

NORTH DORSET LOCAL PLAN 2011 – 2016 PART 1

**NATURAL ENVIRONMENT AND CLIMATE CHANGE
BACKGROUND PAPER**

November 2013

This background paper is intended to be read and used in conjunction with the other background papers produced to support the North Dorset Local Plan 2011 to 2026 Part 1.

Further advice on these papers can be obtained from the Planning Policy Team at North Dorset District Council.

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1. Purpose

- 1.1 This document is one of a number of background papers produced to support Part 1 of the North Dorset Local Plan that sets out the strategic policies for the District for the period 2011 to 2026.
- 1.2 The Local Plan Part 1 has been developed from the draft Core Strategy and Development Management Policies Development Plan Document (DPD) (also known as the New Plan for North Dorset), which was published in March 2010. The Local Plan Part 1 has been drafted to reflect the major reforms to the planning system and to have regard to the recent global economic downturn.
- 1.3 In light of these changes the Council has investigated different ways of delivering positive outcomes for local communities through planning policy and has reassessed the need for future development, particularly housing and employment development.
- 1.4 This background paper provides a general overview of issues relevant to the Natural Environment and Climate Change. It sets out the international, national and more local policy framework, relevant pieces of evidence gathered and the results of consultation in relation to the Natural Environment and Climate Change. These were used to develop the relevant policies in the Local Plan Part 1 and its predecessor the draft Core Strategy and Development Management Policies DPD.
- 1.5 In 2009 the council produced an Environment Topic Paper to support the draft Core Strategy and Development Management Policies DPD. This was updated in 2012 to set out the position at that time and covered the natural environment, the historic environment and climate change.
- 1.6 The Council has now produced separate background papers on the Historic Environment and on the Natural Environment and Climate Change. This approach takes account of changes to national planning policy, notably through the provisions of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) published in March 2012, and reflects the revised approach to policy in the Local Plan Part 1.
- 1.7 This background paper has been prepared to support the pre-submission publication of the Local Plan Part 1. It has been split into two sections, one on the natural environment and one on climate change. It is a working document which will be updated as evidence is acquired and the consultation process proceeds.

2. The Natural Environment of North Dorset

- 2.1 North Dorset is a rural District in southern England which covers approximately 61,000 hectares. The underlying geology and its associated soils and landforms are fundamental to understanding the environment of North Dorset and its potential for development in the future.
- 2.2 The whole of North Dorset falls within two ‘natural areas’ as defined by Natural England¹ (Figure 2.1) creating a distinct “north-south” divide which runs from north-east to south-west across the central part of the District. Natural areas are zones which reflect the geological foundation, the natural systems and processes and the wildlife in different parts of England. They are used by Natural England as an ecologically coherent framework for setting objectives in relation to nature conservation.

Figure 2.1 – North Dorset - Natural Areas



- 2.3 The southern part of the District (including Blandford) falls within the South Wessex Downs Natural Area. This is characterised by rolling downland, river valleys, woodlands and wetlands. It is a very rural area dominated by agriculture. The most

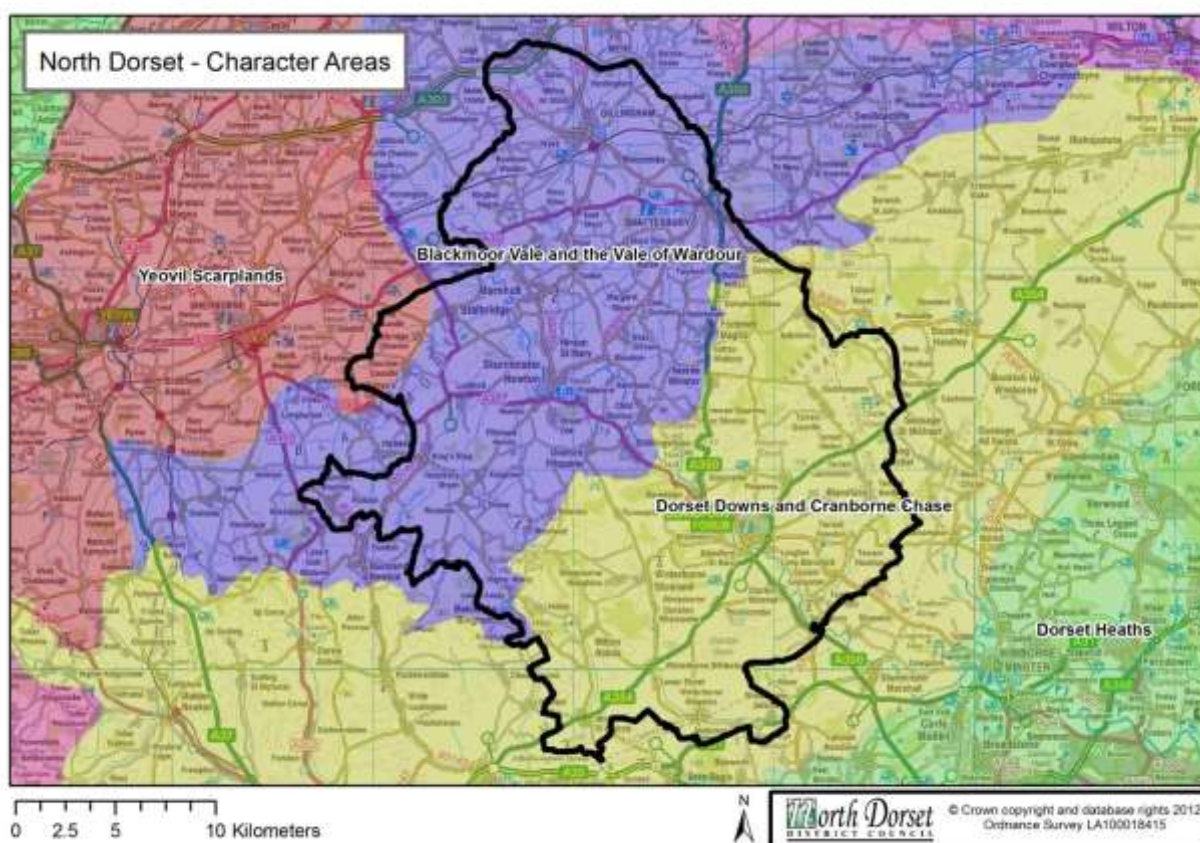
¹ In 1996 English Nature and the Countryside Commission, with help from English Heritage, produced a map of England that depicts the natural and cultural dimensions of the landscape.

notable habitats are chalk grassland, chalk rivers, woodland and arable land with areas of meadowland and wetland habitats. The main influences on land use are agriculture, woodland management and sporting activities such as angling and shooting.

2.4 The northern part of the District (including Gillingham, Shaftesbury and Sturminster Newton) falls within the Wessex Vales Natural Area. This is characterised by rolling hills and vales and hidden valleys. The landscape consists of pastures and meadows enclosed by a network of tall thick hedges, numerous copses and ancient woodlands.

2.5 Natural areas are further broken down into character areas (Figure 2.2) each of which displays a unique “sense of place”. These broad landscape units have a cohesive countryside character and can form the basis for ecological and landscape strategies. The character areas are often used by Natural England as the basis for countryside management

Figure 2.2 – North Dorset - Character Areas

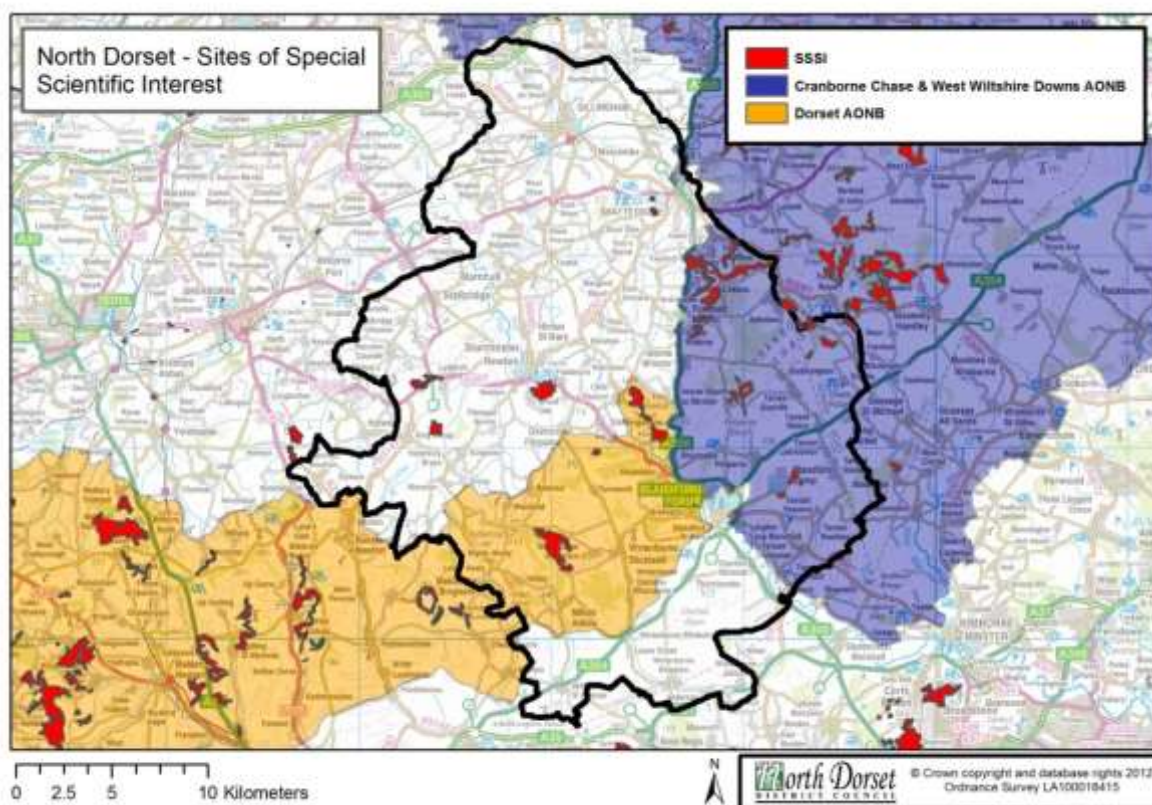


2.6 North Dorset is covered by three character areas. The southern part is covered by the Dorset Downs and Cranborne Chase Character Area. The northern part is primarily covered by the Blackmore Vale and the Vale of Wardour Character Area

with a smaller area to the west of Stalbridge and Lydlinch being covered by the Yeovil Scarplands Character Area.

