

Allendale Area, Wimborne Minster

Sequential Test

**Selection of the site for a new Civic Hub using a sequential approach.
August 2013**

The need for the Sequential Test – National Policy and Technical Guidance

The need for a new Civic Hub for the Christchurch and East Dorset Councils Partnership has been identified for the Wimborne Area. The site preferred to locate this facility is the Allendale Area to the north of Wimborne Town Centre, which has been identified as an Area for Potential Change. However the site contains areas at risk of flooding, so in line with sustainable development principles in national policy all opportunities to locate new development in reasonably available areas of little or no flood risk should first be explored, ahead of locating them in areas of higher risk.

This report has been prepared using the standing advice of the Environment Agency (Demonstrating the flood risk Sequential Test for Planning Applications – Version 3.1, April 2012), which recommends first clearly defining the evidence base before applying the sequential test itself.

The National Planning Policy Framework states in paragraphs 100 & 101 that Local Plans should apply a sequential, risk based approach to the location of development – the first stage of this is known as the Sequential Test. Essentially this means that development should not be allocated or permitted in areas of higher flood risk if there are reasonably available sites appropriate for the proposed development in areas with a lower probability of flooding.

The basis for applying the Sequential Test is the Strategic Flood Risk Assessment (SFRA) – this further refines the areas at risk of flooding taking other sources of flooding and climate change into account.

Technical Guidance to the National Planning Policy Framework (March 2012), provides information on the vulnerability of various types of development and then which of these categories are compatible with each of the flood zones. The guidance also determines when an Exception Test would be required.

Based on Table 2 of this guidance, the proposed Civic Hub building is classed as a 'less vulnerable' development. Table 3 shows developments that are classed as 'less vulnerable' are compatible uses within Zones 1, 2 and 3a subject to the Sequential Test being successfully passed. The Exception Test is not considered to be required in this instance.

Data Sources

This section describes the data sources that have been used to carry out the Sequential Test, and include the sources used to assess the flood risk, to identify the need and geographic location of a Civic Hub and to identify all reasonably available sites.

Strategic Flood Risk Assessment

The Strategic Flood Risk Assessment (SFRA) is the primary method used for comparing flood risk between sites and the basis for applying the Sequential Test. The Assessment further refines the areas at risk of flooding taking other sources of flooding and climate change in to account.

East Dorset undertook an SFRA Level 1 assessment with other adjoining local authorities in February 2008. The SFRA includes maps of the flood risk areas, including identifying the Zones 1, 2, 3a and 3b. However, the document makes the conservative assumption that all areas within Zone 3 are considered as Zone 3b Functional Floodplain until an appropriate flood risk assessment shows whether it falls within Zone 3a High Probability. Therefore further site specific modelling work is required to define the extents of Zones 3a and 3b.

Based on the assumption (to be confirmed by further, detailed modelling) that the sites considered in this test all lie outside Zone 3b, it is considered that a Sequential Test can be undertaken for a new Civic Hub that includes these.

Geographic Location of the New Civic Hub

The area of search for the Civic Hub has been defined in response to the following issues:

- Partnership working between East Dorset District Council and Christchurch Borough Council is resulting in new working practices and a requirement to reduce office space for council workers; and
- A need to make Council facilities more accessible to the local population through sustainable transport.

The Christchurch and East Dorset Partnership

The partnership between the Councils of Christchurch and East Dorset came in to being in 2009 in response to significant national financial challenges. A programme of sharing Council services in to teams that serve both authority areas is currently underway and is due to be completed at the end of 2014.

The Partnership Plan and Operating Model sets out how the Councils will function over the next 5 years. The contents of this plan impact directly on future accommodation needs of the partnership. Having two main office locations creates barriers to maximising the benefits of operating single teams. However, whilst web based customer contact will become increasingly common, there will be a continued need for customers to access services directly. There is also a need for publicly accessible Council meetings.

The move towards this single service together with increasing use of home working and changes to the revenues and benefits system, will not require the need of two

partnership office buildings of the scale currently in use. A report to East Dorset's Resources Committee put forward a series of options based on the following requirements:

- A Council Chamber in each Council area so decisions can be made locally and are accessible to the public.
- A place in each area, where the public can come to access services.

