of the urban area population also confirms that there is an above average representation of pensioners (32%) and comfortable middle-agers (19.3%) compared with the national averages of 2.5% and 13% respectively. The 'greying' of the population, with more people of retirement age, is a long-term trend across the Borough.
- 7.46 Evidence from the 2001 household survey conducted on behalf of the Borough Council, as part of the independent retail capacity assessment, confirms that Christchurch's retail catchment area is constrained to the west by Bournemouth and the east by Southampton. For example, the survey indicated that only 15% of households interviewed in the Borough normally shopped in the town centre for clothing, footwear and other fashion items, which represented a similar market share to Boscombe. In comparison, Bournemouth is by far and away the main destination for fashion shopping, drawing 44% of total respondents within the Borough. The town centre therefore mainly provides convenient shopping and service facilities for its more local catchment population.
- 7.47 Over the last decade the town centre's market share of food and non-food shopping has been impacted by the increased competition from out-of-centre retailing. In terms of food shopping, the 2001 survey indicated that the Sainsbury store on Lyndhurst Road draws over half of all the main household grocery shopping trips in the Borough, followed by the Tesco store at Castle Lane East (16%). Food retailing in the town centre is predominantly at the value or discount end of the grocery sector, and the Somerfield, Pioneer and Iceland stores together attract some 12% of main household grocery trips. Thus, although the independent retail capacity assessment conducted for Christchurch Borough Council did not identify a quantitative capacity for new convenience goods floorspace up to 2011, there may be the opportunity for qualitative improvements to the town centre's food offer.
- 7.48 The Borough's main retail warehousing is concentrated at Bailey Park, Barrack Road and Stony Lane and the eastern end of Somerford Road. Research shows that these and other retail warehouses have had a significant impact on shopping patterns across the Borough. The 2001 household survey indicated that a higher proportion of respondents interviewed in the Borough last shopped at these retail warehouses for DIY/household goods (60%), furniture & carpets (27%), large domestic electrical appliances (34%) and smaller electrical goods (30%). In contrast, on average, only 12% of respondents in the Borough shopped in the town centre for these different types of 'bulky' goods.
- 7.49 The 2001 survey does indicate that the town centre is a more popular shopping destination for smaller, specialist retailing (such as books, jewellery, watches, etc.) and recreational/leisure goods. Over one-third (36%) of respondents interviewed across the Borough stated that they



normally shop in Christchurch for these types of goods. This placed it above Bournemouth (27%) in terms of its market share.

- 7.50 DTZ's review of Christchurch's retail market confirms that the town centre has a number of core strengths. These include its relatively affluent catchment population; its attractive environment and seaside location; a high number of tourist and day visitors; a good mix of national multiples and independent businesses, particularly smaller specialist retailers; and a relatively low vacancy rate (7%) compared with the national average (11%). The 2001 household survey also confirmed that respondents liked its attractive environment (31%), convenience (25%), compactness (10%) and range of shops (8%).
- 7.51 Nevertheless, the town centre's retail offer also has a number of underlying structural weaknesses, which are combining to undermine its attraction and performance. First and foremost, it currently lacks the "quality" retailers one would normally expect in a town of its size, location and function. There is also limited or no representation of retailers in certain key sectors, particularly butchers, off licences, clothing, variety stores, jewellers and recreational goods, such as sports and hobby shops.
- 7.52 DTZ's review of current market demand indicates that there is limited interest from national multiple traders not already represented in the town. However, the proposed reconfiguration and redevelopment of Saxon Square may help to generate new interest in the town centre (this development opportunity is discussed in more detail later in this section). This is because the proposed redevelopment would help to address the current shortage of larger shop units. Currently nine out of ten units in the town are under 232 sq.m. (2,500 sq.ft.), whereas modern multiple retailers are generally looking for units of at least 929 sq.m. (10,000 sq.ft.).
- 7.53 Whilst the lettings to national multiples will continue, we do not believe that there will be a significant increase in future demand due to the increased competition from Bournemouth, Southampton, Ringwood, Poole and other out-of-centre attractions, such as Castlepoint. Indeed, local agents were of the opinion that Christchurch has reached full capacity with regard to demand from national multiples. The lack of quality and the limited demand for space from key retailers is reflected by the estimated Prime

Zone A rents of £50 per sq.ft. recently achieved on the High Street (not Saxon Square), which is only slightly higher than the £37/45 per sq.ft. achieved in the early 1990s. By way of comparison, DTZ estimate Prime Zone A's in Bournemouth are £150 per sq.ft., which is higher than for Poole (£110) but lower than Southampton (£220). A further weakness in Christchurch's retail offer is the physical division and poor pedestrian linkages between Bargates and the High Street. This is reflected by the fact that Prime Zone A's and pedestrian footfall decline sharply away from the High Street.