- 2.7 The chalk outcrops of the Dorset Downs & Cranborne Chase Natural Area support chalk landscape types and a range of associated chalk landscape character areas². Many of these landscapes are included within either the Cranborne Chase and West Wiltshire Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) to the north and east of Blandford or the Dorset AONB to the west of the town (Figure 2.3).

Figure 2.3 – Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) and Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI)



- 2.8 The southern part of the District supports habitats characteristic of chalk outcrops. These include lowland calcareous grassland such as the Fontmell and Melbury Downs Special Area of Conservation (SAC) to the south of Shaftesbury and chalk streams such as the North Winterborne south and west of Blandford.
- 2.9 The Blackmore Vale & the Vale of Wardour Natural Area has a more varied geology and in North Dorset limestone and greensand ridges sit alongside rolling farmland and clay vale landscapes. Some remnants of ancient woodland remain such as Piddles Wood Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) south of Sturminster Newton,

² See Section 5 of the North Dorset Landscape Character Area Assessment (March 2008)

as do important wetland habitats such as the Blackmore Vale Commons and Moors SSSI south of Stalbridge.

3. Policy Context

- 3.1 This section outlines the international policy context within which the policies relevant to the Natural Environment and Climate Change have been formulated. The national and more local policy context is set out under the separate headings of The Natural Environment and Climate Change.

International Policy

- 3.2 International agreements and EU Directives drive much of our national agenda on sustainable development, climate change and other environmental issues. The Rio “Earth summit” in 1992 was an important first step in persuading governments around the world to commit to sustainable development, the aim being to prevent the continued degradation of the environment and to lay a foundation for global partnership between developing and more industrialised countries.
- 3.3 United Nations resolution 42/187 recognised that sustainable development, which implies meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs, should become a central guiding principle for all organisations. This led to the production of the UK Sustainable Development Strategy Securing the Future with its five principles of:
- living within the planet’s environmental limits;
 - ensuring a strong, healthy and just society;
 - achieving a sustainable economy;
 - promoting good governance; and
 - using sound science responsibly.
- 3.4 In 1997 the Kyoto protocol recognised the connection between greenhouse gas emissions and anthropogenic climate change. The Renewable Energy Directive (2009) puts in place a common framework across the EU for the use of energy from renewable sources and sets a target for the UK to achieve 15% of its energy consumption from renewable sources by 2020.
- 3.5 There have also been a number of agreements and directives to protect wildlife, in particular:
- The Birds Directive (79/409/EEC) which makes provision for the designation of Special Protection Areas (SPA);
 - The Habitats Directive (92/43/EEC) which makes provision for the designation of Special Areas of Conservation (SAC); and
 - The Convention on Wetlands of International Importance especially as Waterfowl Habitat (Ramsar Convention 1971) which makes provision for the designation of Ramsar Sites.

- 3.6 In 2010, a Strategic Plan for Biodiversity 2011 – 2020 was adopted internationally. This strategy recognises the importance of biodiversity and ecosystems as essential for human well-being and aims to take action to halt biodiversity loss. The strategy contained 20 “Aichi Biodiversity Targets” important to achieving its strategic goals.
- 3.7 In addition there have been a number of agreements and directives to promote resource conservation including the Water Framework Directive, 2000/60/EC which seeks to improve the quality of inland and coastal water systems; and the Waste to Landfill Directive, 99/31/EC which seeks to reduce the impact of landfill on the environment.

National Policy

- 3.8 The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) sets out the main national planning policy context for the Natural Environment and Climate Change. At the heart of the document is a definition of what sustainable development is in relation to the planning system and the “presumption in favour of sustainable development”. It defines three roles that the planning system must perform to help achieve this:
- an economic role - through its contribution to building a strong, responsive and competitive economy, by ensuring that sufficient land of the right type is available in the right places and at the right time to support economic growth and innovation; and by identifying and coordinating development requirements, including the provision of infrastructure;
 - a social role - through its support for strong, vibrant and healthy communities, by providing the supply of housing required to meet the needs of present and future generations; and by creating a high quality built environment, with accessible local services that reflect the community’s needs and supports its health, social and cultural well-being; and
 - an environmental role - through contributing to the protection and enhancement of our natural, built and historic environment; and, as part of this, helping to improve biodiversity, use of natural resources prudently, minimise waste and pollution, and mitigate and adapt to climate change including moving to a low carbon economy.
- 3.9 The NPPF sets out that these three roles should be sought jointly and simultaneously through the planning system and that development should be guided to sustainable locations as part of this. The NPPF goes on to set out twelve Core Principles that underpin the role of planning in delivering sustainable development.
- 3.10 In relation to Climate Change, one of the twelve Core Principles states that planning should “Support the transition to a low carbon future in a changing climate, taking full account of flood risk and coastal change, and encourage the reuse of existing

resources, including conversion of existing buildings, and encouraging the use of renewable resources (for example, by the development of renewable energy)".

- 3.11 In relation to the natural environment, these planning principles suggest that planning should "take account of the different roles and character of different areas... ..recognising the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside". It goes on to set out that planning should "contribute to conserving and enhancing the natural environment and reducing pollution" with allocations being directed towards "land of lesser environmental value".

Climate Change Policy

- 3.12 Section 10 of the NPPF also sets out the role of planning in tackling the challenge of climate change and flooding. This includes securing reductions in greenhouse gas emissions, minimising vulnerability to and providing resilience to the impacts of climate change and supporting the development of renewable and low carbon energy. The Local Planning Authority should "adopt proactive strategies to mitigate and adapt to climate change".
- 3.13 To help move towards a low carbon future, Local Planning Authorities should:
- Plan development in locations and ways which reduce greenhouse gas emissions;
 - Support energy efficiency improvements to existing buildings; and
 - Be consistent with national standards and zero carbon buildings policy.
- 3.14 The NPPF also states that there is a responsibility for all communities to contribute to energy generation from renewable or low carbon sources. This includes:
- having a positive strategy to promote energy from renewable and low carbon sources;
 - considering cumulative landscape and visual impacts;
 - considering identifying areas where low carbon and renewable energy development may be suitable; and
 - supporting the role of neighbourhood planning in delivering renewable and low carbon energy.
- 3.15 In taking a long term view, the NPPF highlights the need to take account of flood risk, water supply and changes to biodiversity and landscape. It also highlights the need for the incorporation of Green Infrastructure to help tackle these issues and re-establishes the sequential test to avoid areas of high flood risk.
- 3.16 Energy White Paper: Our Energy Future – Creating a Low Carbon Economy (2003) sets a target for the reduction of CO₂ emissions of 60% by 2050 against 1990 levels. The 2009 Energy White Paper set a higher target of 80% reduction by 2050.
- 3.17 The Climate Change Act 2008 introduced a legally binding target of reducing greenhouse gas emissions by at least 80% by 2050 and at least 34% by 2020 against

the 1990 baseline. The target was to be achieved through the setting of five-year carbon budgets amongst other measures.

- 3.18 The Renewable Energy Roadmap 2011 sets out an action plan for deployment and use of renewable energy and sets out the route to the 2020 target of 15% of energy usage. The Roadmap identifies eight technologies that have the greatest potential to help achieve the 2020 target. These are onshore wind, offshore wind, marine energy, biomass electricity, biomass heat, ground source heat pumps, air source heat pumps and renewable transport fuels. It also highlights the role of other technologies such as hydropower and solar PV.
- 3.19 Planning decisions on nationally significant infrastructure are made by the National Infrastructure Directorate within the Planning Inspectorate. These decisions are made having regard to National Policy Statements with six being approved in relation to energy, including EN-3 Renewable Energy. Renewable and low carbon energy proposals over 50MW are considered under this consent regime.
- 3.20 There are a number of national initiatives which seek to incentivise the deployment of certain renewable energy technologies primarily on the domestic scale. These are Feed in Tariffs which provide a payment for renewable electricity generated from micro renewable sources such as solar PV or micro-hydro; and the Renewable Heat Incentive which makes a payment for heat produced from renewable sources such as biomass or heat pumps. These incentives make renewable energy more financially viable and hence more attractive as an investment.
- 3.21 It was calculated that in 2004, more than a quarter of the UK's carbon emissions came from energy used in our homes. In addition, the construction and use of our homes has a range of other environmental impacts such as water use and waste generation. The Code for Sustainable Homes provides a standard by which the sustainability of new homes can be measured. The Code sets a standard for key elements of design and construction which are measures against nine criteria: energy/CO₂, water, materials, surface water runoff, waste, pollution, health and well-being, management and ecology. Currently, it is mandatory to have a new dwelling assessed against the Code but not mandatory to achieve a particular Code level. The Government have recently consulted on a new set of standards for new dwellings, moving away from the Code for Sustainable Homes.
- 3.22 Building Regulations Part L related to energy usage, will gradually be tightened to improve the energy performance of new homes. The aim was that all new homes were to achieve "zero carbon" by 2016 (i.e. that the emissions from a new dwelling would effectively be zero). Research has shown that in certain situations it is not technically possible to achieve zero carbon on-site. Zero carbon now only relates to

emissions regulated through building regulations³ (heating, fixed lighting, hot water and building services) and not from plug-in appliances (such as computers and televisions).