From this, four broad options were considered with a preferred option approved by Council to investigate further. This was for the main partnership offices to be located at the Christchurch Civic Offices and the creation of a new Civic Hub in Wimborne, with the capacity for some staff. The Furzehill site would then be disposed.

Along with maintaining a civic and customer facility in the centre of Christchurch, this locates a new civic and customer facility in East Dorset's principal town of Wimborne which has good public transport connections. It is also intended that the building should become a focal point for the community.

Total Place Reviews and Opportunities - December 2010

The aim of the review was to identify opportunities for making the best use of assets in East Dorset's two main towns of Wimborne Minster and Ferndown. Due to national pressures on public finances at all levels of government, EDDC along with other public sector partners are exploring opportunities to reduce spending, whilst maintaining services and community benefits as far as possible.

The review looked at key land holdings in the towns including car parks and community centres, how these assets performed as well as looking at opportunities to create a civic heart within each town based on site availability and appropriateness.

A key recommendation for Wimborne was based around the Allendale site and its redevelopment into a community hub that could replace other community assets in the town and also be used to relocate the Council's offices from Furzehill. The latter would allow closer and more sustainable engagement with the local community, through the ability to promote sustainable transport and providing a boost to the town centre economy.

Core Strategy Policy

Options for Consideration (2010)

Using the evidence in the Total Place Review and Opportunities (2010), Options WMC9 and WMC10 were proposed identifying the Allendale Area as an area for potential change. The two options provided a choice between different uses for the site.

The Sustainability Appraisal, which considered the issue of flood risk of these options, pointed to other options in the document – namely Preferred Option ME14 - ME16 which requires the passing of the sequential test followed by the need of flood management strategies where risk cannot be adequately mitigated on site.

Analysis of consultation responses received showed an even balance regarding WMC9 which proposed the moving of the Council Offices, with those for the scheme seeing the potential advantages of being more accessible to the community and an opportunity to rebuild the Allendale Centre. However those against had concerns about the cost of such a move and the loss of town centre car parking. The issue of flood risk was also highlighted.

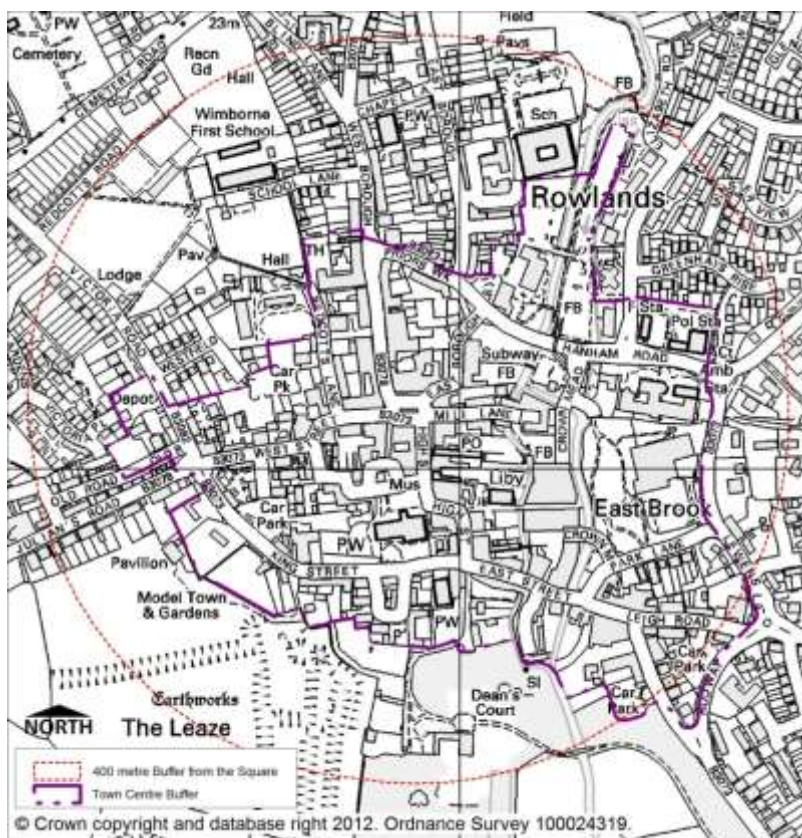
Pre-Submission (2012)

