



Topic Paper

Environment

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1.0 Purpose

- 1.1 This is one of a number of topic papers that have been produced to support the Draft Core Strategy and Development Management Policies Development Plan Document (DPD) (also known as the New Plan for North Dorset). It provides an overview of the environment of North Dorset and summarises the relevant evidence that has informed the policies in the Draft Core Strategy and Development Management Policies DPD. It also sets out the policy framework at both national and regional levels within which the DPD will sit. This paper is very much a working document which will be updated as new evidence is produced and the consultation process proceeds.
- 1.2 Version 1 of the Environment Topic Paper was published in August 2009. This revision takes into account the changes to the planning system and national planning policies that have arisen since the last version was produced. These changes are most notably the introduction of the Localism Act 2011 and the National Planning Policy Framework.

2.0 Introduction

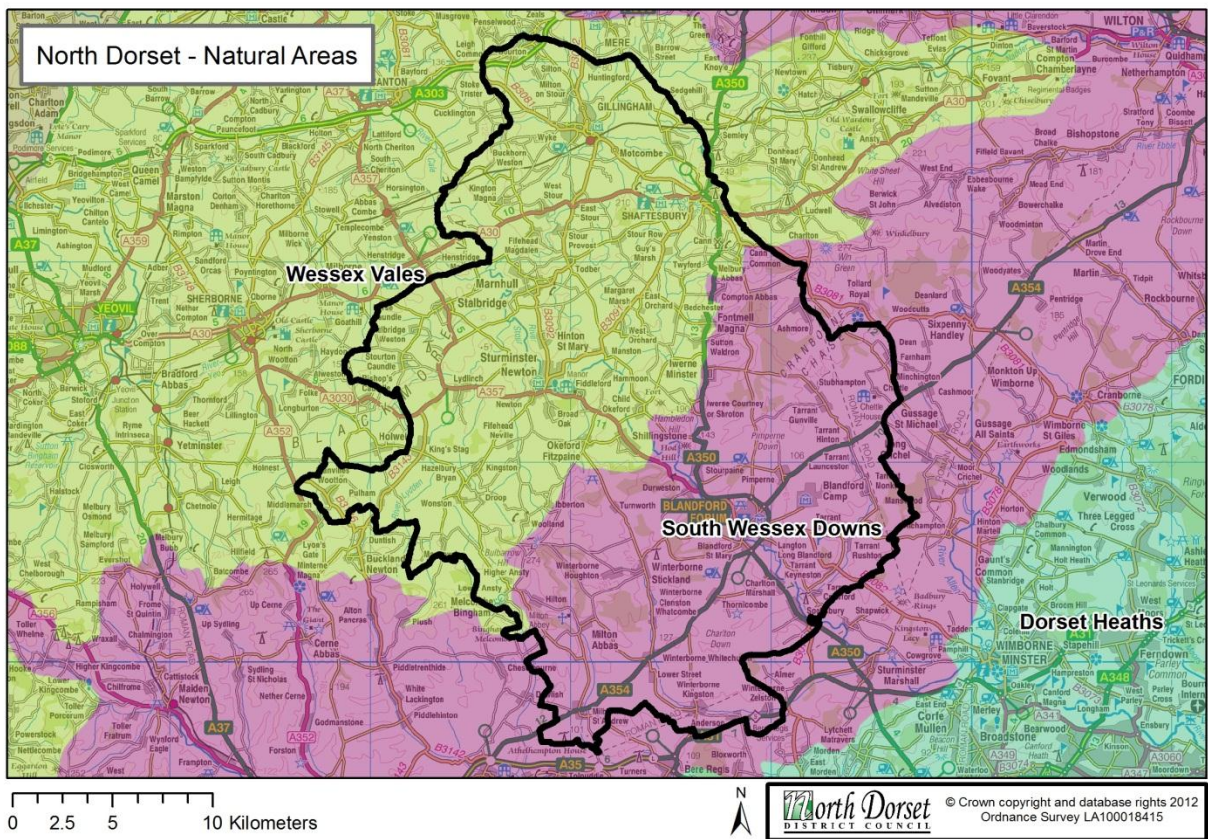
- 2.1 The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) provides guidance to Local Planning Authorities in the production of development plans and must therefore be taken into account during plan preparation. It does however not change the requirement for planning applications to be determined in accordance with the development plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise¹ although it is a material consideration in planning decisions.
- 2.2 Before the introduction of the NPPF, national planning policy was primarily contained in Planning Policy Statements (PPS) and Planning Policy Guidance (PPG). The introduction of the NPPF supersedes the detailed guidance issued by governments over previous years.
- 2.3 When the draft Core Strategy and Development Management Policies DPD was first produced for informal consultation in March 2010, national policy for the production of development plans was contained within Planning Policy Statement 12 'Local Spatial Planning'. The Local Development Framework had the role of helping to achieve the objectives of the Sustainable Communities Strategy as prepared by each local authority. The Sustainable Communities Strategy set out the crosscutting social, environmental and economic issues that affect Dorset.
- 2.4 PPS 12 indicated that the Core Strategy should be the key document in the LDF, containing a 'portrait' of the district and a 'vision' for how it should progress over the plan period. It also indicated that various options for delivering the vision should be considered and assessed to help identify the most sustainable option. PPS 12 has now been superseded by the NPPF, which is discussed in more detail in Section 4.
- 2.5 PPS 12 also required that the contents of a Core Strategy should be founded on a thorough understanding of the needs of its area and the opportunities and constraints which operate in that area. In order to inform policy, the Council has gathered together evidence about the area's environmental assets and has commissioned studies by consultants where a better understanding of specific issues is required. These studies and other evidence are considered in more detail in Section 5.