- 3.23 “Carbon compliance” represents the measures taken on-site to achieve zero carbon with “allowable solutions” being offsite measures funded through contributions from developers. The NPPF states that “local planning authorities should... ..when setting any local requirement for a building’s sustainability, do so in a way consistent with the Government’s zero carbon buildings policy and adopt nationally described standards”.
- 3.24 Another recent initiative to improve the energy efficiency of buildings in the UK is the Green Deal. The Green Deal is designed to help householders and businesses to improve the energy efficiency of properties. It enables energy saving improvements to be made without having to pay all the costs up front but by offsetting payments through energy bills. Energy saving improvements that qualify include insulation, heating, draft proofing, double glazing and renewable energy technologies.
- 3.25 In July 2013, the Government released guidance for renewable and low carbon energy. This highlighted the role of the Local Plan in delivering renewable and low carbon energy and set out the matters that should be considered. These include consideration of:
- the range of technologies appropriate to the local area;
 - the changing viability of certain renewable and low carbon technologies;
 - the impacts of technologies in different areas; and
 - the UK’s legal commitment to reduce greenhouse gas emissions.
- 3.26 The guidance sets out a number of criteria that could be considered in relation to renewable and low carbon energy proposals and when formulating planning policies. It suggests that Landscape Character Areas should be used to undertake an assessment of the visual impact including the cumulative impact of a proposal. In addition, the Environment Agency has published a number of guidance notes on the technologies they regulate, offering advice on their location and suitability in certain areas.
- 3.27 The criteria that the guidance suggests are pertinent include:
- the need for environmental protection;

³ Plan For Growth – Phase One, HM Treasury March 2013:
http://www.hm-treasury.gov.uk/ukecon_growth_index.htm

Action point 9 “The Government is announcing the regulatory requirements for zero carbon homes, to apply from 2016. To ensure that it remains viable to build new houses, the Government will hold housebuilders accountable only for those carbon dioxide emissions that are covered by Building Regulations, and will provide cost-effective means through which they can do this.”

- the cumulative impacts of schemes on the landscape and local amenity;
- local topography;
- the need to conserve heritage assets;
- the impact on designated landscapes such as AONBs; and
- the impact on local amenity including relating to noise, shadow flicker and safety.

3.28 The Government's Roadmap to a Brighter Future published in October 2013 set out four principles to guide solar PV developments in the UK. These established a clear role for PV to reduce carbon emissions whilst ensuring that proposals are appropriately sited taking into account the impact on landscape and visual impact, heritage assets and local amenity.

Natural Environment Policy

3.29 Section 11 of the NPPF focuses on the natural environment and sets out the role of the planning system in its conservation and enhancement. Reference is made to:

- valued landscapes, geological conservation interests and soils;
- the wider benefits of ecosystem services;
- impact on biodiversity;
- consideration of pollution and land stability and;
- the remediation of contaminated land.

3.30 The NPPF suggests that planning policies should encourage the reuse of previously developed land as long as it is not of high environmental value and should consider the merits of incorporating a target for the reuse of such land. It also suggests that the best and most versatile agricultural land should be taken into account.

3.31 The NPPF gives great weight to the conservation of the landscape and scenic beauty of the AONB and also to conserving wildlife and cultural heritage. In relation to biodiversity, landscape-scale solutions should be sought and these should include measures to preserve, restore and re-create priority habitats.

3.32 The ecosystem approach to the natural environment provides a framework for making decisions which looks at the whole ecosystem and the services it provides to ensure that these services continue to function effectively. Different elements of the ecosystem are complex and interrelated. Ecosystem services are the services provided by the natural environment that benefit people. These include:

- Provisioning services – the products we obtain from the natural environment such as food and materials;
- Regulating services – the natural environment processes we benefit from such as water purification and climate regulation;
- Cultural services – the benefits we obtain from a high quality natural environment such as education and wellbeing; and

- Supporting services – the functions that support other ecosystem services such as soil production and nutrient cycling.
- 3.33 The Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 implements various international directives in Great Britain. The Act protects wild birds and their nests, certain wild animals, their habitats and certain plants listed in the Schedules to the Act. The Act also makes provision for the designation of Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) and puts in place a mechanism for protecting moor or heath within National Parks.
- 3.34 The Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 provides for public access on foot to certain types of land (Access Land), amends law related to rights of way, increases measures for the protection of SSSI and listed species and provides for better management of AONB. In relation to AONB, the Act outlines the role of a conservation board in conserving and enhancing the natural beauty of the area having regard to the economic and social well-being of local communities within the area. National Nature Reserves (NNRs) are the very best SSSIs for research and appreciation of habitats and species.
- 3.35 The UK Biodiversity Framework is the UK approach to delivering on the international Strategic Plan for Biodiversity 2011-2020. It sets out the joint approach being taken across the four countries that make up the UK and moves away from a piecemeal approach towards a focus on managing the environment as a whole. The framework effectively supersedes the UK Biodiversity Action Plan however the priority species and habitats lists are still relevant. For England, within this UK framework Biodiversity 2020 has the aims of halting biodiversity loss, supporting healthy and well-functioning ecosystems and establishing coherent ecological networks with more and better places for nature for the benefit of wildlife and people.
- 3.36 National Nature Reserves (NNRs) are declared by Natural England under the National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act 1949 and the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981. Local Nature Reserves (LNRs) are designated by Local Authorities under the National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act (1949). These designations are used to offer protection to and opportunities for the study of wildlife and other natural features. Other designations such as Regionally Important Geological Sites (RIGS) and County Wildlife Sites (e.g. Sites of Nature Conservation Interest - SNCIs) are also designated locally.
- 3.37 The Water Framework Directive requires the management of water at a river basin level. The South West River Basin Management Plan covers the North Dorset area. It outlines the issues facing the water environment in the South West and seeks to improve water quality including incorporation of SuDS into developments.
- 3.38 The Government has undertaken a review of all waste policy to move towards a “zero waste” economy. The Waste (England and Wales) (Amendment) Regulations 2012 came into force on 1 October 2012.

Local Policy

- 3.39 The major issues facing the rural County are set out in “Shaping our Future” the Dorset Sustainable Community Strategy 2010-2020. The strategy highlights the challenges that face Dorset in relation to its high quality environment. These include:
- The economic, cultural and social asset that is the natural, built and historic environment and the pressure that is put upon this by people who live, work and visit the area;
 - The risks posed to the coast, rivers and soils from climate change and increased visitor numbers;
 - The challenge of climate change and the impact on, for example, the economy, people’s health, biodiversity and landscape;
 - The proximity of the internationally protected habitats to major urban areas and the conflict with the need for sustainable growth, the challenge being to integrate these successfully; and
 - The demand for natural resources to support the population and manage waste.

Climate Change Policy

- 3.40 The Dorset Local Authorities have produced a joint Renewable Energy Strategy to 2020. This strategy sets the agenda for renewable energy in Bournemouth, Dorset and Poole to 2020 and identifies six key areas for priority action:
- Supporting the development of community renewable energy;
 - Maximising the local economic benefits of renewable energy generation;
 - Creating a more supportive planning system for renewable energy;
 - Developing locally appropriate technologies;
 - Delivering leadership and partnerships that support renewable energy; and
 - Improving renewable energy communications and learning.
- 3.41 The strategy has been endorsed by North Dorset District Council subject to further work being undertaken in relation to targets. This further work relates to a resource assessment and landscape sensitivity analysis.
- 3.42 The Bournemouth, Dorset and Poole Energy Efficiency Strategy (2009) complements the renewable energy strategy by placing the emphasis on the need to improve energy efficiency and curb energy demand before looking to the need to produce more energy. Many of the actions tackle the need to engage the community in reducing their energy use and are therefore outside the remit of planning policy. However, the research undertaken paints a picture of current energy demand and the need for a huge step up in the level of retro fitting and lifestyle change to achieve the level of reduction in carbon emissions set by the government. The Council is therefore working with the Carbon Trust and Energy

Savings Trust to identify opportunities and actions to work towards national targets.