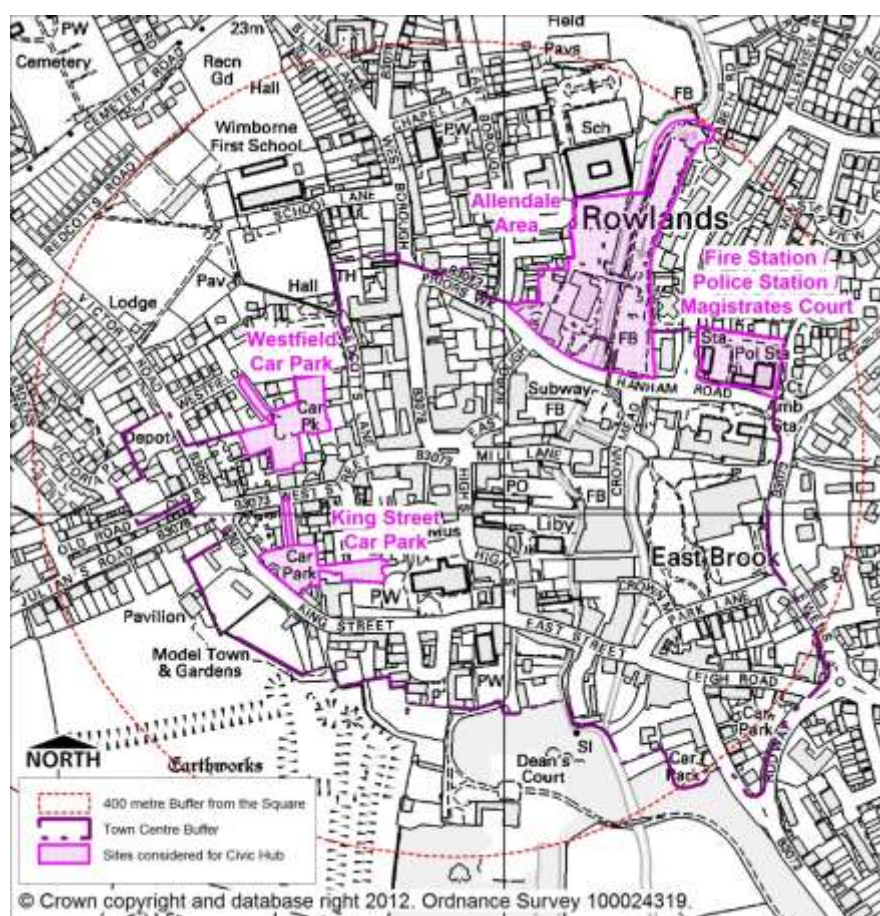
Policy WMC2 continued to propose the Allendale Area as an 'area for potential change', with the aim to create a Civic Hub specifically to include new district council offices.

Key issues raised in the analysis of responses related to the form of the riverside park and impact on transport and car parking. It was also confirmed that Allendale House has a lease until 2036, and so would not be available until then.

Justification for Sequential Test Geographical Area

A combination of the needs of the partnership, to make best use of Council assets and to improve the community facilities confirms that the geographical area for the sequential test is the town centre area of Wimborne Minster, as defined by the town centre boundary. This represents the area with the greatest opportunities for sustainable transport options and in planning policy terms, a designation that would allow office/community building development. The map below shows this area, along with a 400 metre buffer from the Square for information – this demonstrates accessibility to the sustainable transport options available from there to any future civic hub location.





Civic Hub Requirements

Specific Civic Hub Requirements

Based on the requirements of Policy WMC2 and the changing corporate needs of the Christchurch and East Dorset partnership, the following requirements are considered necessary for the Civic Hub building:

- 1,400 sq m building footprint
- 25 car parking spaces directly supporting the building
- Prominent town centre location so close to other community facilities and sustainable transport links
- Site to be available within 1-2 years to meet with the Partnership's single structure timetable

Other Allendale Policy Requirements

Policy WMC2 in the emerging Core Strategy also the Allendale Area looks to deliver/maintain:

- A riverside park
- Public car parking

The requirements are however specific to the site and are either existing uses or classed as water compatible uses – therefore they would not be subject to the Sequential Test.