¹ Section 38(6) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 and Section 70(2) of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990.

3.0 Background

- 3.1 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.
- 3.2 The whole of North Dorset falls within two 'natural areas' as defined by Natural England² (Figure 3.1) 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 3.1 – North Dorset - Natural Areas



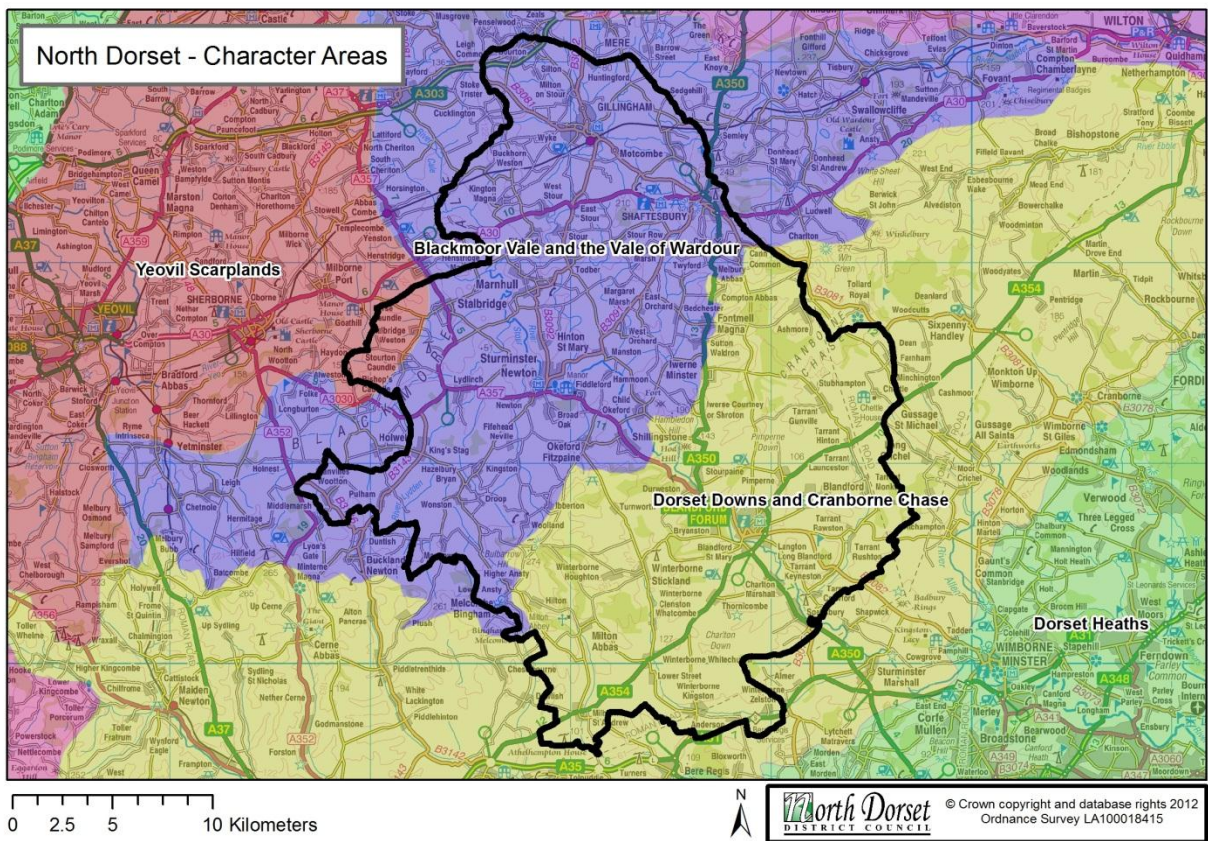
- 3.3 The southern part of the District (including Blandford) falls within the South Wessex Downs Natural Area. This is characterised by rolling downland, river valleys, woodlands and wetlands. It is a very rural area dominated by agriculture. The most notable habitats are chalk grassland,