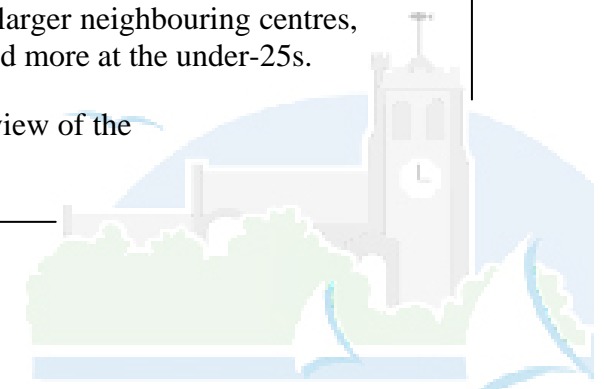
- 7.54 In summary, we believe there is potential to improve the quality and choice of retail and service businesses in Christchurch Town Centre to better serve its more affluent local catchment population, and its growing tourist and visitor trade. As is the case with many historic towns, however, this will need to be balanced with the need to maintain and enhance Christchurch's built environment. Later in this section we highlight the potential for new retail facilities as part of mixed use developments in the heart of the town, although this will obviously need to be sensitively planned and designed so that it reinforces Christchurch's existing function and character, in accordance with Conservation Area policies.

The Leisure Sector

- 7.55 The Borough with its unique historic assets, including the Priory and Castle Ruins, together with the rivers, the harbour and beaches, and its proximity to the New Forest, is an attractive and growing visitor and tourist destination. In consultation with the Southern Tourist Board and the Christchurch Tourism Association, the Borough Council has produced a Tourism Strategy to ensure the area benefits fully from the new and growing tourism market. The strategy recognises tourism is a major generator of wealth in the Borough and assesses ways of promoting the Borough to specific market segments.
- 7.56 In contrast, Christchurch's leisure facilities compare unfavourably with its larger neighbouring towns, with the exception of its watersports and sailing facilities. DTZ has conducted a thorough review of the market demand and potential for new leisure facilities in the town centre and its findings are summarised below.
- 7.57 DTZ's national review of the **multiplex cinema** sector has

indicated that the sector is approaching saturation in certain UK locations and operators are now concentrating on strategic locations (i.e. major regional or sub-regional centres). Christchurch already benefits from a single screen and locally run cinema, which is a major asset in the town centre, and it is unlikely that there is scope to increase the existing provision.

- 7.58 In contrast private **health and fitness clubs** have represented a significant growth market in the leisure sector over recent years and, despite the slowdown in the economy, a number of operators are still pursuing expansion plans. At the local level there are currently a number of private health clubs in close proximity to Christchurch in Ringwood, Poole and Bournemouth, and a club is also planned for the Hampshire Centre development. Local residents in Christchurch are currently served by municipal facilities and, whilst these are popular, they do not match the quality of facilities provided by private clubs. Given the strength of the leisure sector we would anticipate that, subject to a suitable site becoming available, Christchurch would be well placed to attract a private club to the town. This use should ideally be located in or near the town centre to encourage linked trips.
- 7.59 The **food and beverage** market is another sector that has experienced significant change and expansion over recent years. Christchurch town centre's offer is currently characterised by small local "tea shop" style cafés and mid to up-market restaurants. However there is clearly a shortage of major national and regional operators, which will appeal to a wider customer market and profile. Furthermore, there are relatively few places where locals and visitors can enjoy an "al fresco" drink or meal in the town centre. This is a significant deficiency in its provision given its large tourist market. There is therefore a major opportunity (subject to creating the right development opportunity and ensuring compliance with the objectives of development plan policy) to attract new café, bar and pub operators into the town centre. Any improvements to the quality of A3 uses in Christchurch will also help to generate longer dwell times in the town and a thriving evening economy. Nevertheless, Christchurch will need to differentiate its mix of A3 uses from the provision in Bournemouth and other larger neighbouring centres, which are mainly targeted more at the under-25s.
- 7.60 Finally, based on our review of the



hotel sector, we conclude that there may be an opportunity to attract a hotel operator to the town centre. Bournemouth has been, and will continue to be, the most attractive location for the large quality hotel operators. This is illustrated by the fact that the Carlton Hotels Group is currently building a three-star 100-bed hotel on Christchurch Road. Furthermore, the hotel industry has been experiencing significant difficulty over the last 12 months, and the larger operators will tend to gravitate towards Bournemouth's larger tourist market. The current uncertain outcome of the proposed hotel at Wick Ferry suggests that there is currently a limited market for further hotel developments in the town centre.