Sources for Available Sites

Public Land Holdings

The East Dorset Land Terrier confirms that the only sites within Wimborne Town Centre that are reasonably available and of a sufficient size to fit the requirements of a Civic Hub are its existing Car Park sites at Allenvue, King Street and Westfield. The Allendale Centre and Allendale House which adjoin Allenvue car parks are also considered reasonably available and of a sufficient size. However Allendale House alone would not be a sufficient size.

The Dorset County Council Land Terrier confirms that within its land holdings, the only sites that can be considered of a sufficient size is the Fire Station / Police Station / Magistrates Court Site.

Total Place Review

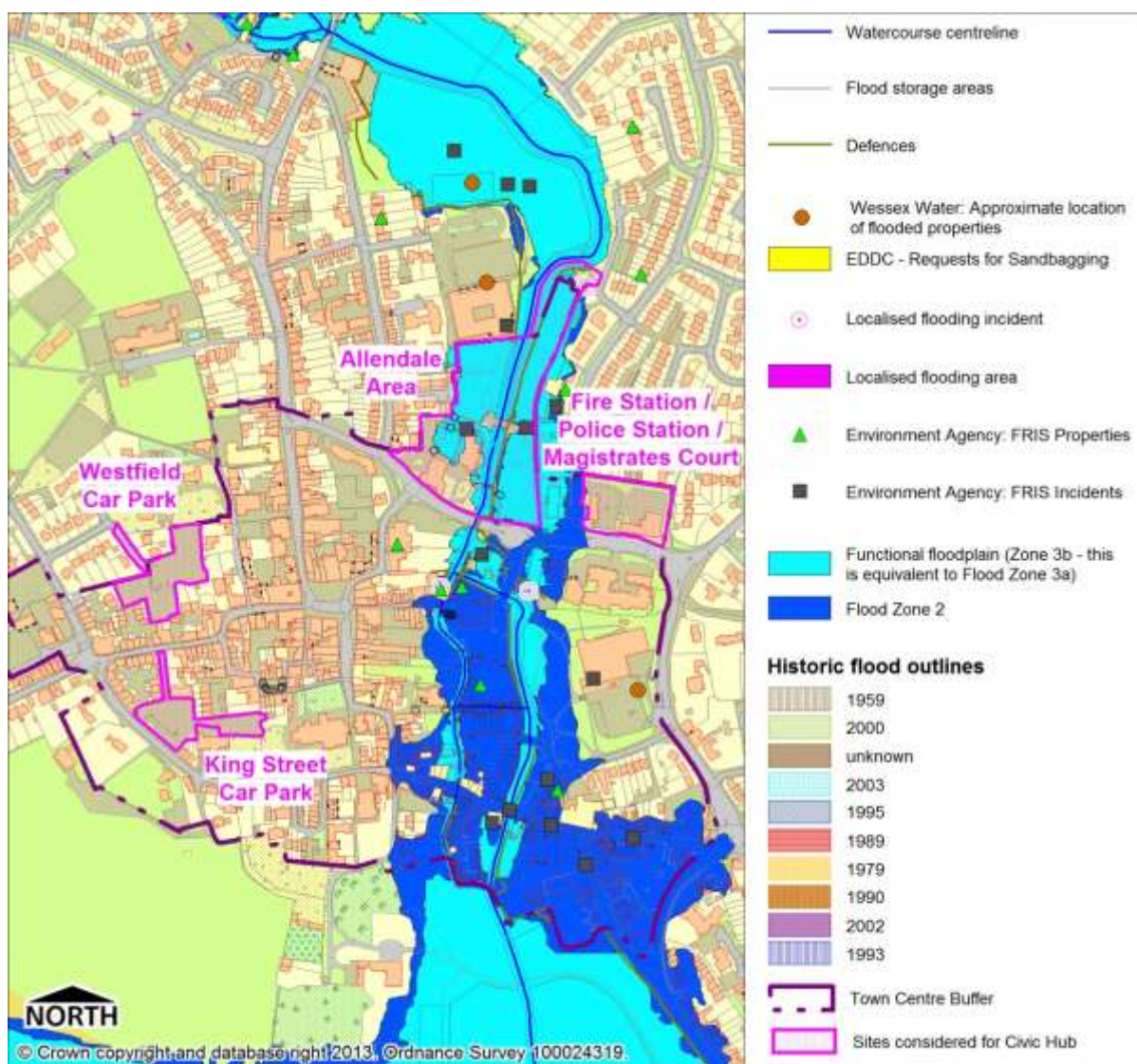
The Total Place survey contains assets that can be included for consideration and provides the detail to inform the detailed appraisal of those sites physically capable of fitting the requirements for the civic hub. The car parks and community buildings in the centre of Wimborne are assessed and reviewed in terms of their current usage and future development potential. Other than the sites already identified in the Councils' Terrier layers, no further sites listed in Appendix E are considered either reasonably available or of a sufficient size.

Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment (2012)

The Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment (SHLAA) has also been used as a source of other land owners who have indicated whether sites may be available for future development. No sites were landowner identified of a sufficient size within the town centre boundary.

Table of all sites Considered

Based on the requirements for the Civic Hub, the following sites are all considered as having potential to physically accommodate the facilities. Detailed appraisals of each of these sites are contained in an accompanying appendix.



Site Name	Current Use	Flood Zone	Site Ownership	Commentary
Allendale Area (Allenview car parks, Allendale Centre and Allendale House)	Car Park and Community uses	3a, 3b, 2,1	East Dorset District Council	<p>Existing community facilities and prominent location in the town, close to town centre for access to buses, taxi ranks, etc. These facilities are currently subject to a risk of flooding.</p> <p>Opportunity to provide replacement facilities for the Allendale Community Centre which requires a significant capital investment and has rising revenue costs.</p> <p>Site is in an otherwise</p>

Site Name	Current Use	Flood Zone	Site Ownership	Commentary
				sustainable location (accessibility, etc.) and also within the Town Centre Policy Area, where office development is considered acceptable
Fire Station / Police Station / Magistrates Court	Mixed Employment and community uses	2, 1	Dorset County Council	Whilst the Magistrates Court closure is known, DCC have not indicated the overall site is available for redevelopment, nor provided any timescales. As the site is capable of coming forward as housing land, it is also likely to be required to meet the Core Strategy's housing target for development within existing urban areas.
King Street Car Park	Car Park	1	East Dorset District Council	The car park has one of the highest utilisations of those within Wimborne. The car park is considered unsuitable for development as it is vital to the town's visitor appeal and is in close proximity to the Minster.
Westfield Car Park	Car Park	1	East Dorset District Council	Predominantly residential setting and only partly within the Town Centre Policy Area, so suited for residential development. Not prominent enough for the Council Offices.

The Sequential Test

- 1) Can Development be located in Flood Zone 1?

Site Name	Flood Zone	Availability Conclusion
Allendale Area (Allenview car parks, Allendale)	3, 2, 1	Site is considered reasonably available but also falls within

Centre and Allendale House)		flood zones 2 and 3
Fire Station / Police Station / Magistrates Court	2, 1	Site is not considered reasonably available
King Street Car Park	1	Site is not considered reasonably available
Westfield Car Park	1	Site is not considered reasonably available

2) Available sites located in Flood Zone 2?

Site Name	Flood Zone	Availability Conclusion
Allendale Area (Allenvie car parks, Allendale Centre and Allendale House)	3, 2, 1	Site is considered reasonably available but also falls within flood zone 3

3) Available sites located in Flood Zone 3?

The Allendale Area lies partly within flood zone 3 and is considered reasonably available.

It is considered that a site specific Flood Risk Assessment of Allendale Area will inform the future development of the site. This will also enable a sequential approach to the siting of the Civic Hub to ensure it is in the most appropriate location in terms of flood risk.

The Exception Test

The Exception Test should be applied only after the Sequential Test has been undertaken and when 'more vulnerable' development and 'essential infrastructure' cannot be located in flood zones 1 or 2. The test is applied when there are an insufficient number of suitably available sites for development within zones of lower flood risk.

