

3 OVERVIEW OF PROVISION

3.1 General

This section describes overall provision and distribution of open space and other community recreation facilities within the two local authority areas. It should be read in conjunction with the Local Needs Area Profiles in Section 6 which provide more detailed consideration of the adequacy or otherwise of provision of open space within local areas.

3.2 Open space: general note

This study has looked at the following types of publicly accessible green space:

- Recreation Grounds and Public Gardens
- (Accessible) Natural and Semi Natural Green Space (including green corridors/recreation routes, and accessible beaches)
- Amenity / Informal Green Space
- Allotments and Community Gardens
- Outdoor Active Sports Space (includes pitches)
- Equipped play provision for children and young people
- Built facilities (includes sports halls and swimming pools)
- Country Parks
- Education Outdoor Sports facilities
- Other Open Space (includes golf courses)

These terms are explained in detail in section 1.7 and within the following sections which address each open space type in turn.

These categories have been agreed by the two local authorities, and also generally reflect the typology of open spaces identified in PPG17 and its companion guide. Although the above are varied in their nature they all generally share a trait of being open to community use in some way, either freely (as in the case of Parks), or on a managed access basis (such as with allotments and some kinds of outdoor sports facility.)

Sites have been identified through desk research by the two local authorities as well as site visits and inspections. A total of 1506 qualifying open spaces have been identified within the study area. Quality assessments for these sites have been undertaken. The assessment forms used for this purpose are included as **Appendix 1a**.

Each identified site has been given a Unique Reference Label based on conventions devised by the two local authorities. These labels are shown on the Area Profile maps (Section 6), and (wherever possible) on the maps in this section. A summary list of all sites is included as **Appendix 2**.

3.3 Strategically important sites and sites outside the study area

Because of its very compact nature, Christchurch Borough residents rely on access to, and use of, certain open spaces within neighbouring districts for recreational enjoyment. In this regard a number of sites have been identified by the Borough Council within Bournemouth and the New Forest as being of relevance to this study of open space provision and needs. Such sites are shown on the relevant maps, but have **not** been included in any quantitative analyses of provision.

Some sites outside of the identified Local Needs Areas must be considered to play a strategic role due to their significance and the wide catchment area from which visitors are drawn. One example is Bournemouth Sports Ground which lies within Christchurch Borough, very close to the East Dorset District boundary. Although it is not within any identified LNAs, it clearly attracts residents from both local authority areas.

Moors Valley Country Park in East Dorset and the beaches in Christchurch offer a natural resource attractive to people from many miles away. They have not been included within any LNA but are considered within overall open space provision.

When considering provision within LNAs and general access to opportunities at the local and strategic level, the local planning authorities must take into account the role played by these strategic sites, or those outside the study area.

3.4 Other general comments

In practice it can sometimes be very difficult to differentiate between certain types of open space:

- Some of the larger spaces (such as parks/recreation grounds) may clearly serve more than one of the above functions. For example, a large park may include children's play facilities, sports pitches, natural areas and more. On the other hand, many large spaces may serve predominantly one function.
- It is often difficult to differentiate between various types of informal recreation space, as local people do not necessarily draw distinction between (for example) a 'recreation ground', a park, and a large area of amenity open space; all are capable of meeting local need for informal activity and enjoyment. This demonstrates the need for flexibility in the perception of and planning for open space, which should have implications for the development and application of new local standards for open space.
- Some of the identified sites have been broken down as appropriate to reflect the above diversity of use. However, some sites have not been broken down as such and they are categorised (and shown on the maps) according to their identified primary use.

- Much of the open space considered in this report is 'free and open to use'. Access is not generally monitored for most sites considered and is often possible from a variety of points and directions. This makes it difficult to quantify with any precision the levels of use of different open spaces. However, as is seen in Section 5, local consultation has identified clearly the desire of residents to have access to such spaces for informal recreation opportunities.

This report and the underlying audit has attempted to address these issues by:

- Breaking large sites down so as to better reflect key elements/uses that would otherwise be overlooked. Equipped play provision (which is often located in larger areas of space) is an example of where this approach is necessary.
- Elsewhere in the report recommending standards, and a revised development plan typology, of open space which better reflect their distinctive recreation values, and the willingness of people to travel to use attractive major spaces.

3.5 Overall open space provision: some general facts and figures

Before examining the overall provision of the different categories of open space within the two local authorities, here are some general figures.