² 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.

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.

- 3.4 The northern part of the District (including Gillingham, Shaftesbury and Sturminster Newton) falls with 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.
- 3.5 Natural areas are further broken down into character areas (Figure 3.2) 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 3.2 – North Dorset - Character Areas

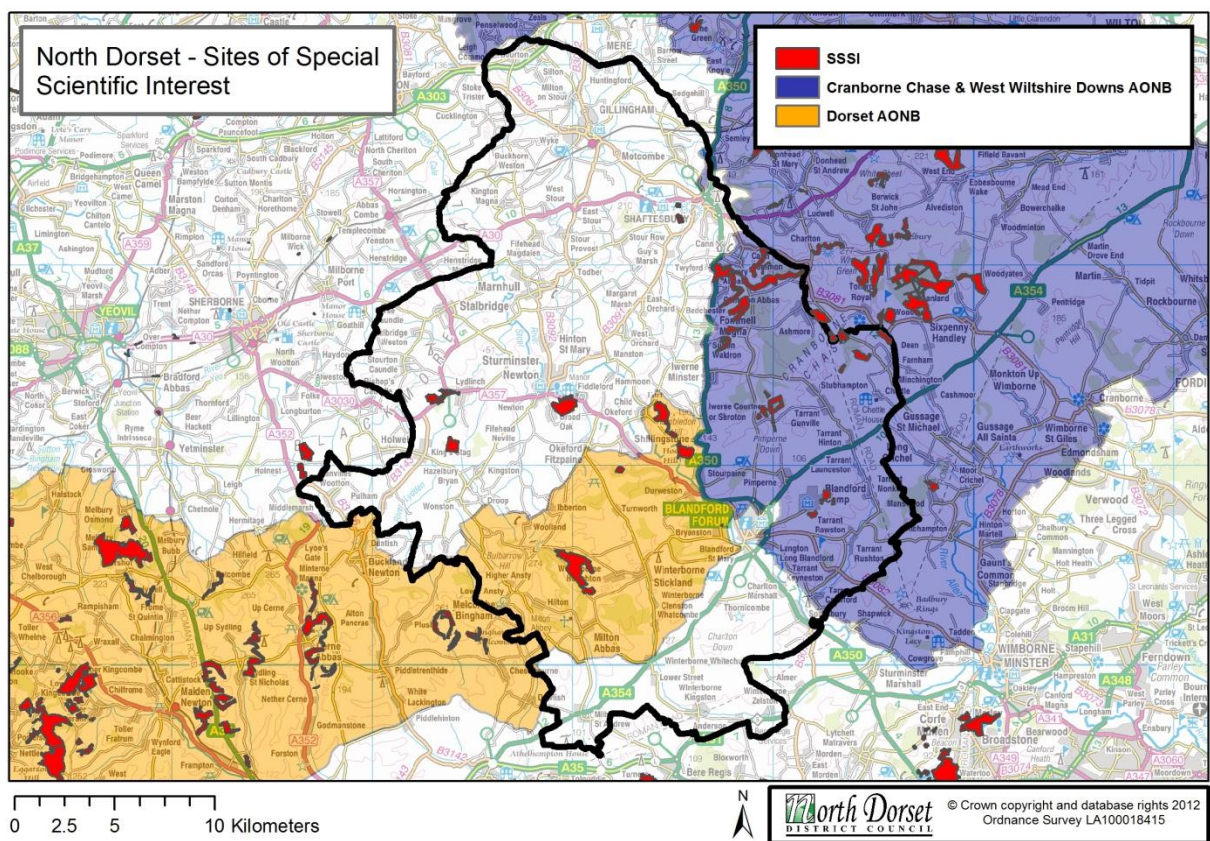


- 3.6 North Dorset is covered by three character areas. The southern part is covered by the Dorset Downs and Cranborne Chase Character Area. The northern part is primarily covered by the Blackmore Vale and the Vale of

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

- 3.7 The chalk outcrops of the Dorset Downs & Cranborne Chase Natural Area support chalk landscape types and a range of associated chalk landscape character areas³. 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 3.3).