The Residential Market

- 7.61 According to the more recent *Halifax House Price Index* (HHPI), house prices in the South West rose by 4.6% during the second quarter of 2002 and average house prices are almost 23% higher than in 2001. Across the South West region, the average price of a semi-detached house is £128,550, ranging from a low of £97,900 for Plymouth to a high of £148,950 in Bristol. Dorset is also a 'hotspot' and is ranked second behind Bristol with an average house price of £148,000. According to the HHPI, the outlook for the region's housing market is one of growth, but probably at a lower rate than seen during 2001/2.
- 7.62 The housing market in Christchurch currently mirrors the South West. Market evidence indicates that demand for different types of housing is strong and that there is a shortage of instructions to meet this demand. In Christchurch, figures derived from the Land Registry indicate that average property prices based on transactions between April and June 2002 were £175,000, which is significantly higher than the average for England and Wales of £132,500. Local agents report significant interest for retirement and second homes, which reflects the 'greying' population and improved connections with London and the rest of the South East. On the other hand, there is also a strong need for affordable first time buyer accommodation. Many locals, particularly the younger age groups, are unable to afford to buy their own homes in the area and are therefore being forced out to more affordable parts of Bournemouth and Poole, or even further afield.
- 7.63 It is DTZ's understanding that there is a limited amount of new development coming to the market, mainly because

there is a limited amount of land. One new development being built by Westbury developments on the River Stour consists of a mixture of 2-4 bedroom flats and houses. Prices range from £220,000 - £500,000 and demand is very good. This reflects the strength of Christchurch's residential market as a whole.

- 7.64 DTZ consider that based on the current market, there is sufficient demand to support new housing development in the town centre. Not only would this go some way to satisfying the Borough's housing targets, but would also bring new activity and community into the town centre. Whilst many of the housebuilders active in the area aim to focus on the luxury or the lucrative retirement markets, research shows that homes for local people, and particularly first time buyers, are in short supply and should therefore form part of the emerging strategy for the town centre.

The Office Market

- 7.65 Christchurch is not a recognised office location compared to its larger neighbours. The great majority of offices in the town centre are activities that are normally incidental to a town centre, comprising mainly local and small professional organisations, such as solicitors and accountants. Much of the office floorspace in the town is in small suites above retail premises.
- 7.66 Office rents in Christchurch town centre are currently at £7-£9 per sq ft for a modest suite above retail accommodation. There are currently two properties under offer on the High Street that confirm this market valuation. The first, at 17A High Street, is a period building with offices above a shop and basic accommodation and is under offer at over £7 per sq.ft. and the second is a suite in The Fountain, which is a mock Tudor building currently under offer at £8 per sq.ft.. Although both office premises experienced strong interest from local occupiers, they were agreed at comparatively low rents. Analysis of planning applications over recent years also indicates that demand for offices in the Bargates area is steady. This is partly due to the more restrictive policies being applied on the High Street.
- 7.67 Given the strength of nearby locations, local demand and more importantly achievable rental levels, DTZ does not believe that the town centre can support speculative office

development.

EMERGING DEVELOPMENT OPPORTUNITIES

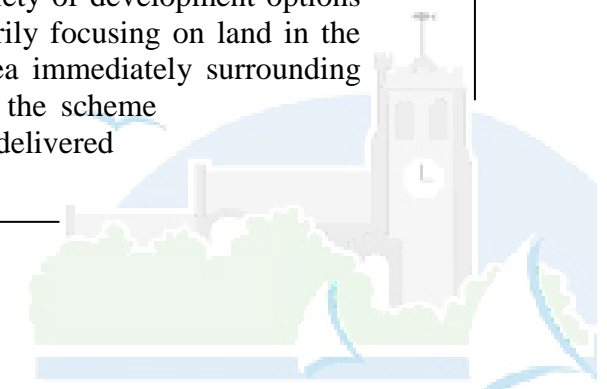
- 7.68 Drawing on our market demand and physical assessments, and also taking account of the national and local planning policy context, we have identified a number of locations and sites in Christchurch town centre, which we believe afford the best potential for future new development. These development opportunities are integral to the delivery of the emerging strategy and vision for the town centre. The following sets out DTZ's initial appraisal of their potential and viability. The final section of this report sets out a more detailed commentary and action plan which identifies the steps required to realise and deliver these development opportunities, particularly in terms of funding and phasing.