In overall terms Christchurch Borough Council has much less defined open space than East Dorset, it being a smaller area and urban in character. **East Dorset District** is characterised by its very large provision of Natural and Semi Natural Green Space as well as 'Other Open Space', Other Open Space (for both local authorities) can cover diverse features such as large private gardens, golf courses and large areas of acknowledged importance for nature. Some of these spaces will not be accessible to the community within the spirit of the definition provided in section 1.8 of this report.

Figure 3.1: Total provision in Christchurch Borough

	Total provision (hectares)	Provision per 1000 population (hectares)
Allotments & Community Gardens	8.30	0.18
Active Sports Space	26.07	0.58
Children's Play Space	1.43	0.03
Teenage Space	0.48	0.01
Recreation Grounds and Public Gardens	56.84	1.26
Amenity / Informal Green Space	12.75	0.28
Natural and Semi Natural Green Space	576.0	12.8
Cemeteries and Churchyards	9.74	0.22
Education Outdoor Sports Facilities	25.19	0.56
Other Open Space	119.40	2.65
TOTAL	836.2	18.55

Figure 3.2: Relative breakdown of provision in Christchurch Borough

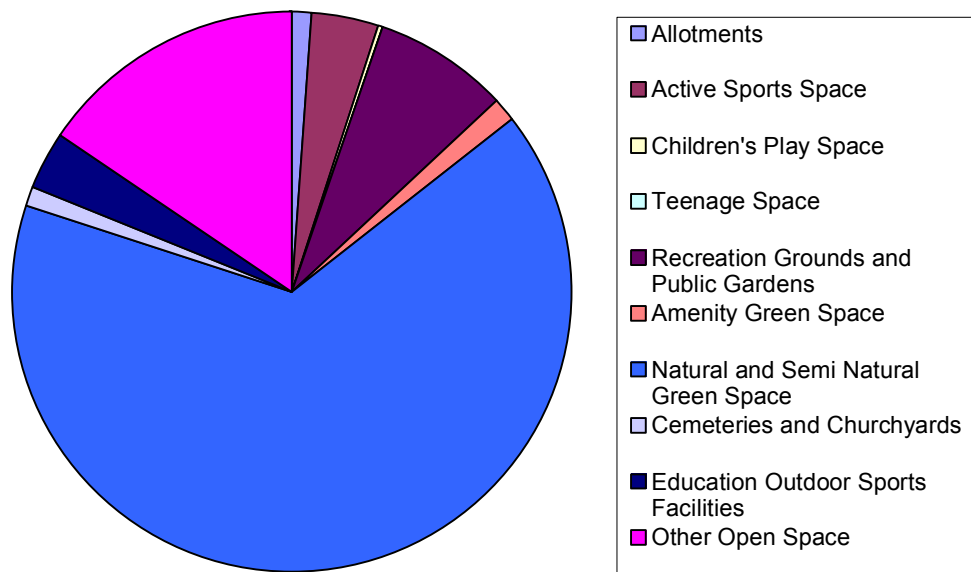


Figure 3.3: Provision per head of population in Christchurch Borough

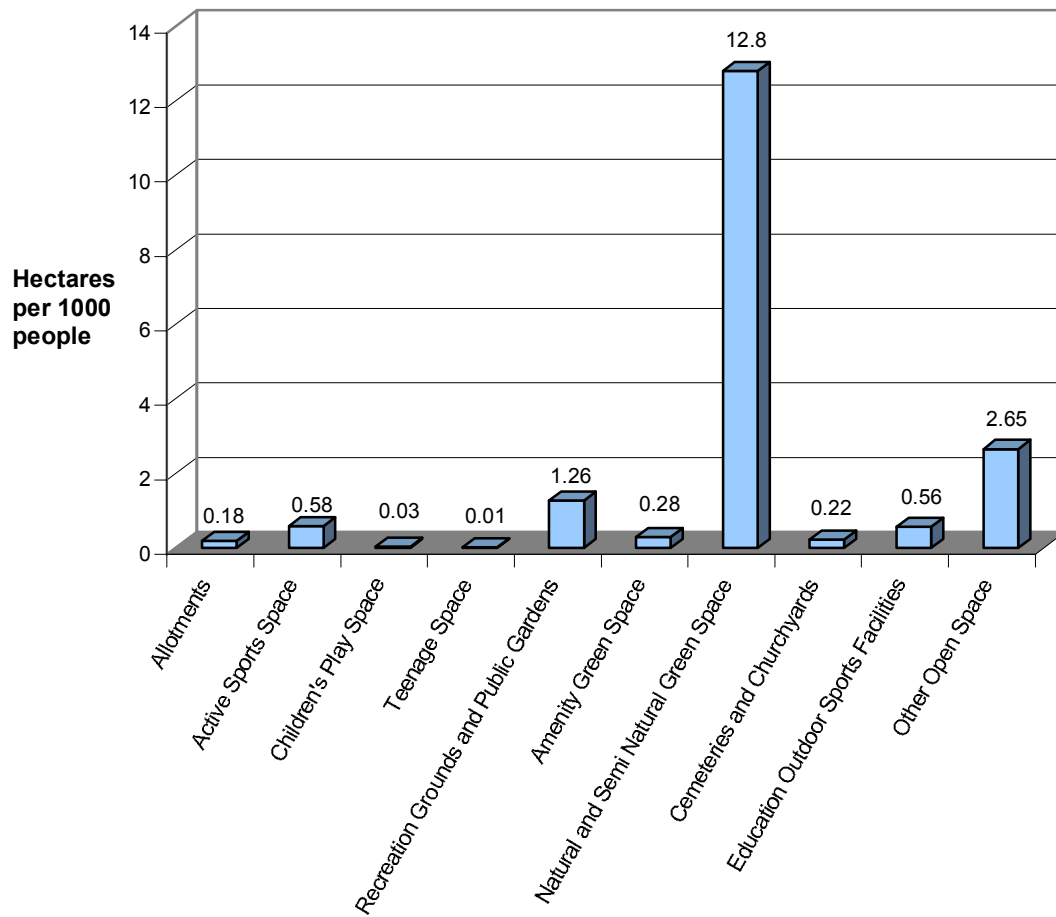


Figure 3.4: Total provision in East Dorset District

	Total provision (hectares)	Provision per 1000 population (hectares)
Allotments & Community Gardens	11.53	0.14
Active Sports Space	23.85	0.28
Children's Play Space	3.78	0.05
Teenage Space	0.95	0.01
Recreation Grounds and Public Gardens	65.01	0.78
Amenity / Informal Green Space	79.98	0.95
Natural and Semi Natural Green Space	6158.48	73.50
Cemeteries and Churchyards	22.74	0.27
Education Outdoor Sports Facilities	64.32	0.77
Other Open Space	1209.32	14.43
Moors Valley Country Park	30.4	0.36
TOTAL	7670.36	91.54