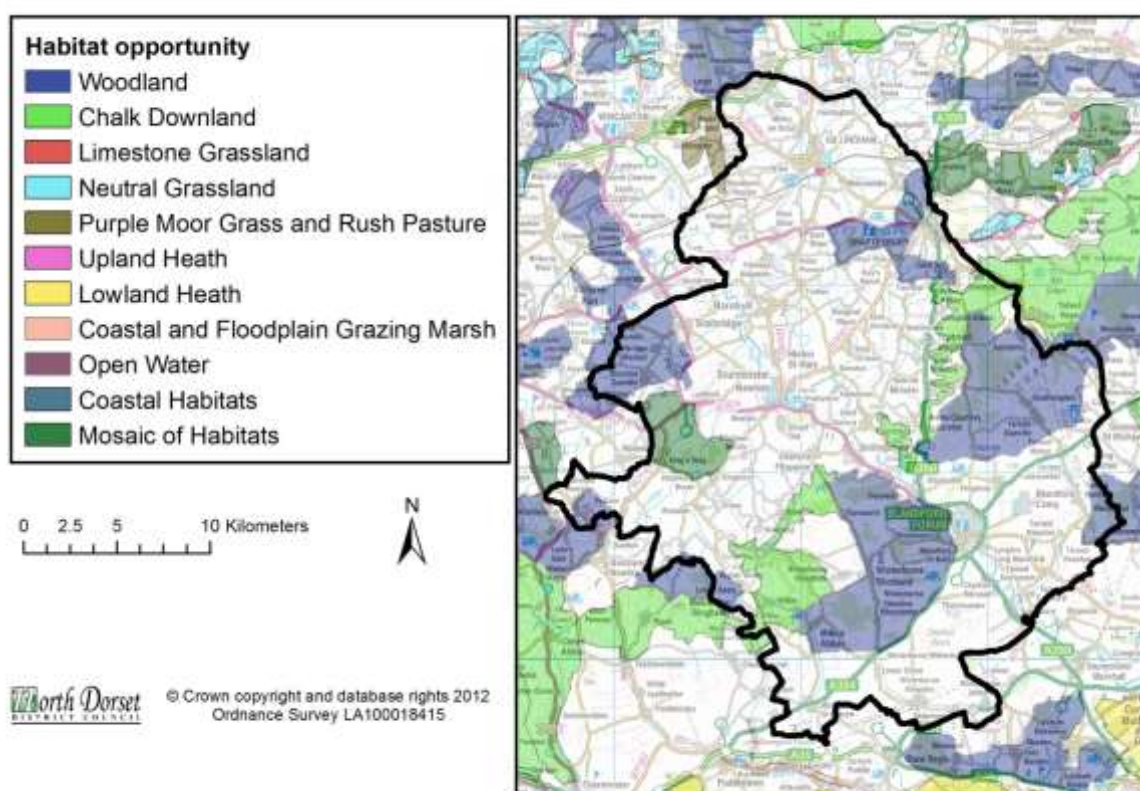
Natural Environment Policy

- 3.43 At the regional level, the South West Nature Map (Figure 3.1) identifies the best areas in the region (and therefore the district) to conserve, create and connect wildlife habitats at landscape scale. The Map should be used at the local level to move from a site-based to a wider landscape scale approach to wildlife protection and enhancement, with spatial planning policies designed to manage future development in a way which links, buffers and re-creates wildlife habitats, rather than further fragmenting them.
- 3.44 The Dorset Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan (2003) seeks to ensure that the national targets for species and habitats are met at the local level. It states that although Dorset is one of the richest Counties for wildlife in England, nevertheless it has seen widespread declines in semi natural habitats and populations of rare and common species. The need to reverse this fragmentation is made more urgent by predicted climate change. The UK Biodiversity Strategy lists 45 priority habitats for action; of these 32 occur in Dorset and 6 in North Dorset.
- 3.45 Due to cross boundary issues, protection of the internationally designated Dorset heathlands from harm resulting from development pressures requires a strategic approach. Local Planning Authorities in South East Dorset are working together to develop a long term strategy to protect these designated sites, the Dorset Heathlands Joint Development Plan Document.
- 3.46 The interim approach developed in South East Dorset is to restrict all development within 400m of protected heathland sites and to take a contribution from all developments within 5km of a protected heathland to put towards mitigation of the impact.
- 3.47 A few protected heathlands fall within 5km of the District boundary, however the Heathlands DPD, which is being prepared by the authorities in South East Dorset, will not cover the North Dorset area. The District Council, through its Local Plan policy has established an approach similar to that outlined in the draft Heathlands Joint Development Plan Document which seeks to secure a contribution from each new dwelling within the 5km zone of influence to help fund mitigation measures on the Dorset heaths.
- 3.48 Nitrogen loading on Poole Harbour from diffuse sources has increased significantly over the past 100 years and is predicted to continue to grow. The result of this is eutrophication leading to macroalgal growth.
- 3.49 To reduce this impact, the Environment Agency and Natural England have produced a Strategy for Managing Nitrogen in the Poole Harbour Catchment with the aim of achieving favourable condition of the SPA and where possible, good

status by 2027. This also helps meet the objectives of the Water Framework Directive.

- 3.50 Although the majority of the nitrogen loading on the harbour results from agricultural practices, there is an impact resulting from new development within the harbour catchment. Part of the District is within this catchment and therefore to meet its obligations under the EU Habitats Directive, the District Council has put in place a mechanism for reducing the impact of new development on Poole Harbour, having regard to the approach outlined in the Environment Agency and Natural England Strategy

Figure 3.1 – South West Nature Map for Dorset



- 3.51 The Dorset Local Geodiversity Action Plan is concerned with the geology, geomorphology, soils and landscapes of Dorset. Geodiversity is important to biodiversity but also the local character and the landscape of the area. The strategy aims to conserve and enhance the geological resource and increase appreciation and understanding of the geological heritage of the area.
- 3.52 The two AONB which cover parts of North Dorset have produced management plans that set out in detail the features which make the areas special, their visions for the future and the actions necessary to realise the visions. These actions have implications for policies being developed by the Council. The Council has endorsed the management plans for each of the AONBs.

- 3.53 The Cranborne Chase and West Wiltshire Downs AONB Management Plan covers the period 2009 to 2014. The priorities of this strategy are: to increase the awareness and understanding of the AONB; conserve and enhance the landscape character, habitats, species and tranquillity of the AONB; conserve and enhance the historic, archaeological and cultural features within their distinctive landscape settings; support and influence innovative ways of maintaining and providing access to community facilities and services; conserve and enhance the distinctive character of the built environment within its historic, cultural and landscape setting; promote the management of the impact of traffic on the AONB and; support the rural economy in ways that are sustainable.
- 3.54 The Dorset AONB Management Plan outlines several objectives under the themes of landscape; biodiversity; geodiversity; coast and sea; historic and built environment; land management and local products; access; enjoying and learning; planning development and infrastructure; and community action.
- 3.55 The Joint Municipal Waste Management Strategy for Dorset was published in April 2009. It sets out the approach to managing waste in Dorset and follows the principles set out in the Waste Strategy for England (2007). The objectives of the strategy follow the waste hierarchy and include: reduction of all waste; high recycling and composting rates; residual waste treatment and recovery and; minimal landfill especially of untreated waste.

4. Issues arising from Stakeholder and Community Consultations

Consultation 2007 – “Issues and Options”

- 4.1 The community’s views on the key issues arising out of the national and emerging regional policy framework were sought when the Council undertook consultation on the issues and options⁴ for a ‘stand-alone’ core strategy in June – July 2007. This consultation on issues and options was based on the draft Regional Spatial Strategy for the South West.
- 4.2 The Council suggested that the contribution to, and the effects of climate change could be mitigated in part by directing growth in a sustainable manner. In this way the potential impacts of pollution, carbon dioxide emissions and flooding would be carefully managed, and the need to travel would be minimised. In addition, development would be expected to incorporate sustainable construction methods and make a significant contribution towards meeting statutory targets relating to renewable energy. Various options for ways in which we could reduce the contribution to, and the effects of, climate change were suggested.
- 4.3 The options were not mutually exclusive, and in general terms, respondents were supportive of a variety of solutions to address climate change. The majority supported sustainable construction methods and integrated micro renewable targets that were higher than government standards on the grounds that current UK standards were lower than those in other European countries. There was also qualified support for renewable energy installations provided that they were medium scale community projects, with design and landscape issues being the main concerns.
- 4.4 With regard to environmental assets, the majority of respondents considered that the Core Strategy should take a wide view of environmental protection which encompasses enhancement as well as protection. Climate change, biodiversity and landscape character were considered important and the need to protect locally important, but undesignated, sites was also mentioned. Respondents were equally divided regarding the priority which should be given to the environment when considering the need for development although it was pointed out that environmental protection was controlled in most cases by national policy. The need for a more integrated approach to the planning, delivery and maintenance of open

⁴ Core Strategy: Issues and Alternative Options – North Dorset District Council (June 2007)
<http://www.dorsetforyou.com/396679>

space through a “green infrastructure” strategy was fully supported by those who responded.

Consultation 2010 – “The draft New Plan”

- 4.5 In relation to the themes covered by this Background Paper, the draft New Plan as produced in 2010 received general support⁵. The key points raised that were relevant to these topics are outlined below.
- 4.6 The delivery of a balance between jobs and housing, which should increase self-containment and reduce the need to travel, was specifically supported. There was also support for the proposed Green Infrastructure Strategy incorporating small play areas as well as larger landscape scale schemes offering opportunities for the production of wood as a fuel source, for recreation and for habitat creation.
- 4.7 The importance of the rural economy was also highlighted; especially in relation to food production and the need for an emphasis on the reuse of previously developed land.
- 4.8 Concern was raised about the impact of the sustainability requirements on development viability and the affordability for local residents, of the dwellings that are built. It was suggested that the sum total of all the requirements in the Core Strategy (affordable housing, renewable energy, other sustainability measures etc) may make developments unviable. To this end it was suggested that the Council should not push ahead of the national timetable for implementing Zero Carbon Homes.
- 4.9 In relation to sustainable construction techniques, there was a reasonable level of support for all buildings both residential and commercial, to incorporate all possible measures to tackle climate change including the highest levels of energy efficiency; renewable technologies; water efficiency including the use of grey water; and passive solar design.
- 4.10 Respondents felt that the retro-fitting of energy efficiency measures and micro-generation technologies to listed buildings should be looked upon favourably. It was also suggested that areas off mains gas should be targeted for energy efficiency measures to reduce the cost of living and improve general well-being.
- 4.11 Concern was raised about the impact of renewable energy technologies on the District. It was suggested that only technologies appropriate to the location and available energy resource should be considered and the visual impact on locally sensitive views should be taken into account. It was suggested that an assessment of the resource and landscape impact should be undertaken.

⁵ The New Plan for North Dorset consultation responses report:
<http://www.dorsetforyou.com/media.jsp?mediaid=174202&filetype=pdf>

- 4.12 Energy from waste was highlighted as an opportunity including the development of anaerobic digestion plants. This should be incorporated into policy in a similar way to other renewable technologies.
- 4.13 The availability of water resource was raised as an issue and suggestions were that the use of rainwater/grey water harvesting and water efficiency measures should be encouraged.
- 4.14 It was suggested that the strategy concentrated on the main risk of climate change, namely increased flood risk and ignored the impacts on the water resource, on landscape, on biodiversity and other impacts. It was also suggested that the strategy should explicitly make the link between transport and climate change and incorporate measures to reduce emissions from this source.
- 4.15 There was support for avoiding flood prone areas and for incorporating flood alleviation measures into all new developments however concern was also raised over the potential conflict between such measures and the protection of wildlife habitats.
- 4.16 It was suggested that the requirements for Green Infrastructure should be spelt out early so that they can be built into development proposals from the outset and not seen as a “bolt-on”. The provision of more allotments was a recurring theme throughout the consultation responses. The importance of hedgerows within Green Infrastructure was highlighted as was the importance of native trees and orchards, particularly for biodiversity.
- 4.17 The loss of green space within settlements was a concern as was the importance of landscaping schemes incorporating bat boxes and native shrubs. The aim in relation to biological and geological conservation should be to seek enhancement of the resource.
- 4.18 The landscape character in relation to the AONBs within the District was highlighted and the level of protection that AONBs are afforded was emphasised. There was a suggestion that best practice guidelines be produced for development within the AONB.
- 4.19 The pollution of rivers with high nitrate levels as a result of inefficient and inadequate sewage treatment plants was raised as a concern.

Key Issues Consultation 2012

- 4.20 Although the Key Issues Consultation didn't ask any specific questions about the approach to the Natural Environment or Climate Change, several comments were received raising issues. The main responses highlighted the lack of a strategic approach to enhancing the natural environment as required by the NPPF and the lack of an analysis of the need for Green Infrastructure. It was suggested that the Infrastructure Delivery Plan needs to be amended to reflect this.