Figure 3.3 – Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) and Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI)



- 3.8 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.

³ See Section 5 of the North Dorset Landscape Character Area Assessment (March 2008)

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

4.0 International, National and Regional Policy Context

International Policy

- 4.1 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.
- 4.2 *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.
- 4.3 In 1997 the *Kyoto protocol* recognised the connection between greenhouse gas emissions and anthropogenic climate change. The Renewable Energy Directive 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.
- 4.4 There have also been a number of agreements and directives to protect wildlife, in particular *79/409/EEC: The Birds Directive*; *92/43/EEC: The Habitats Directive*; and *The Convention on Wetlands of International Importance especially as Waterfowl Habitat (Ramsar Convention 1971)*. 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.
- 4.5 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

4.6 The *National Planning Policy Framework* (NPPF) sets out the main national planning policy context for the Environment. 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 protecting and enhancing 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.

4.7 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 12 Core Principles that underpin the role of planning in delivering sustainable development. The Core Principles with most relevance to the environment state that planning should:

- Take account of the different roles and character of different areas, promoting the vitality of our main urban areas, protecting the Green Belts around them, recognising the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside and supporting thriving rural communities within it;
- 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);

- Contribute to conserving and enhancing the natural environment and reducing pollution. Allocations of land for development should prefer land of lesser environmental value, where consistent with other policies within this framework;
- Encourage the effective use of land by reusing land that has been previously developed (brownfield land), provided that it is not of high environmental value;
- Conserve heritage assets in a manner appropriate to their significance, so that they can be enjoyed for their contribution to the quality of life of this and future generations.

4.8 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”.

4.9 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
- Be consistent with national standards and zero carbon buildings policy

4.10 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; consider cumulative landscape and visual impacts; consider identifying areas where low carbon and renewable energy development may be suitable; and support the role of neighbourhood planning in delivering renewable and low carbon energy.

4.11 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.

- 4.12 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.
- 4.13 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.
- 4.14 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.
- 4.15 Section 12 of the NPPF highlights the fact that heritage assets are an irreplaceable resource and that they need to be conserved in a manner appropriate to their significance including recognition of their setting. It further highlights the contribution that the historic environment makes to local character, to the social, cultural and environmental benefits of the historic environment and the need to seek appropriate uses of heritage assets.
- 4.16 *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.
- 4.17 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.
- 4.18 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.

- 4.19 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.
- 4.20 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.
- 4.21 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.
- 4.22 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 regulations⁴ (heating, fixed lighting, hot water and

⁴ Plan For Growth – Phase One: 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."

- building services) and not from plug-in appliances (such as computers and televisions).
- 4.23 “Carbon compliance” represents the measures taken on-site to achieve zero carbon with “allowable solutions” being offsite measures funded through contributions from developers.
- 4.24 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.
- 4.25 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 Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) and puts in place a mechanism for protecting moor or heath within National Parks.
- 4.26 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.
- 4.27 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.
- 4.28 National Nature Reserves (NNRs) are designated by Natural England under the Environmental Protection Act 1990 and 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.

4.29 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.

4.30 Up to date detail on the Government's position in relation to Heritage Assets is included in the *Practice Guidance* that originally supported PPS5. Although the NPPF replaced PPS5, the Government still endorses the Practice Guidance subject to a review of its contents. The council will need to consider the approach to be taken in relation to heritage assets in the light of the changes to national policy. The key designated heritage assets are listed below.

- World Heritage Sites are inscribed by the UNESCO World Heritage Committee for their Outstanding Universal Value.
- Scheduled monuments are designated under the Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Areas Act 1979 by the Secretary of State for their national importance.
- Listed buildings are designated under the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 by the Secretary of State for their special architectural or historic interest.
- Protected wreck sites are designated by order under the Protected Wrecks Act 1973 for their historical, architectural or artistic importance.
- Conservation areas are designated under the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990, primarily by local authorities, for their special architectural or historic interest the character or appearance of which it is desirable to preserve or enhance.
- Registered parks and gardens are designated by English Heritage under the Historic Buildings and Ancient Monuments Act 1953 for their special historic interest.