Land West of the High Street

- 7.69 Large-scale development in Christchurch is constrained by its heritage and built environment, and the fact that much of the town centre is designated as a conservation area. Nevertheless, one of the main development opportunities in the town lies to the west of the High Street. This area has also been identified by **Policy ES5** of the Local Plan as having potential for shopping uses (Class A1) and a mix of other uses, including residential (Class C3), financial/professional service use (Class A2), food and drink use (Class A3), non-residential institutions (Class D1) and other leisure and entertainment uses (Class D2). DTZ has conducted a detailed analysis of the market potential of two key development opportunities in this area and its initial findings are set out below (please refer to Section 8 of this report for a more detailed commentary on the delivery of these development opportunities): -

(i) The Lanes

- 7.70 The Lanes comprises the area broadly between Sopers Lane and Wick Lane. Plans for the redevelopment of this area were first drawn up by one of the local landowners with an interest in properties fronting the High Street and land to the rear. A variety of development options were considered, primarily focusing on land in the northern part of the area immediately surrounding Drutt Hall. However, the scheme ultimately failed to be delivered



as a result of a breakdown in negotiations between two of the principal landowners.

7.71 In broad terms, DTZ considers The Lanes offers an opportunity for mixed use small-scale niche retailing, residential accommodation and community facilities. The scheme envisaged would complement the more mainstream retailing provided elsewhere on the High Street and particularly in Saxon Square. Whilst a range of shop unit sizes could be provided, DTZ doubts whether these will be of sufficient size to secure interest from major national operators. The retail element would therefore comprise a variety of small and medium sized shop units fronting on to attractive pedestrian areas. The residential accommodation would be vertically integrated with the new shopping facility. In terms of occupiers, DTZ considers there is potential for a range of retail and A3 uses. This new scheme will help to maintain and enhance the town's shopping provision, whilst also acting as a focus for new activity, interest and footfall away from the linear High Street. At the same time, the community facilities of the Library and Drutt Community Hall should be retained, with the Hall being resited and the Library expanded.

7.72 Whilst DTZ broadly concurs with the earlier proposals for The Lanes, more creative thinking is needed to link its development with the need to improve and enhance Drutt Gardens. As highlighted previously in this strategy document, DTZ believes there is an opportunity to create an attractive woodland garden connecting the key public facilities.

(ii) Wick Lane/High Street

7.73 The redevelopment of The Lanes also offers the potential to link up with another development opportunity in the town centre, located on the corner of the High Street/Wick Lane, and including the covered arcade and Post Office. Although the facilities here have been subject to improvements in recent years, the Local Plan identifies that they are still below the appropriate standards for a Conservation Area in terms of environment and design.

7.74 The arcade is a small, poor quality shopping environment in need of updating and to the rear of The Arcade, fronting Wick Lane, lies the Post Office and associated sorting office. At this stage, it is understood that the Post Office and sorting office are still operationally required for

Christchurch. But, in the longer term the requirement to have a sorting office in the town centre may change, therefore releasing this site as a potential development opportunity. Moreover, combining the Post Office sorting depot and The Arcade would represent a significant opportunity to redevelop this important part of the town centre.

7.75 As with the Lanes scheme DTZ envisages a mix of uses on this site, combining shops, food and beverage outlets and some residential accommodation.

Saxon Square Shopping Centre

7.76 Saxon Square is an attractive open pedestrianised shopping centre and anchors Christchurch's mainstream retail offer. Currently the land adjoining the south side of Saxon Square comprises small kiosks, as the adjoining land owners were unwilling to participate in the original redevelopment of the scheme in the early 1980s. The Local Plan has identified this area as having potential for redevelopment as an integral part of the existing scheme and the Local Plan accepts that the provision of a fourth side at Saxon Square would greatly increase its intimacy, aesthetic appeal and atmosphere. This is formalised by **Policy ES6** which allows for mainly shopping uses, as well as residential, financial or professional service use, food and drink use, non-residential institutions and leisure and entertainment uses. The Local Plan also states that the design of shop fronts and advertisements will need to accord with the Council's guidelines as set out in the Supplementary Planning Guidance on 'Guidelines for Advertisements and Shop Fronts'.