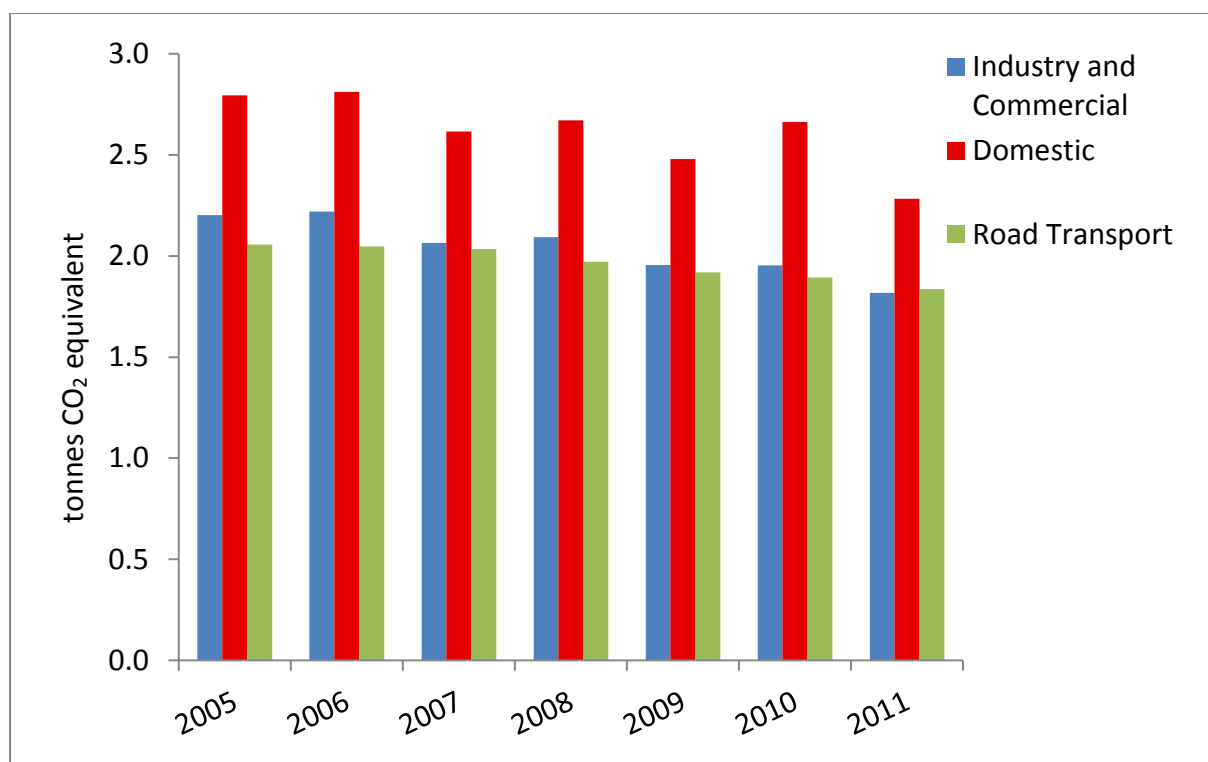
5. Issues from the Evidence Base

5.1 To inform the production of the Core Strategy, the Council has produced several pieces of evidence⁶ on issues relevant to the environment. These studies and other evidence are outlined in this section.

CO₂ Emissions

5.2 North Dorset emitted about 6.0 tonnes of CO₂ per capita in 2011, in line with the Dorset average. The rate of emissions has been steadily falling since 2006 when emissions were at about 7.1 tonnes of CO₂ per capita. Figure 5.1 shows CO₂ emissions from the three main sectors and indicates that the domestic sector is responsible for the highest emissions. Emissions of CO₂ from domestic sources primarily originate from electricity consumption (Figure 5.2). However both gas and 'other fuels' are mainly used for space heating and cooking and therefore it can be seen that improving energy efficiency of buildings will reduce emissions from this source.

Figure 5.1: North Dorset per-capita CO₂ emissions (estimates)

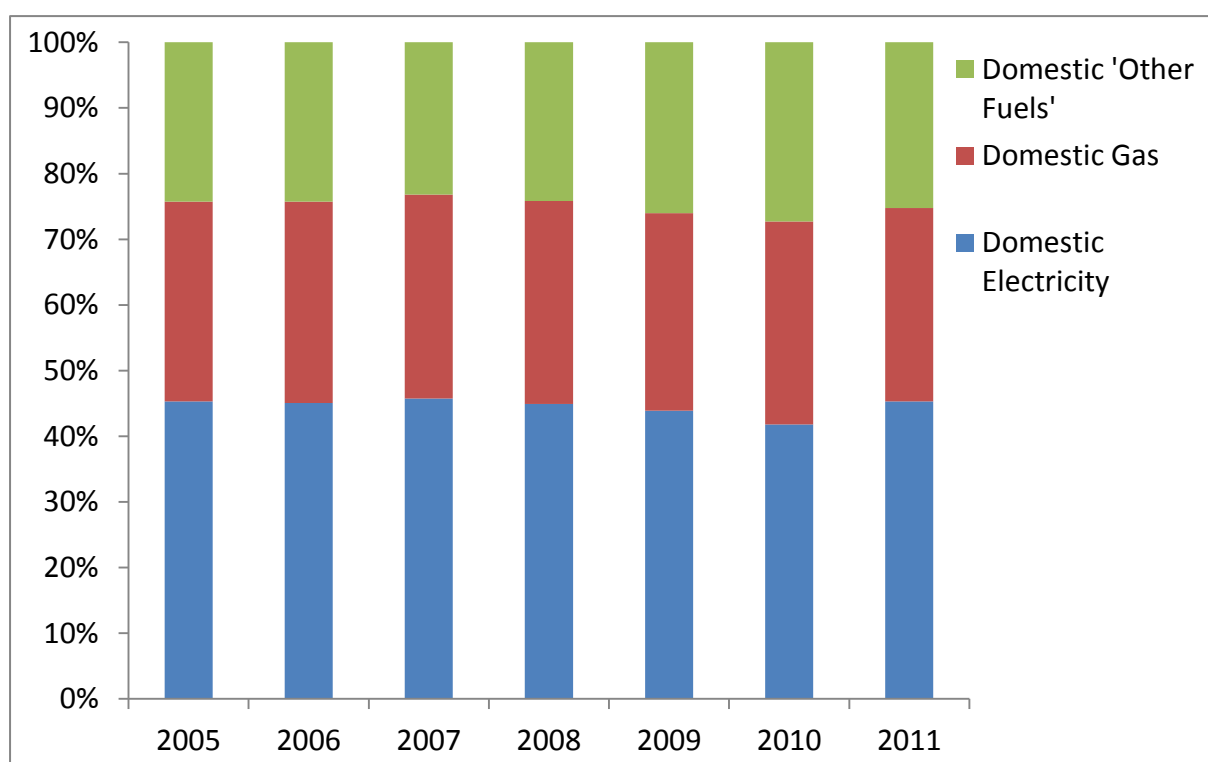


⁶ The evidence base studies produced or commissioned by North Dorset District Council can be found at: <http://www.dorsetforyou.com/evidence/north>

REvision 2020

5.3 REvision 2020 was prepared to inform the emerging revision of the South West Regional Spatial Strategy (RSS). The precursor to this report, REvision 2010 proposed targets for the delivery of renewable energy on a county basis with the target for Dorset of between 64 and 84 MW of installed capacity. The Coalition Government revoked regional spatial strategies before the 'emerging' RSS revision was adopted. However the work undertaken for REvision 2020 is still relevant. REvision 2020 suggests a target for Dorset as a whole of 1,247 MW electricity and 503 MW heat by 2020 with an on-site requirement of 10% within new development.

Figure 5.2: Domestic CO₂ emissions by use



River Stour Catchment Flood Management Plan

5.4 The River Stour Catchment Flood Management Plan (2012) aids the Environment Agency in understanding the scale and extent of flooding now and in the future, and sets policies for managing flood risk within the catchment.

5.5 The upper catchment consists of impermeable clays of the Blackmore Vale resulting in shallow valleys with wide floodplains. The central band of permeable chalk on Cranborne Chase results in steeper valleys and narrow floodplains. The lower catchment has the semi-permeable sands, clays and gravels of the Dorset Heaths. Run-off and changes in water levels are rapid in the many streams on the clays. Water levels rise more slowly in the rivers across the chalk, the rivers being fed by groundwater.

- 5.6 The main issue arising from the Stour Catchment Flood Management Plan is the need for the use of SuDS to ensure no increase in runoff from new developments and to seek opportunities to reduce runoff, where possible.

Strategic Flood Risk Assessment

- 5.7 The Level 1 Strategic Flood Risk Assessment (SFRA) (2008) was jointly commissioned by the authorities located within the Stour and Avon catchment areas in response to the requirements of PPS 25 and its associated Good Practice Guide. Since then PPS 25 has been replaced by the NPPF but the need for a SFRA is still in place.
- 5.8 The SFRA is a desk based study using existing information to allow application of the Sequential Test as set out in the technical guide to the NPPF and to identify whether application of the Exception Test is likely to be necessary. It indicates that:
- climate change is predicted to exacerbate both river and groundwater flooding. Flood zone maps, taking climate change into account, have been produced. Where new development is necessary in areas of higher risk the Council will need to apply the “sequential test” and, if necessary, the “exception test”. Information in the SFRA enables the authority to undertake these tests;
 - North Dorset is susceptible to groundwater flooding from the chalk aquifer as well as river flooding from the River Stour and its tributaries. Groundwater events can be inconsistent and difficult to predict but can cause severe disruption. The mapping of historical flood events is the only means of understanding current susceptibility;
 - there are historical incidents of sewer flooding, probably due to network incapacity. Wessex Water are aware of these and intend to rectify any issues that exist;
 - there are 12 reservoirs which pose various levels of risk. If development downstream is proposed, a detailed breach and overtopping assessment would be required;
 - similar assessment would be required for any development proposed behind existing flood defences (e.g. in Blandford Forum, Gillingham and at locations along the River Winterborne);
 - in the application of SuDS techniques, it is recommended that priority is given to surface water techniques due to the generally permeable soils. However, each site should confirm that infiltration will not increase the risk of groundwater flooding.