Figure 3.5: Relative breakdown of provision for East Dorset District

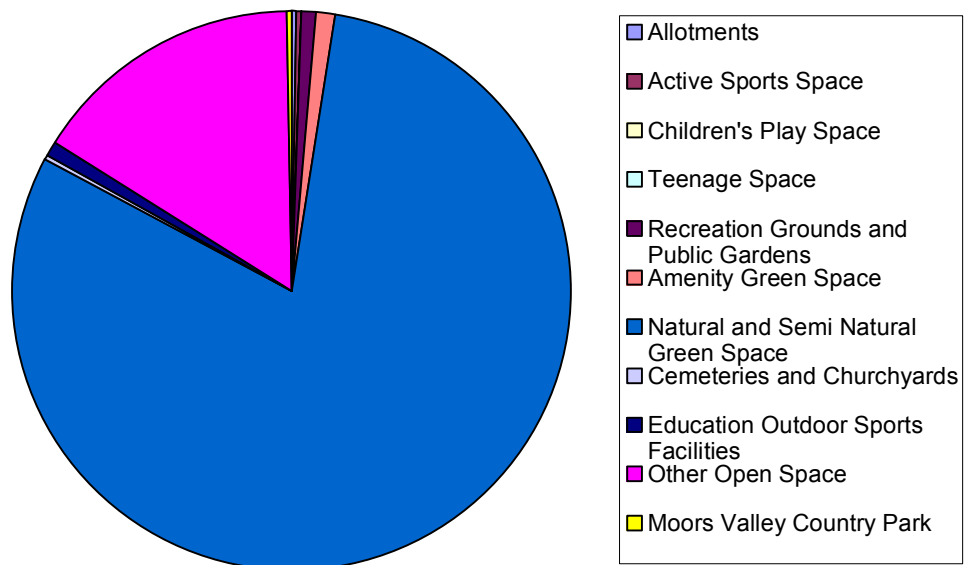
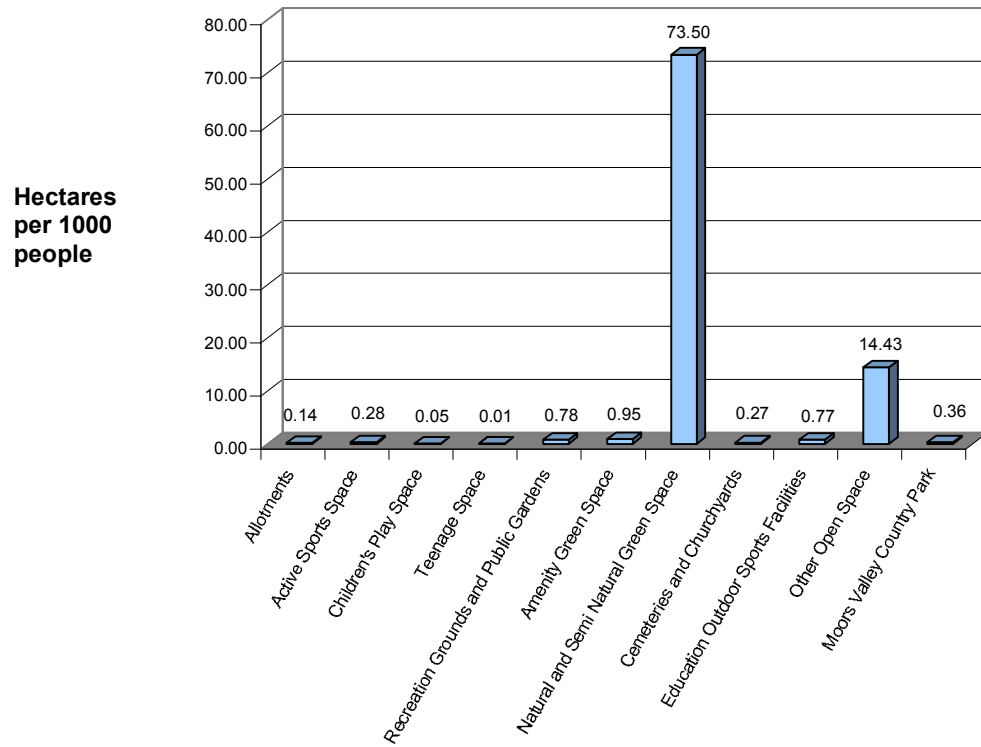


Figure 3.6: Provision per head of population in East Dorset District



The figures (for both local authority areas) currently include the contribution of Natural and Semi Natural Green Spaces that also lie in whole or part within international ecological designations (Special Protection Areas, Special Areas of Conservation and Ramsar sites).

In light of the issues discussed in section 2.4, it will be important not to subject such areas to additional pressures and, wherever possible, to divert recreation activity to other appropriate locations.

The combined size of sites falling wholly or partly within an international designation is estimated to be:

- East Dorset District: 1535 ha
- Christchurch Borough: 170 ha

3.6 Recreation Grounds and Public Gardens

For the purpose of this study the two local authorities have agreed to include all sites that might be thought of as recreation grounds, parks, and public gardens into one overall classification called Recreation Grounds and Public Gardens. The role of parks' in terms of enhancing general quality of life and the urban realm has been 'rediscovered' in recent years at national level through government supported campaigns and the work of organisations like Cabe Space. Public parks and gardens take on many forms, and may embrace a wide range of functions, including:

- Informal recreation and outdoor sport
- Play space of many kinds (including for sport and children's play)
- Providing attractive walks to work
- Offering landscape and amenity features
- Providing areas for 'events'
- Providing habitats for wildlife.

Parks and gardens are more than simply recreational space- they are a composition of features, the combined value of which might be seen as greater than that of the constituent parts.

Parks and Gardens are largely an urban phenomenon, and the nearest equivalent provision in rural areas tends to be recreation grounds. However, there are sites within Christchurch which probably cannot be defined as either a Park or Public Garden, but generally have some hybrid function similar to a recreation ground.

Country Parks are considered elsewhere in this report (section 3.16), as they in turn are very different in character from the archetypal municipal park.

Existing provision

The **Map 3.1: Recreation Grounds and Public Gardens** shows the location of all open spaces defined as such, and can be cross referred to the following table of sites. Further reference is made in the Local Needs Areas profiles in Section 6.