- Registered battlefields are designated by English Heritage on a non-statutory basis.

4.31 The Government is currently undertaking a review of all waste policy to move towards a “zero waste” economy.

Local Policy

4.32 The major issues facing the rural County are set out in *Shaping our future* the Dorset Sustainable Communities Strategy 2010-2020. The strategy highlights the challenges that face Dorset in relation to its high quality environment. These include:

- 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;
- The risks posed to the coast, rivers and soils from climate change and increased visitor numbers;
- 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 challenge of climate change and the impact on, for example, the economy, people’s health, biodiversity and landscape; and
- The demand for natural resources to support the population and manage waste.

4.33 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:

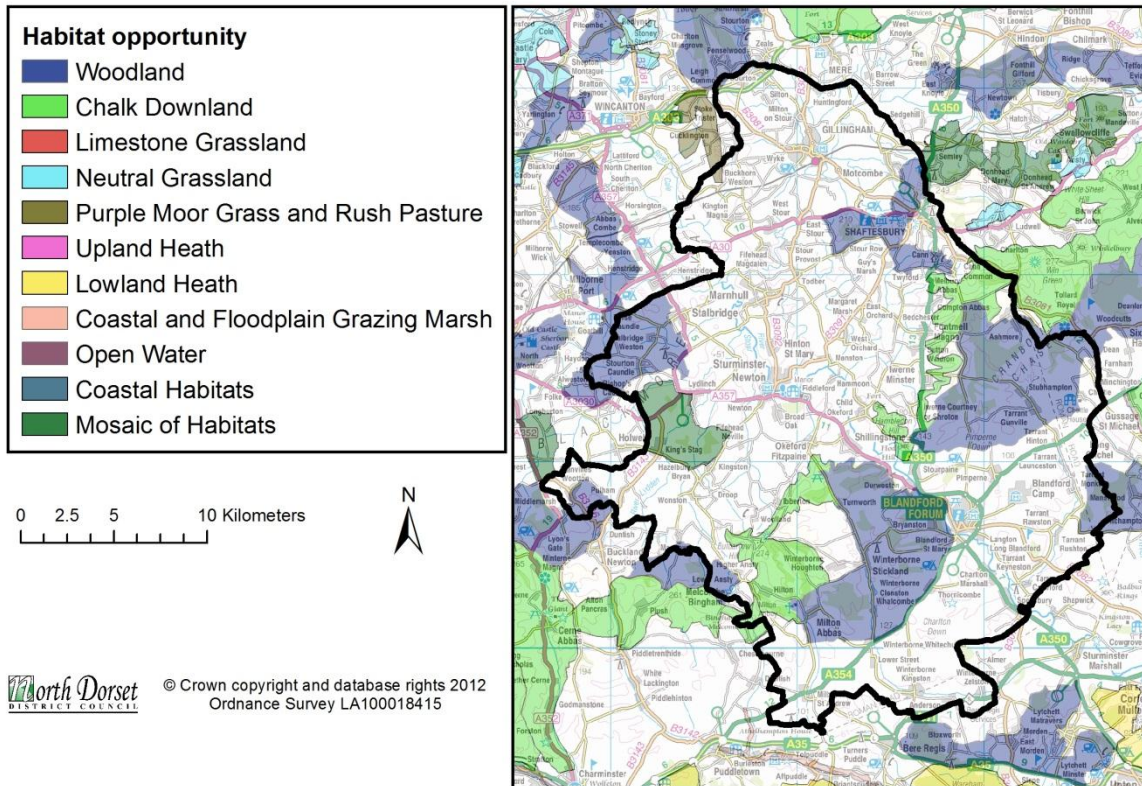
- Supporting the development of community renewable energy;
- Maximising the local economic benefits of renewable energy generation;
- Creating a more supportive planning system for renewable energy;
- Developing locally appropriate technologies;
- Delivering leadership and partnerships that support renewable energy; and
- Improving renewable energy communications and learning.

4.34 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.