Wildlife Sites and Habitats

- 5.9 There are a number of designated wildlife and heritage assets within North Dorset, including designated wildlife sites, scheduled monuments, listed buildings, conservation areas etc.

- 5.10 internationally, nationally and locally designated wildlife sites include:
- 2 internationally important sites (SACs);
 - 40 Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs);
 - 201 Sites of Nature Conservation Interest (SNClIs) and;
 - 11 Regionally Important Geological Sites (RIGS).
- 5.11 6 of the 45 national priority habitats listed in the UK Biodiversity Action Plan have been identified as being priorities for North Dorset:
- lowland mixed deciduous woodland;
 - wood pasture;
 - species rich hedgerows;
 - calcareous grasslands;
 - chalk streams and ponds and;
 - ancient semi-natural woodlands, including ancient replanted woodlands which have the potential to be restored through appropriate management. Ancient replanted woodlands are ancient semi-natural woodlands that have been densely replanted with broadleaves, such as Beech, or conifers.
- 5.12 The protection and enhancement of these sites, habitats and species is closely regulated by national policy and legislation.

Habitats Regulations Assessment

- 5.13 To accompany the proposals included in the 2010 draft New Plan, a draft Habitats Regulations Assessment (HRA) was produced looking at the potential impacts of the policies and proposals in the New Plan on biodiversity and habitats particularly in relation to the “Natura 2000” (N2K) sites as designated under the EU Habitats Directive. A revised HRA has been produced to accompany the revised approach being taken in the Local Plan Part 1.
- 5.14 The assessment looks at the Natura 2000 sites where there is a potential pathway between the site and a proposal within the Local Plan Part 1. These sites are discussed in more detail in Appendix A.
- 5.15 Pathways can be man-made or natural and can include pollutants carried along a watercourse or traffic increase along a road resulting from development. The HRA looked at sites within 20km of the District boundary to check for potential impacts. The results of the HRA are summarised in Figure 5.3.

Figure 5.3: HRA results summary

Sites potentially affected	Possible impacts resulting from development	Mitigation measures
Dorset Heathlands SPA Dorset Heathlands Ramsar Dorset Heaths SAC	Potential impact on the Dorset heaths resulting from development with a 5km “zone of influence” of the heaths. This covers a small area in the southern part of the District.	Developments within the “zone of influence” will be required to contribute towards mitigation. Mitigation could be direct works on the heath sites or provision of alternative recreation space.
Rooksmoor SAC	The long term management of the Rooksmoor site is not secured and it is vulnerable to a number of factors including scrub encroachment.	Management is secured through grazing up to 2025 but the longer term position may have implications for the Council.
Rooksmoor SAC Fontmell and Melbury Downs SAC	Increased traffic through the sites will increase air pollution. The sites are therefore vulnerable to increased traffic.	Traffic reduction and sustainable transport measures, as included in the plan, should be implemented to reduce impacts on the sites. Monitoring measures will be put in place to establish a baseline position.
Fontmell and Melbury Downs SAC	Increased recreational pressure may result from development at Shaftesbury.	Ensure monitoring is in place to highlight any impacts and that mechanisms are in place to resolve any issues that arise.
Poole Harbour SPA	Increased recreational pressure on the harbour causing disturbance to wild birds.	Evidence rules out a direct impact so no mitigation necessary.
Poole Harbour SPA	Increased nitrogen deposition in Poole Harbour resulting from developments within the catchment.	The Local Plan makes reference to the Strategy for Managing Nitrogen in the Poole Harbour Catchment with the aim of making developments within the catchment nitrogen neutral.
New Forest SAC/SPA/Ramsar	Increased recreational pressure identified arising from development within 20km of the forest. Small parts of the District are within 20km but evidence suggests that the effects would not be significant.	The Council should maintain a dialogue with the relevant authorities to ensure that it participates in joint working.
River Avon SAC	Potential water quality and	Liaise with Wessex Water and

Sites potentially affected	Possible impacts resulting from development	Mitigation measures
	water resource issues resulting from development at Shaftesbury where a tributary of this river runs close to the town.	the Environment Agency to ensure that development within the District does not adversely impact on the River Avon.

- 5.16 Rooksmoor SAC forms part of a much larger SSSI. This SSSI has recently been enlarged to take into account the areas which support the protected species and support the Rooksmoor SAC itself.
- 5.17 The recommendations of the HRA have been incorporated into the Local Plan. Where monitoring has been suggested, indicators will be developed to identify any adverse impacts. A dialogue will be established with the relevant bodies to ensure that the Council plays its part in the longer term management of the sites where potential impacts have been identified.

Landscape Character Assessment

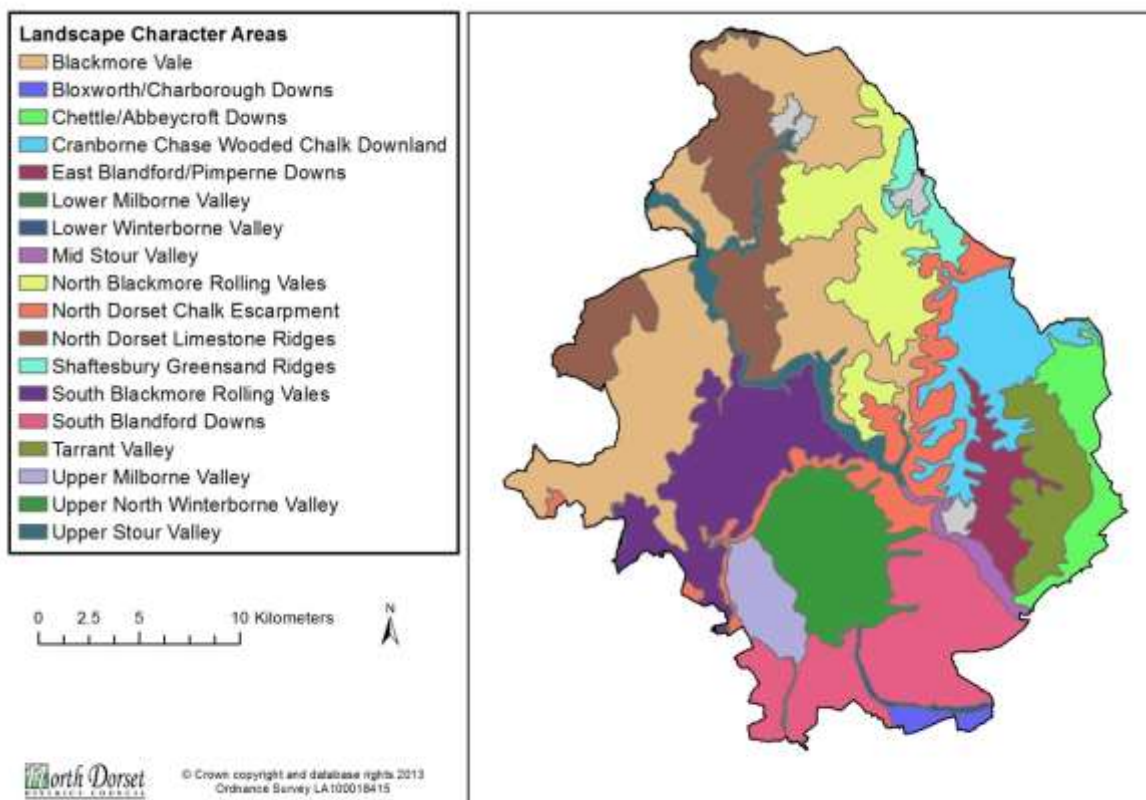
- 5.18 The District-wide Landscape Character Assessment and associated addendum (2008) was commissioned by the Council to provide a structured framework for describing the landscapes of North Dorset. There are eight landscape character types (Figure 5.4) in the district divided further into 18 landscape character areas (Figure 5.5). The assessment describes their key characteristics. If these characteristics should change or be lost, there would be significant consequences for the current character of the landscape.
- 5.19 In addition to the District-wide Landscape Character assessment and as a result of the consultation on the draft New Plan, a landscape impact assessment of the potential housing sites adjoining Blandford and Shaftesbury, as identified in the District Council's Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment (SHLAA) was undertaken. The results of these site based assessments have influenced the site selection around these two towns, with more detail on this being included in the Market Towns Site Selection Background Paper.

Figure 5.4: North Dorset Landscape Character Types

Landscape Character Types	Landscape Character Areas
Limestone Hills	North Dorset Limestone Ridges
Chalk Valley and Downland	Upper North Winterborne Valley Lower Winterborne Valley Upper Milborne Valley Lower Milborne Valley Tarrant Valley

Landscape Character Types	Landscape Character Areas
	Bloxworth/Charborough Downs Chettle/Abbeycroft Downs East Blandford/Pimperne Downs
Open Chalk Downland	South Blandford Downs Chettle/Abbeycroft Downs
Chalk Escarpment/Ridge	North Dorset Chalk Escarpment
Wooded Chalk Downland	Cranborne Chase Wooded Chalk Downland
Rolling Vales	North Blackmore Rolling Vales South Blackmore Rolling Vales Shaftesbury Greensand Ridges
Clay Vale	Blackmore Vale
Valley Pasture	Upper Stour Valley Mid Stour Valley

Figure 5.5 – North Dorset Landscape Character Areas



Open Space Audit and Assessment of Local Need

- 5.20 An Open Space Audit and Assessment of Local Need was produced for the North Dorset area in 2006. It provides a qualitative assessment of the level of provision of open space for recreational purposes and will act as a starting point for developing the proposed Green Infrastructure Strategy.

6. North Dorset Local Plan Part 1

6.1 The Local Plan Part 1 contains a range of policies which deal with the Natural Environment and Climate Change. Figure 6.1 sets out the main policies which tackle each issue.