Based on Table 2 of the Technical Guidance to the National Planning Policy Framework (March 2012), the proposed Civic Hub building is classed as a less vulnerable development (Buildings used for ...offices....etc.).

Table 3 shows developments that are classed as Less Vulnerable are compatible uses within Zones 1, 2 and 3a subject to the Sequential Test being successfully passed. The Exception Test is not considered to be required in this instance.

Summary

When weighing up the flood risk issues with the wider sustainability benefits of locating a Civic Hub within the Allendale Area, it is considered that the sites located in Flood Zone 1 are not reasonably available sites for the proposed development.

As the Allendale Area is also in part a redevelopment opportunity, there is the potential to improve the flood resilience of the uses on the site. Therefore a detailed FRA will ensure a sequential approach to the site itself will ensure land uses are allocated appropriately to specific areas within the site.

Appendices

Detailed Site Appraisals

The detailed appraisals for the sites considered having the physical capacity for a civic hub have been prepared using the Council's GIS and relevant information contained within the Total Place Survey 2010.

Site name: Allendale Area (Allenview car parks, Allendale Centre and Allendale House)

Total Size: 2.18 hectares

Site Context: Located to the north of the town centre, the Allendale Area is a large plot of Council land that comprises the Allendale Centre, Allendale House and Allenview Car Parks. The River Allen runs through the site and is separated from the town centre by Hanham Road. The Allendale Centre's primary purpose is to act as a space and centre for the local community. Allendale House promotes access to Wimborne Minster's history, providing facilities for community use and houses the Citizens' Advice Bureau.

Ownership: The complete site is owned by East Dorset District Council, although there are lease arrangements for the Allendale Centre and Allendale House

Accessibility / Sustainability: The Allendale Area is generally well connected to the rest of the town centre, within easy walking distance and car parks both within the site and nearby. Bus services are available in The Square, 150 metres from the site. Hanham Road can be crossed at the Allendale House pelican crossing and the subway on the eastern side of the River Allen.

Policy Context and Constraints:

- Conservation Areas – Allendale House and Centre are within the Wimborne Minster Conservation Area, the character and appearance of which should be preserved and enhanced.
- Listed buildings – Allendale House is a Grade II* Listed Building. The special architectural and historic features of the house and its setting should be preserved and substantial harm should be avoided; however it could be argued that the architecture of the current centre detracts from the setting of the listed building.

- Other designations – The Allendale Area lies within the existing Urban Area, where general development is in principle allowable. Part of the site including the House and Centre are also within a Town Centre Policy Area, in which town centre uses will generally be permitted.

Site History: The Allenvue car parks were considered by the SHLAA for housing, but were rejected due to a loss of town centre car parking and falling within areas of flood risk. Allenvue North and West car parks have low utilisation rates recorded of 18% and 14% respectively. The southern car park has a greater use of 39%.

Conclusions: For the Allendale Centre, the building represents a major opportunity for redevelopment within the town centre. It is in a poor state of repair and represents the Council's second biggest maintenance liability for the next 5 years. The site is also well valued due to its close location to the town centre and frontage to the River Allen. For Allendale House, there are no future plans for this part of the Allendale Area. There is also a robust lease with the current occupiers that is due to run out on 2036. Finally, for the Allenvue Car Parks, the South and West could feasibly be used for development either on their own or as part of a larger development of the Council's land holding. The northern car park has the least potential as it is a narrow site, and shares a risk of flooding with the east and west sites.

Site name: Fire Station / Police Station / Magistrates Court

Total Size: 0.48 hectares

Site Context: The Fire Station, Police Station and Magistrates Court are located on the north side of Hanham Road, between the corner with Allenvue Road and Rowland's Hill roundabout.

Ownership: The site is owned by Dorset County Council

Accessibility / Sustainability: The site is further to the east of the River Allen and to the north of Hanham Road and is relatively distant to other town centre services being 340 metres from the square. Whilst there are bus stops close to the site on Hanham Road itself, they do not offer the full range of services available from The Square. There are car parks 60 metres to the west and 140 metres to the south.