- 4.35 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.
- 4.36 At the regional level, the South West Nature Map (figure 4.1) 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.
- 4.37 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.
- 4.38 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.
- 4.39 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. As few protected heathlands fall

within 5km of the District boundary, the Heathlands DPD, which is being prepared by the authorities in South East Dorset, will not cover North Dorset. The District Council will need to establish its own approach which effectively mitigates the impact of any development on the protected heathlands in line with the approach developed in South East Dorset.

Figure 4.1 – South West Nature Map for Dorset



4.40 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.

4.41 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.

- 4.42 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.
- 4.43 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.
- 4.44 North Dorset has 47 conservation areas and over 2500 listed buildings. There is a rolling programme of conservation area appraisals in place.
- 4.45 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.

5.0 Issues arising from Stakeholder and Community Consultations

Consultation 2007 – “Issues and Options”

- 5.1. 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 options⁵ 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.
- 5.2. 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.
- 5.3. 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.
- 5.4. 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

⁵ Core Strategy: Issues and Alternative Options – North Dorset District Council (June 2007)
<http://www.dorsetforyou.com/396679>

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

Consultation 2010 – “The draft New Plan”

- 5.5. In relation to the themes covered by this Environment Topic Paper, the draft New Plan as produced in 2010 received general support⁶. The key points raised that were relevant to these topics are outlined below.
- 5.6. The delivery of a balance between jobs and housing 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.
- 5.7. 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.
- 5.8. 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.
- 5.9. 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.
- 5.10. 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 as this would reduce the cost of living and improve general well-being.
- 5.11. 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

⁶ The New Plan for North Dorset consultation responses report
<http://www.dorsetforyou.com/media.jsp?mediaid=174202&filetype=pdf>

- 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.
- 5.12. Energy from waste was highlighted as an opportunity that including the development of anaerobic digestion plants. This should be incorporated into policy in a similar way to other renewable technologies.
- 5.13. 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.
- 5.14. 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.
- 5.15. 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.
- 5.16. 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.
- 5.17. The landscape character in relation to the AONBs within the district was highlighted and the level of protection that AONBs are afforded was highlighted. There was a suggestion that best practice guidelines be developed for development within the AONB.
- 5.18. 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.
- 5.19. The pollution of rivers with high nitrate levels as a result of inefficient and inadequate sewage treatment plants was raised as a concern.

5.20. Several comments were received relating to national policy in relation to heritage assets. These were out of the control of the Council however national policy has now changed giving more freedom for Local Authorities to develop their own policies in relation to heritage assets. There was a suggestion that a strategic framework for the effective management of the historic environment should be developed.

6.0 Issues from the Evidence Base

- 6.1. To inform the production of the Core Strategy, the Council has produced several pieces of evidence⁷ on issues relevant to the environment. These studies are outlined below.
- 6.2. 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.
- 6.3. *REVision 2020* was prepared to inform the South West Regional Spatial Strategy. 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 have signalled their intentions to remove the regional tier of planning, revoking regional spatial strategies however the work undertaken for *REVision 2020* is still relevant. *REVision 2020* suggests a target of 1247 MW electricity and 503 MW heat by 2020 with an on-site requirement of 10% within new development.
- 6.4. To accompany the proposals included in the 2010 draft New Plan, a *draft Habitats Regulations Assessment* (HRA) has been 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. The assessment looks at the two Natura 2000 sites within North Dorset and other Natura 2000 sites in close proximity to the district boundary. An updated version of the HRA will be undertaken to accompany the final version of the Core Strategy.
- 6.5. The N2K sites within the District that could potentially be affected are:
 - Melbury Downs Special Areas of Conservation (SAC) to the south of Shaftesbury; and
 - Rooksmoor SAC, south and west of Sturminster Newton.
- 6.6. Other internationally important wildlife sites located outside but within a few kilometres of the District boundary, including heathland sites to the south and watercourses in the catchment of the River Avon to the east. The HRA will also need to consider the direct and indirect implications for

⁷ The evidence base studies produced or commissioned by North Dorset District Council can be found at the following location:

<http://www.dorsetforyou.com/396704>

these sites for example as a result of recreational pressure or pressure on the water resource.

- 6.7. *The River Stour Catchment Flood Management Plan (2012)*⁸ 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.
- 6.8. 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.
- 6.9. 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.
- 6.10. The *Level 1 Strategic Flood Risk Assessment (SFRA) (2008)* was jointly commissioned by the authorities⁹ 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.
- 6.11. 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

⁸ The Dorset Stour Catchment Flood Management Plan
<http://www.environment-agency.gov.uk/research/planning/114342.aspx>

⁹ Jointly commissioned by Bournemouth BC, Christchurch BC, East Dorset DC, North Dorset DC and the former Salisbury DC

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.