Figure 6.1: Natural Environment and Climate Change policies

Policy area	Summary
Climate Change policies	
Policy 2 – Climate Change	Sets out the overall approach to climate change and how developments should address the issue including adaptation and mitigation measures.
Policy 13 – Grey Infrastructure	Highlights the importance of flood alleviation measures within developments.
The town policies	Include descriptions of the key opportunities and risks associated with climate change for each of the towns.
Policy 22 – Renewable and Low Carbon Energy	Sets out the approach which will be taken to make decisions on proposals for Renewable and Low Carbon Energy.
Policy 24 – Design	Sets out the approach to maximising energy efficiency through the use of passive design techniques.
Natural Environment policies	
Policy 4 – The Natural Environment	Sets out the strategic approach to protecting and enhancing the natural environment including the mitigation of impacts on internationally designated sites.
Policy 15 – Green Infrastructure	Sets out the multiple benefits of green infrastructure and the approach to the enhancement of the green infrastructure network across the district.
The town policies	Set out the key natural environment assets close to each town.
Policy 24 – Design	Sets out the approach to trees and hedgerows on development sites and landscape planting within developments.

6.2 The concept of sustainable development is far reaching and covers a range of issues. The policies in the Local Plan Part 1 set out how the District will achieve more sustainable development in the light of international, national and local issues and priorities. In relation to Climate Change and the Natural Environment the three main issues are considered to be:

- effectively addressing the causes and effects of climate change whilst respecting high quality local environmental assets;
- delivering development which avoids impacts on environmental assets and mitigates any residual impact; and
- delivering development that enhances the natural environment including through the delivery of Green Infrastructure.

Climate Change

- 6.3 Councils are required to address the causes and effects of climate change. These include both measures to reduce greenhouse gas emissions (the cause) and to adapt to predicted changes (the effects). The main issues are considered to be:
- improving energy efficiency of existing and new buildings and therefore reducing the demand for energy;
 - using sustainable construction methods including passive design methods;
 - generating energy from renewable sources appropriate to the local area;
 - addressing the risk of increased flooding from all sources;
 - providing green infrastructure to provide shelter from warmer weather; and
 - encouraging water efficiency to reduce the pressure on water resources.
- 6.4 Evidence suggests that improving the energy efficiency of the existing building stock could contribute to a significant reduction in greenhouse gas emissions, helping to tackle the cause of climate change. Improving the energy efficiency of the existing building stock also helps to reduce running costs reducing the instances of fuel poverty. Policy 1 – Climate Change looks favourably on such proposals and seeks to secure improvements in energy performance when planning permission for extension or change of use is required.
- 6.5 New buildings are required by Building Regulations to be built to high levels of energy efficiency compared to the majority of the existing building stock. Designing in energy efficiency measures from the outset is easier and cheaper than modifying proposals to meet the requirements of Building Regulations. For this reason detailed energy statements will be required to accompany planning applications to demonstrate how the proposed building meets the requirements of Building Regulations.
- 6.6 Building Regulations form part of the Government’s Zero Carbon policy and form the basis for Policy 3 – Climate Change. This encourages developments to first look at measures to improve the efficiency of the building fabric such as insulation or through design approaches. Secondly measures such as renewable and low carbon technologies should be incorporated into the building. As a last resort, in instances where it is not feasible or viable to meet the Zero Carbon standards on site, off-site measures would be acceptable as set out under emerging Allowable Solutions policy.

- 6.7 The use of design techniques to reduce the amount of energy consumed by the users of a building can help to reduce greenhouse gas emissions overall. Measures include:
- facilitating the use of cycling/walking through the provision of safe, convenient routes walking/cycling routes and the provision of cycle storage;
 - location developments in the most sustainable areas or in areas which can be made more sustainable in line with Policy 2 Core Spatial Strategy;
 - the provision of appropriate clothes drying space to encourage energy efficient drying methods; and
 - the use of passive design techniques.
- 6.8 Passive design techniques, as encouraged by Policy 24 – Design, include measures such as building orientation, appropriate shading, ventilation and landscaping all of which can help reduce the energy consumption of a building.
- 6.9 To help reduce greenhouse gas emissions, renewable and low carbon energy developments will be encouraged where it is appropriate to its location. This will help to meet the national target of 15% of energy consumption from renewable sources by 2020 as contained in the Renewable Energy Directive. Policy 22 – Renewable and Low Carbon Energy sets out the Council’s approach to deciding on proposals for renewable and low carbon energy including the balancing of benefit against impacts. Schemes which offer significant community benefit and community acceptance will be looked upon more favourably in line with the approach set out in the NPPF.
- 6.10 North Dorset is already susceptible to both river and groundwater flooding and the risk will increase with predicted climate change. Policy 13 – Grey Infrastructure sets out the Council’s approach to flooding, which is to avoid areas at risk of flooding from all sources and to manage flood risk including from surface water, by incorporating SuDS in all developments of three or more dwellings in line with the national approach.
- 6.11 Water resources are put under stress through climate change as a result of drier, hotter summers. This will have an effect on biodiversity as well as the ability to meet the needs of the population of the District. It is therefore essential that water resources are conserved and utilised efficiently through the use of water efficient fittings as required by Building Regulations. In addition, grey water harvesting and rainwater harvesting can help to reduce the consumption of water and SuDS can help to replenish groundwater resources.
- 6.12 Another effect of the hotter temperatures predicted to occur as a result of climate change will be the need for adequate cooling during times of extreme heat. This can result in reliance on active cooling and ventilation systems such as air conditioning. The inclusion of vegetation such as trees and open spaces within

settlements can help to reduce this effect through the provision of shading and provision of a cooling effect. Policy 15 – Green Infrastructure seeks to secure appropriate vegetation and open space within settlements, ensuring that such spaces are multifunctional.

- 6.13 Each of the town policies include a section on Climate Change where the threats and opportunities are highlighted and the implications of these for developments are set out. Examples include the implications of surface water flooding during extreme weather events.

The Natural Environment

- 6.14 It is important to recognise the interconnected nature of ecosystems in policy making and make decisions with this issue in mind. Ecosystem services are the benefits we depend upon for the long-term and National policy highlights their importance in the planning system. Protection of the natural environment and landscape assets and the provision of gains in biodiversity are a key aim of Policy 4 – The Natural Environment.
- 6.15 The high quality environment of North Dorset should however not be seen as an absolute constraint but should shape the way development is managed within the District and can attract businesses and visitors to the area. Development should be utilised to enhance environmental assets and increase biodiversity.
- 6.16 The landscape approach to managing the natural environment will offer the greatest opportunities for its enhancement. This will include the protection of the highest value designated sites; the linking together of these sites with ‘corridor’ and ‘stepping stone’ habitats; the enhancement of the biodiversity value of an area through the creation of habitats where opportunities exist; and the use of buffer zones around environmental assets such as rivers and hedgerows.
- 6.17 The Landscape Character Assessment establishes the key features of the 18 landscape character areas which exist within the District. It should be used to influence development proposals so that they reflect the local landscape and incorporate the important landscape features into developments. Policy 4 - The Natural Environment and Policy 24 – Design both highlight the importance of good design respecting local character.
- 6.18 The two AONBs which cover parts of North Dorset have their own management plans which complement the Local Plan Part 1 and will be used to influence decisions. Developments in these areas should only be permitted if they enhance the natural beauty of the areas, further the objectives of the management plans or are in the public interest. Policy 4 – The Natural Environment seeks to secure the natural beauty of the AONBs and increase understanding and enjoyment of the areas. It also recognises that there is a need to foster the economic and social wellbeing of the local community.

- 6.19 The towns' policies highlight the key natural environment assets and opportunities within the immediate area and highlight the main threats to them. An example would be the proximity of Fontmell and Melbury Downs SAC to Shaftesbury and the potential increase in recreational pressure associated with developments in the town. Provision of alternative attractive recreational space is important in mitigating this.
- 6.20 The Habitats Regulations Assessment highlighted where there was potential for a significant effect to result from the developments proposed within the Local Plan Part 1. These significant effects related to Fontmell and Melbury Downs SAC, Rooksmoor SAC, The Dorset heathlands⁷, Poole Harbour SPA and Poole Harbour Ramsar site. The Local Plan makes efforts to avoid impacts on these sites and where residual impacts may still remain, Policy 4 – The Natural Environment establishes mitigation measures to offset the impact.

Fontmell and Melbury Downs SAC

- 6.21 The impact on the Fontmell and Melbury Downs SAC is likely to result from residential growth at Shaftesbury which will result in increased recreational pressure on the site. To mitigate this impact Shaftesbury has a number of high quality open spaces including some designated as Local Nature Reserves. Policy 4 – The Natural Environment seeks to enhance and enlarge these sites with a view to diverting recreational pressure away from the internationally designated site. In addition, monitoring arrangements are set out to identify any adverse effects which may occur.

Rooksmoor SAC

- 6.22 The main pathway for impacts on the Rooksmoor SAC relate to increased air pollution from road traffic passing directly through the site. The evidence relating to air pollution suggests that the impact of this pollution is not likely to be significant. However to divert traffic away from this route, reducing the impact further, extension of the North Dorset Trailway from Sturminster Newton to Stalbridge is promoted by Policy 4 – The Natural Environment as well as other policies.

The Dorset heathlands

- 6.23 Evidence suggests that development within 400m of a heathland site cannot be effectively mitigated, resulting in significant effects on the designated site. Impacts include recreational pressure, cat predation, and wildfires. Outside of the 400m exclusion zone but within 5km of a heathland impacts still exist but these can be

⁷ References to the Dorset heathlands includes the internationally designates sites of the Dorset Heaths SAC, the Dorset heaths (Purbeck and Wareham) and Studland Dunes SAC, Dorset Heathlands SPA, and Dorset Heathlands Ramsar site.

mitigated. Southern parts of the District are within 5km of the Dorset heaths and hence Policy 4 – The Natural Environment requires mitigation as part of developments. Mitigation could be through the provision of adequate alternative recreation space in close proximity to the development or through financial contributions to fund direct works to the heathland sites.

- 6.24 As the heathland sites are outside of the District, mitigation will need to be delivered by other agencies. In South East Dorset, a joint development plan document is being prepared to mitigate the impact on heathland sites. This document establishes a mechanism and a body for delivering mitigation. Contributions towards mitigation will be collected from developments within the zone of influence and used to fund mitigation in a way similar to that proposed by the South East Dorset local authorities.