7.77 Redevelopment of the centre's main shopping focus would help to improve the vitality and viability of the town centre as a whole by providing the type of larger shop units that modern multiple retailers require. Currently many of the shops in the centre (particularly units 15-20) are too small to satisfy occupier requirements. Plans for the centre are progressing and the owner, London and Associated Properties (LAP) submitted a planning application to make a number of key alterations. In particular, the application sought to enable the redevelopment of the small units fronting onto Fountain Way to provide a new 5,000 sq.ft. anchor, upgrading the kiosk units (28-32) fronting onto Saxon Square, and introducing small in-town residential apartments as part of the scheme. This application was

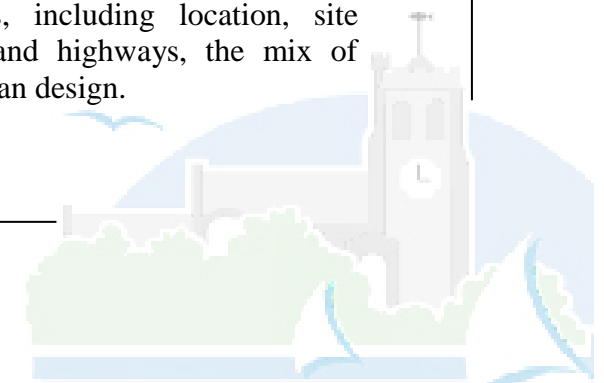
refused planning permission and the Borough Council and LAP are in discussion on revised proposals to improve the retail space adjacent to Fountain Way and introduce small residential units into Saxon Square.

The Former Magistrates Court Site

7.78 The site has its main frontage on Barrack Road and occupies a strategic and highly visible 'gateway' location in the town centre. However its position on the northern edge of the A35 means that it is currently separated from the core of the town centre. The site has two principal points of access, one from Bargates (serving the former Magistrates Court) and one off Barrack Road. The site therefore represents a significant development opportunity close to the heart of the town centre.

7.79 It is occupied by a number of buildings and is largely dominated by the former Magistrates Court and the Police Station, with car parking and a number of residential dwellings with rear gardens. Although Dorset Police intend to maintain their profile and visible presence in the town centre, the existing Police Station may be too large for their requirements. Similarly, the Magistrates Court is redundant and is now partly occupied by an Adult Education facility run by the County Council.

7.80 The site is subject to a number of different land ownerships, including Christchurch Borough Council; Dorset County Council; Dorset Police Authority; Trustees of the Hospital of St Mary Magdalen; and other third parties. Given its location, accessibility and size, it has already attracted considerable interest as a development opportunity. DTZ consider that the focus of the town centre's retail activity should continue to be concentrated on the High Street and Saxon Square and that any new development on the former Magistrate's Court site should not undermine the overall vitality and viability of the town centre as a whole. As part of the development of the town centre strategy, DTZ has also prepared a Development Brief for the former Magistrates Court site, based on a detailed market demand appraisal, as well as consultation with the local authority, key town centre stakeholders and the local community. The development brief covers a number of key issues, including location, site characteristics, access and highways, the mix of appropriate uses and urban design.



Bridge Street/Stony Lane South

- 7.81 This site is made up of a number of land owning interests, including the Borough Council's offices, the Two Riversmeet sports centre and neighbouring land and the gas storage depot. Part of this area currently occupied by a petrol filling station and car repair workshop, a light industrial factory and a gas board depot is under-used at present and is visually unattractive. In an attempt to stimulate development the site has been identified by Local Plan **Policy EO 3** as having potential for a mixed redevelopment incorporating leisure and recreation, business and commercial, residential and transportation uses. The Local Plan states that the frontage to Bridge Street would benefit from a development that, either through landscaping or design, would enhance the existing character of the street.
- 7.82 Given the operational requirements of the numerous uses within this location DTZ do not believe that the site is likely to come forward in the short term. The gas holders are likely to be required for at least the next 5/6 years after which we understand they will be subject to an operational review. At this stage, however, there are no plans to provide alternative supply and storage facilities for gas to the area. In order to remove the gas holders and the use of the site the landowners would only be persuaded should the redevelopment of the site generate significant revenue. Whilst a redevelopment could secure a high level of disposal receipts, it is unlikely to be sufficient to bring forward the release of the land.
- 7.83 After being run under licence, the Borough Council owned sports centre is now subject to new management and funding to upgrade the facility. Given the new investment put into this facility and the importance of the use in Christchurch we suspect this unlikely to come forward in the near future. Moreover the Borough Council's offices themselves would need to be incorporated into the development site and would therefore need to be relocated elsewhere. On the face of it, DTZ is of the view that the Council occupy generally good quality offices with more than adequate facilities. DTZ suspects, therefore, that in the short term justifying the relocation and reprovision of Council offices might be difficult.
- 7.84 Given the above constraints, the site identified as part of

the emerging strategy is not an immediate prospect. Nevertheless, by virtue of its location close to the waterfront, DTZ envisages the future potential of this location to provide new quality mixed use development, including employment/housing alongside additional moorings and associated waterside development—cafés, bars and restaurants. This is described in more detail in the concluding section to this report, as part of the wider town centre strategy and vision.