3.7 (Accessible) Natural and Semi Natural Green Space

For the purpose of this study (Accessible) Natural Green Space covers a variety of spaces including beaches, meadows, river floodplain, woodland, copse all of which share a trait of being managed for wildlife value but which are also open to public use and enjoyment. Research elsewhere and (more importantly) the local consultation for this study have identified the value attached to such space for recreation and emotional well-being. A sense of 'closeness to nature' with its attendant benefits for people is something that is all too easily lost in urban areas.

Accessible Natural Green Spaces should be viewed as important a component of community infrastructure in planning for new development as other forms of open space or 'built' recreation facilities. Accessible Natural Green Spaces can make important contributions towards local Biodiversity Action Plan targets and can also raise awareness of biodiversity values and issues.

Existing provision

The **Map 3.2: Natural and Semi Natural Green Space** shows the provision of such space within the two local authority areas and can be cross referenced to **Appendix 2**. It clearly shows that the vast majority of such space is located within East Dorset District. It is unclear the extent to which all of these sites can be deemed to be accessible to the community within the general definitions provided earlier. Some sites will have statutory rights or permissive codes allowing the public to wander in these sites. Others may have defined Rights of Way or permissive routes running through them. For the remainder of sites there may be some access on a managed basis, or else none at all. These differences will need to be taken into account in assessing both the amount and location of Accessible Natural Green Space within the study area. However, although some of the space identified may not be 'accessible' in the sense that it can be entered and used by the general community, they can be appreciated from a distance, and contribute to visual amenity.

The map and table also shows important 'green corridors' such as footpaths, cycle ways and river courses which can be used as recreation routes. Walking and cycling are continually identified by national surveys as major recreation activities in their own right, but are also endemic to everyday 'healthy living' (such as walking or cycling to work, the shops, or school). As activities they should be encouraged as a means of making both recreation and utility trips. Green recreational corridors can include:

- The local public Rights of Way network
- Promoted long distance footpaths and cycleways
- Permissive routes.

It is recognised that some of these routes (especially in the towns) will also serve as utility routes and can be of significant ecological value.

Links between town and countryside are important for accessing the wider rights of way network and quiet lanes, and can help to reduce car usage. Further consideration of Accessible Natural Green Space is provided in the Area Profiles in **Section 6**, and sites are properly identified in **Appendix 2**.

The Map 3.3: Natural and Semi Natural Green Space in relation to international ecological designations identifies that some of this type of open space is wholly or partially protected by environmental legislation which restricts the way in which they can be promoted and used for recreation. The most significant designations are Special Protection Area (SPA), Special Area of Conservation (SAC) and Ramsar. These sites include:

- Town Common (includes St Catherine's Hill) (SPA, SAC & Ramsar)
- Corfe and Barrow Hills (SPA, SAC & Ramsar)
- Corfe Mullen Pastures (SAC & Ramsar)
- Cranborne Common (SPA, SAC & Ramsar)
- Ebblake Bog (SPA, SAC & Ramsar)
- Ferndown Common (SPA & SAC)
- Holt and West Moors Heaths (SPA, SAC & Ramsar)
- Horton Common (SPA, SAC & Ramsar)
- Hurn Common (SPA & SAC)
- Lions Hill (SPA, SAC & Ramsar)
- Parley Common (SPA, SAC & Ramsar)
- Slop Bog and Uddens Heath (SPA, SAC & Ramsar)
- St Leonards and St Ives Heaths (SPA, SAC & Ramsar)
- Upton Heaths (SPA, SAC & Ramsar)
- Verwood Heaths (SPA & SAC)

These sites are shown on the relevant maps as they are used by the public. Because of the potential conflicts that can arise over such sites, **it is important that they are not promoted for additional recreation usage, and should not be considered to contribute towards the meeting of minimum standards of provision for Accessible and Semi Natural Green Space as explained in Section 5.**

The above illustrates the potential issues that have to be addressed in the planning and management of current and future recreation opportunities, with regard to areas of particular ecological sensitivity. Such areas can be seen as important recreation outlets by many, but this activity can impact upon the very environments that users may value.