Poole Harbour SPA and Poole Harbour Ramsar Site

- 6.25 Impacts on Poole Harbour primarily relate to nitrogen deposition resulting from activities within the harbour catchment. Part of this catchment covers southern parts of the District around Milton Abbas and Milborne St Andrew.
- 6.26 The main contributor to nitrogen levels within Poole Harbour is run-off from intensive agricultural practices. Impacts do however also result from the settlements within the catchment and the associated outflows from sewerage treatment works.
- 6.27 To tackle this issue, the Strategy for Managing Nitrogen in Poole Harbour proposes that all developments within the catchment will need to be nitrogen neutral and Policy 4 – The Natural Environment supports this approach. The strategy suggests a number of mechanisms for achieving this including the upgrade of sewerage treatment works. However the level of growth within the catchment in North Dorset is unlikely to be able to fund such an upgrade necessitating an alternative approach. One alternative could be the removal of land from intensive agricultural production to less intensive uses equivalent to the uplift in nitrogen resulting from growth. Alternative measures may also be suitable and may arise through joint working with other local authorities and local partners.

Other Designated sites

- 6.28 Other sites across the District which benefit from designation include two National Nature Reserves (NNR), twelve Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) and a number of Local Nature Reserves (LNR), Local Geological Sites (LGS) and Sites of Nature Conservation Interest (SNCI) all of which contribute to the mosaic of habitats which support wildlife and contribute to the natural environment.
- 6.29 The nationally protected NNR and SSSI sites will be protected from harm resulting from growth unless benefits can clearly be demonstrated to outweigh the harm. To improve their biodiversity value, they will form the backbone of the Green

Infrastructure network in relation to biodiversity benefit. The Green Infrastructure network will seek to link together these sites at a landscape scale creating “corridors” and “stepping stones” between them.

- 6.30 The locally designated LNR, LGS and SNCI aid in the delivery of many ecosystem services and form a key part of the Green Infrastructure network. Protecting them from harm resulting from development is important however they are also important as sites for recreation and education. The benefits of such sites will be secured through Policy 15 – Green Infrastructure.
- 6.31 Local Green Space is a relatively new concept introduced through Section 8 of the NPPF. Such sites can be designated by local communities through Neighbourhood Plans or by working with the Council but must meet a number of criteria as set out in Paragraph 77 of the NPPF. The Natural Environment policy and the Green Infrastructure policy both promote the use of Local Green Space to protect locally important open space and the Council will work with local communities to designate appropriate sites.
- 6.32 These international, national and local designations are the highest value sites for biodiversity and this is recognised through the Local Plan Part 1. Developments should seek to protect and where possible enhance the biodiversity of an area especially related to the designated sites. Policies 4 – The Natural Environment and 15 – Green Infrastructure are important in achieving these outcomes for designated sites and for biodiversity more generally.

Species

- 6.33 A number of protected species are found within the District often outside of formally designated wildlife sites. Where these are found, they should be protected from harm resulting from development. The approach to protecting important species in Policy 4 – The Natural Environment is that development proposals should include an assessment of the impact on species and take measures to avoid this impact. Where an impact does exist, developers will be required to demonstrate that appropriate mitigation is put in place ideally on the development site. However suitable alternative habitat could be created in close proximity to the original site. This does however not apply to internationally designated sites and species as these must be protected in situ.

Appendix A: Internationally designated sites

Fontmell and Melbury Downs SAC

- A.1 The Fontmell and Melbury Downs SAC site consists of approximately 260 hectares of species rich chalk grasslands on the scarp slope of the Dorset Downs to the south of Shaftesbury. The area supports large populations of early gentian (*Gentianella anglica*) and is one of the best areas in the United Kingdom for this species. A slightly larger area, encompassing the whole of the SAC is also designated as a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI).
- A.2 Threats to this designated site are from grazing pressure, the impact from adjacent intensive agricultural practices and scrub encroachment onto the site. There is also a public right of way which crosses the site which carries with it the potential for trampling and soil erosion.
- A.3 The potential impacts on the designated site are likely to result from residential growth in Shaftesbury and the associated increase in recreational pressure. Measures to mitigate the impact on the SAC resulting from growth across the District but primarily at Shaftesbury, should include the provision of suitable and attractive recreational green space within settlements and within developments.

Rooksmoor SAC

- A.4 Rooksmoor SAC is split into two clusters of smaller sites. The first at Lydlinch Common covers approximately 30 hectares at the junction of the A3030/A357 whilst the second area covers approximately 32 hectares to the south at Rooksmoor Copse. The areas designated as a SAC form part of the larger Blackmore Vale Commons and Moors SSSI totalling approximately 296 hectares. The site supports an exceptionally large population of marsh fritillary butterfly (*Euphydryas aurinia*) and supports *Molinia* meadows on calcareous, peaty or clayey, silt-laden soils.
- A.5 The Lydlinch Common area is difficult to manage in the traditional way through light grazing by cattle as it is bisected by the A3030/A357 junction, creating a need for infrastructure. The difficulty in establishing effective management at both parts of the SAC site has resulted in scrub invasion.
- A.6 Due to the presence of the A3030/A357 through the Lydlinch Common part of the designation, increases in traffic along this road corridor as a result of residential growth could have an impact on the designated site resulting in increased air pollution.
- A.7 Traffic numbers along the roads which run through the site are likely to increase as a result of development in the local area. However taking into account the predicted downward trend in nitrogen deposition over the period to 2020, the

increase in pollution resulting from the development in the local area is not likely to be significant.

- A.8 Diversion of traffic away from the A3030/A357 road corridor will help to reduce the impact on the designated site. One way of achieving this will be by making alternative routes available and attractive. The obvious route in this area is the extension of the North Dorset Trailway from Sturminster Newton to Stalbridge, thereby offering a direct, sustainable pedestrian or cycle route between the two towns.

Dorset Heaths SAC, Dorset Heaths (Purbeck and Wareham) and Studland Dunes SAC, Dorset Heathlands SPA, Dorset Heathlands Ramsar site

- A.9 Dorset Heaths SAC comprises a network of sites around Poole Harbour covering approximately 5,730 hectares and stretching from Warmwell Heath in the west, to Hengistbury Head in the east and to Alderholt Common in the north. The Dorset Heaths (Purbeck and Wareham) and Studland Dunes SAC covers the remaining parts of heathland within the District of Purbeck. The Dorset Heathlands SPA and the Dorset Heathlands Ramsar site cover similar areas to the two SAC designations.
- A.10 The heathland sites together support a wide range of important habitats and species. Habitats present consist of the transition from wet heaths to dry heaths and include wet lowland heathland and mires, woodland, grassland, pools and reedswamps. The Purbeck Dunes also comprise the only large dune site in the south of Britain. There are numerous protected species supported by these habitats including a stronghold of the southern damselfly (*Coenagrion mercuriale*), and great crested newts (*Triturus cristatus*).
- A.11 The sites that make up the Dorset heathlands have been fragmented by losses to urban expansion, to agriculture and to forestry. Although these pressures have now been halted, the remaining sites are subject to further pressures from recreation, wildfires and cat predation of wildlife. Decline in traditional agriculture on heathland sites has also resulted in scrub encroachment and invasion by other species.
- A.12 Research undertaken on the Dorset heathlands has identified that residential development within 400 metres of a heathland site is likely to result in significant effects that cannot be successfully mitigated. Outside this region, the zone of influence of residential development has been shown to stretch to 5 kilometres from the heathland site. The southern parts of the District are within 5 kilometres of parts of the Dorset heathlands and hence there is the potential for development in this area to increase recreational pressure on the heathland sites.

- A.13 As there is a link between development in the southern part of the District and pressure on the Dorset heathlands, mitigation measures will need to be put in place to offset the impact. Mitigation will either take the form of the provision of alternative recreation space in close proximity to the development taking place or through a contribution collected from each new dwelling to directly fund mitigation works on heathland sites such as help funding access management and educational activities to protect and improve the Dorset heathlands.

Poole Harbour SPA and Poole Harbour Ramsar Site

- A.14 Poole Harbour is a natural harbour, approximately 4,000 hectares in area lying around 11 kilometres to the southeast of the District. The majority of the intertidal areas around the harbour are designated as a SPA, totalling almost 2,275 hectares. These intertidal areas include extensive mud flats, saltmarshes and reedbeds all important for waterfowl. The Poole Harbour SPA and Ramsar designations cover very similar areas and abut the Dorset Heathlands SPA/Ramsar and Dorset Heaths SAC in many areas.
- A.15 The growth of Poole and the development of a commercial port and marinas along the northern shore of the harbour have had an impact on the designation. The pressure from urban expansion and the recreational pressure that goes with urbanisation are direct threats to it.
- A.16 Several sewerage treatment plants drain into the harbour along with the River Piddle and the River Frome and contribute to nitrogen levels in the harbour through sewerage treatment plant outflow. Additionally, nitrogen run-off from intensive agricultural practices increases the impact on the harbour, directly and via groundwater. Both of these sources cause growth in green seaweeds creating macroalgae mats. To tackle this issue, a joint strategy has been produced by the Environment Agency and Natural England for managing the nitrogen impact on Poole Harbour arising as a result of intensive agricultural practices and as a result of development.
- A.17 One of the tributaries of the River Piddle drains more than 3,500 hectares of the District around Milborne St Andrew and Milton Abbas into Poole Harbour. As a result of this there is the potential for development in this area to have a significant impact on the Poole Harbour designation through nitrogen deposition.
- A.18 To avoid contributing to these adverse effects, where development takes place, there will be a need for developments within the Poole Harbour catchment to be nitrogen neutral in order to be compliant with the legal requirements. There are a number of ways that this could be achieved as set out in the Strategy for Managing Nitrogen for Poole Harbour. Joint working with other local authorities and local partners will be required to develop appropriate and effective mitigation to ensure all developments are nitrogen neutral.

Other Internationally Designated Sites

- A.19 Outside of the District there are a number of other internationally designated sites with a potential pathway which could lead to significant effects. Only two sites are within five kilometres of the District boundary.
- A.20 Holnest SAC consists of approximately 20 ponds and associated scrub, grassland and woodland covering approximately 55 hectares and which support a large population of great crested newts. The main threat to this site is through changes in agricultural practices.
- A.21 Cerne and Sydling Downs SAC consists of an area of grassland on the chalk downs to the southwest of the District covering almost 370 hectares. The main pathway for an impact on this site is through increased recreational pressure.