Policy Context and Constraints:

- Conservation Areas – The site is adjacent or nearby to the Rowlands Hill / St Johns Hill and Wimborne Minster Conservation Areas. The setting, character and appearance of these areas should be preserved and enhanced.
- Listed buildings – none within close proximity
- Other designations - The site lies within the existing Urban Area, where general development is in principle allowable. It is also within a Town Centre Policy Area, in which town centre uses will generally be permitted.

Site History: The Ministry of Justice has considered the Magistrates Court is no longer required, and will be closed. The police have also stated the desire to downsize and potentially relocate.

Conclusions: Whilst it is possible the site is being considered as part of Dorset's Joint Asset Management Plan, there are no fixed plans that we are currently aware of for the near future.

Site name: King Street Car Park

Total Size: 0.36 hectares

Site Context: King Street Car Park is in a central location, behind the Minster and easily accessible from King Street, one of the main routes through Wimborne. It provides access to Wimborne Model Town, the Minster and the main shopping area.

Ownership: The site is owned by East Dorset District Council.

Accessibility / Sustainability: The site is 80 metres from the Square via West Street and adjacent to the Minster, which leads on to the High Street.

Comprehensive bus services are available from The Square.

Policy Context and Constraints:

- Conservation Areas – The car park is within the Wimborne Minster Conservation Area, the character and appearance of which should be preserved and enhanced.
- Listed buildings – The eastern edge of the car park is adjacent to the curtilage of the Minster, so any development would need to take full account of its setting.
- Other designations – The site lies within the existing Urban Area, where general development is in principle allowable. It is also within a Town Centre Policy Area, in which town centre uses will generally be permitted.

Site History: The town centre car parks were considered by the SHLAA, but were rejected due to a loss of town centre car parking. The car park has a 60% utilisation – one of the highest of the Wimborne Car Parks and also provides the greatest gross revenue for a car park in the district.

Conclusions: Whilst King Street car park is well located within the town, it is unlikely to be suitable for development as it is vital to the town's visitor appeal, and is in close proximity to the Minster.

Site name: Westfield Car Park

Total Size: 0.47 hectares

Site Context: Westfield car park is located to the west of Wimborne town centre, just to the north of West Street. The main point of access is from Victoria Road

Ownership: The site is owned by East Dorset District Council.

Accessibility / Sustainability: The site is 40 metres from the Square via Redcotts Lane, where comprehensive bus services are available.

Policy Context and Constraints:

- Conservation Areas – The southern part of the site is within the Wimborne Minster Conservation Area, the character and appearance of which should be preserved and enhanced.
- Listed buildings – The southern half of the car park abuts the listed buildings that front West Street, so any re-development would need to take full account of their setting.
- Other designations – The site lies within the existing Urban Area, where general development is in principle allowable. The southern half of the site is also within a Town Centre Policy Area, in which town centre uses will generally be permitted.

Site History: The town centre car parks were considered by the SHLAA, but were rejected due to a loss of town centre car parking. Whilst the car park has 30% utilisation, it still brings in significant gross revenue for the District Council.

Conclusions: The car park could be a valuable site for redevelopment but as residential accommodation. This is due to the residential character of the surrounding development and that it only partly lies in the Town Centre Boundary.

Whilst the site is close to the centre of Wimborne, it is not in a prominent position, with no direct frontage on to the main route in to and around Wimborne.

List of evidence studies, policy documents, etc.

Total Place Reviews and Opportunities: Ferndown and Wimborne Minster
(December 2010)

Bournemouth, Christchurch, North Dorset and Salisbury SFRA – Level 1 Strategic
Flood Risk Assessment (February 2008)

Technical Guidance to the National Planning Policy Framework (March 2012)

National Planning Policy Framework (March 2012)

Report to East Dorset Resources Committee – Future Office Accommodation (3 April
2013)

Christchurch and East Dorset Core Strategy – Options for Consideration (October
2010)

Christchurch and East Dorset Core Strategy – Pre-Submission (April 2012)

Christchurch Borough Council and East Dorset District Council Shared Service
Partnership - Partnership Plan and Operating Model