3.8 Amenity/informal green space

It is quite difficult to offer a practical definition of Amenity Green Space compared with other types of open space covered by this study. The category is considered to include those spaces open to free and spontaneous use by the public, but neither laid out and or managed for a specific function such as a park, public playing field or recreation ground; nor managed as a natural or semi-natural habitat. These areas of open space will be of varied size, but are likely to share the following characteristics:

- Unlikely to be physically demarcated by walls or fences.
- Predominantly lain down to (mown) grass.
- Unlikely to have identifiable entrance points (unlike parks).
- Unlikely to have planted flower beds or other formal planted layouts, although they may have shrub and tree planting.
- Generally no other recreational facilities and fixtures (such as play equipment or ball courts), although there may be items such as litter bins and benches.

Examples might include both small and larger informal grassed areas in housing estates, and general recreation spaces. They can serve a variety of functions dependent on their size, shape, location and topography. Some may be used for informal recreation activities, whilst others by themselves, or else collectively, contribute to the overall visual amenity of an area. However, as a general rule such spaces will not include highway verges and other incidental open space that does not fall within the definition of recreational open space contained within Section 1.

Existing provision

The **Map 3.4: Amenity Green Space** shows the general location of identified Amenity Green Space within the study area, and the sites are properly described in **Appendix 2**. Many of the sites are also covered by the Local Needs Areas Profiles in Section 6.

3.9 Allotments and Community Gardens

Allotments provide areas for people to grow their own produce and plants. It is important to be clear about what is meant by the term 'Allotment'. The Small Holdings and Allotments Act 1908 obliged local authorities to provide sufficient allotments and to let them to persons living in their areas where they considered there was a demand for allotments.

The Allotment Act of 1922 defines the term 'allotment garden' as:

“an allotment not exceeding 40 poles² in extent which is wholly or mainly cultivated by the occupier for the production of vegetable or fruit crops for consumption by himself or his family”

The Allotments Act of 1925 gives protection to land acquired specifically for use as allotments, so called Statutory Allotment Sites, by the requirement for the need for the approval of Secretary of State in event of sale or disposal. Some allotment sites may not specifically have been acquired for this purpose. Such allotment sites are known as “temporary” (even if they have been in use for decades) and are not protected by the 1925 legislation.

In this country a 'Community Garden' is generally distinct from an Allotment Garden. A Community Garden in the UK tends to be situated in a built-up area and is typically run by an independent non-profit organisation. It is also likely to perform a dual function as an open space or play area: while it may offer plots to individual cultivators the organisation that administers the garden will normally have a great deal of the responsibility for its planting, landscaping and upkeep.

Existing provision

The **Map 3.5: Allotments and Community Gardens** indicates the provision of allotment sites/community gardens through the study area, and can be cross referenced with the table of sites in **Appendix 2**.

² 40 poles is equivalent to 1,210 square yards or 1,012 square metre. A 'pole' can also be know as a 'rod' or 'perch'

3.10 Outdoor Sports Pitches

The provision of outdoor sports pitches covers facilities for a variety of sports, as reviewed below.

3.10.1 Synthetic Turf Pitches (STPs)

STPs are a requirement for competitive hockey but are also a very important training resource for football and other sports. Recent technological developments have also produced a 'tufted' "3rd Generation" STP that is on the verge of being accepted by the Football Association (FA) for competitive play at various levels (although this surface is not accepted for competitive hockey).

The following **Map 3.6: Synthetic Turf Pitches** locates known full-size, floodlight STPs in and around the study area and these can be cross referenced to the accompanying tables in **Appendix 2**.

It should be noted that the map does not show an un-lit STP at Dumpton Preparatory School in Colehill, which makes a helpful contribution to local sports space. The overall ratios of provision of full-size, floodlit STPs to the two local authority populations are:

- Christchurch Borough: 1 per 15,016 people.
- East Dorset Council: 1 per 85,370.

3.10.2 Other outdoor sports including grass pitches

Grass pitches remain the surface of choice for most pitch sports at the community level. The **Map 3.7: Active Sports Space** indicates the general location of areas for outdoor sport within the study area. This includes not just areas for pitch sports, but also other outdoor sports facilities such as for bowls and tennis. The areas shown exclude golf courses which account for very large tracts of land, and are considered elsewhere under 'other open space'. The map can be cross referred to the table of sites contained in **Appendix 2**.