6.12. 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 6.1) in the district divided further into 18 landscape character areas (Figure 6.2). 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.

| Landscape Character Types | Landscape Character Areas |
|---------------------------|--|
| Limestone Hills | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • North Dorset Limestone Ridges |
| Chalk Valley and Downland | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Upper North Winterborne Valley • Lower Winterborne Valley • Upper Milborne Valley • Lower Milborne Valley • Tarrant Valley • Bloxworth/Charborough Downs • Chettle/Abbeycroft Downs • East Blandford/Pimperne Downs |
| Open Chalk Downland | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • South Blandford Downs • Chettle/Abbeycroft Downs |
| Chalk Escarpment/Ridge | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • North Dorset Chalk Escarpment |
| Wooded Chalk Downland | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cranborne Chase Wooded Chalk Downland |
| Rolling Vales | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • North Blackmore Rolling Vales • South Blackmore Rolling Vales • Shaftesbury Greensand Ridges |
| Clay Vale | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Blackmore Vale |
| Valley Pasture | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Upper Stour Valley • Mid Stour Valley |

6.13. The draft Core Strategy included proposals for residential development adjoining the main towns of Blandford and Shaftesbury. As these sites are within or adjoining the AONBs that surround the towns, further landscape work was undertaken. The *Landscape impact of housing sites at Blandford and Shaftesbury* report suggested that the Core Strategy proposed sites were appropriate but that reduction in scale would reduce the impact on the landscape.

Figure 6.1 – North Dorset Landscape Character Areas



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

- internationally, nationally and locally designated wildlife sites covering about 6% of the District:
 - 2 internationally important sites;
 - 40 Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs);
 - 201 Sites of Nature Conservation Interest (SNCIs) and;
 - 11 Regionally Important Geological Sites (RIGS).
- priority habitats listed in the UK Biodiversity Action Plan with 6 of the 45 national priority habitats have been identified¹⁰ as being priorities for North Dorset:
 - lowland mixed deciduous woodland;
 - wood pasture;
 - species rich hedgerows;
 - calcareous grasslands;

¹⁰ In The Dorset Biodiversity Strategy – Dorset Biodiversity Partnership (2002)

- 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.

6.15. As stated above, the protection and enhancement of such sites is closely regulated by national policy and legislation.

7.0 Conclusions Drawn from the Policy Context and Evidence Base

7.1. The concept of sustainable development is far reaching and covers a range of issues. Policy needs to set out how the District will achieve more sustainable development in the light of international, national and regional policies. The three main issues are considered to be:

- addressing the causes and effects of climate change;
- delivering sustainable forms of development including the development of a strategic approach to the delivery of Green Infrastructure; and
- delivering a sustainable pattern of development that respects local character and aspirations.

7.2. Legislation requires Councils to address the causes and effects of climate change issues. The District will need to take measures to both reduce its greenhouse gas emissions (the cause) and to adapt to predicted changes (the effects). The main issues are considered to be:

- improving energy efficiency and therefore reducing the demand for energy;
- using sustainable construction methods;
- generating energy from renewable sources including capitalising on funding schemes such as allowable solutions and the Green Deal; and
- address the risk of increased flooding from all sources.

7.3. North Dorset is already susceptible to both river and groundwater flooding and the risk will increase with predicted climate change. Policies are required which will:

- locate new development in areas at low risk of flooding; and
- manage surface water in a sustainable manner through incorporating SuDS in all developments.

7.4. The protection of designated sites is covered by national policy and legislation but locally important environmental assets do not have protection. Policies are therefore required which will recognise and give protection to:

- the key landscape characteristics identified in the Dorset-wide Landscape Character Assessment;
- listed and unlisted buildings of architectural or historic importance; and

- designed landscapes, historic parks or gardens of regional or county importance.
- 7.5. The Habitats Regulations Assessment (HRA) screening report identifies certain Natura 2000 sites both within and outside of North Dorset where development may potentially have an adverse effect. The Council therefore needs to:
- undertake a HRA; and
 - put in place adequate mitigation measures to offset the impact of development on these important sites.
- 7.6. There are two Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty within North Dorset. Their management plans identify a series of actions which will complement the statutory spatial plan. The Council will continue to work in partnership with their boards to forward their primary purpose.