3.11 Play provision for children and young people

It is important at the outset to establish the scope of the audit in terms of this kind of space. Children and young people will play/'hang out' in almost all publicly accessible "space" ranging from the street, town centres and squares, parks, playing fields, "amenity" grassed areas etc as well as the more recognisable play and youth facility areas such as equipped playgrounds, youth shelters, BMX and skateboard parks, Multi-use Games Areas etc. Clearly many of the other types of open space covered by this study will therefore provide informal play opportunities.

To a child, the whole world is a potential playground: where an adult sees a low wall, a railing, kerb or street bench a child might see a mini adventure playground or a challenging skateboard obstacle. Play should not be restricted to designated 'reservations' and planning and urban design principles should reflect these considerations.

The study has recorded the following:

- Equipped children's space (for pre-teens)
- Provision for teenagers.

The former comprises equipped areas of play that cater for the needs of children up to and around 12 years. The latter comprises informal recreation opportunities for, broadly, the 13 to 16/17 age group, and which might include facilities like skateboard parks, basketball courts and 'free access' Multi Use Games Areas (MUGAs). In practice there will always be some blurring around the edges in terms of younger children using equipment aimed for older persons and vice versa.

The identified sites are listed in **Appendix 2** and are also delineated on the maps within the Local Needs Area profiles in Section 6. They are generally too small in size to be shown on the scale of **Map 3.8: Children and Young People's Space**, which shows instead the general locations.

3.12 Other Open Space

The study has also identified a variety of other open spaces, which have been included on the **Map 3.9: Other Open Space** on which records are held. The map shows the location of churchyards and cemeteries, golf courses³, large private gardens spaces, amongst other things. These are not open spaces which are of central concern to this study given their specialist and (often) private nature.

However, their existence should be acknowledged as well as the general contribution that they can make to the character and amenity of an area.

3.13 Sports halls and swimming pools

Sports halls host a variety of formal sport and active recreational activities. National research indicates that although they tend to attract use by a quite limited section of the population use by such people tends to be regular. Swimming pools attract both casual and competitive activity, and swimming continues to be one of the most popular leisure pursuits. Larger facilities may attract use from residents living outside the study area and vice versa.

The following **Maps 3.10 and 3.11** locate existing sports halls and swimming pools within and around the study areas. It can be cross referenced to the tables in **Appendix 2**. All those facilities identified will have some level of community use, although the extent of use and how it may be reflected in formal access arrangements varies. Community access will obviously be greatest in the Councils' supported sports halls and swimming pools.

Other provision is centred on school sites and facilities operated by the private/commercial sector.

The respective ratios for the provision of sports halls of at least 4-courts in size, and available on a pay and play basis (the most open form of management in terms of access) are:

- Christchurch Borough: 1 hall per 22,525
- East Dorset District: 1 hall per 42,685

Halls of at least 4-courts in size are used as a standard 'unit' of assessment by Sport England, as this size allows for a variety of activities to take place (such as 5-a-side, basketball etc). This does not deny the important contribution made by facilities that are smaller in size, especially in meeting local needs.

³ Golf courses have been excluded from the general analyses of open space. Because of the extensive tracts they cover inclusion would skew the overall picture of provision so as to be misleading. Usage tends to be heavily managed and requires payment of fees significantly higher than those charged for the use of other active sports spaces included in this study, where charges are known to be made.

The respective ratios for the provision of swimming pools of at least 4-lanes and 20 metres in length, and available on a pay and play basis (the most open form of management in terms of access) are:

- Christchurch Borough: 1 pool per 22,525
- East Dorset District: 1 pool per 42,685

Pools of at least 4-lanes and 20 metres in length are considered to allow for both recreational and a basic level of competitive swimming and training. This does not deny the important contribution made by facilities that are smaller in size, especially in meeting local needs.

3.14 Other built facilities

For the purpose of this study 'built facilities' include indoor covered venues (excluding dedicated sports halls and swimming pools) that exist to a major or significant extent to accommodate sports and recreational activities for the community. At one end of the spectrum the definition can include large leisure centres, but it will also include smaller community venues and village halls that can be used for a variety of recreation and leisure activities. A judgement is inevitably made about what is available for the community, but it is clear that some facilities (such as many located within private schools, prisons, and others and ancillary buildings such as standalone pavilions and changing blocks) are not included in this definition.

The full listing of these facilities is contained in **Appendix 2**.

3.15 Education Outdoor Facilities

Many schools have multi-use games areas, playing fields, sports pitches and even swimming pools which access to the public varies between schools. For this reason, they are not included within the accessible open space categories addressed by this report.

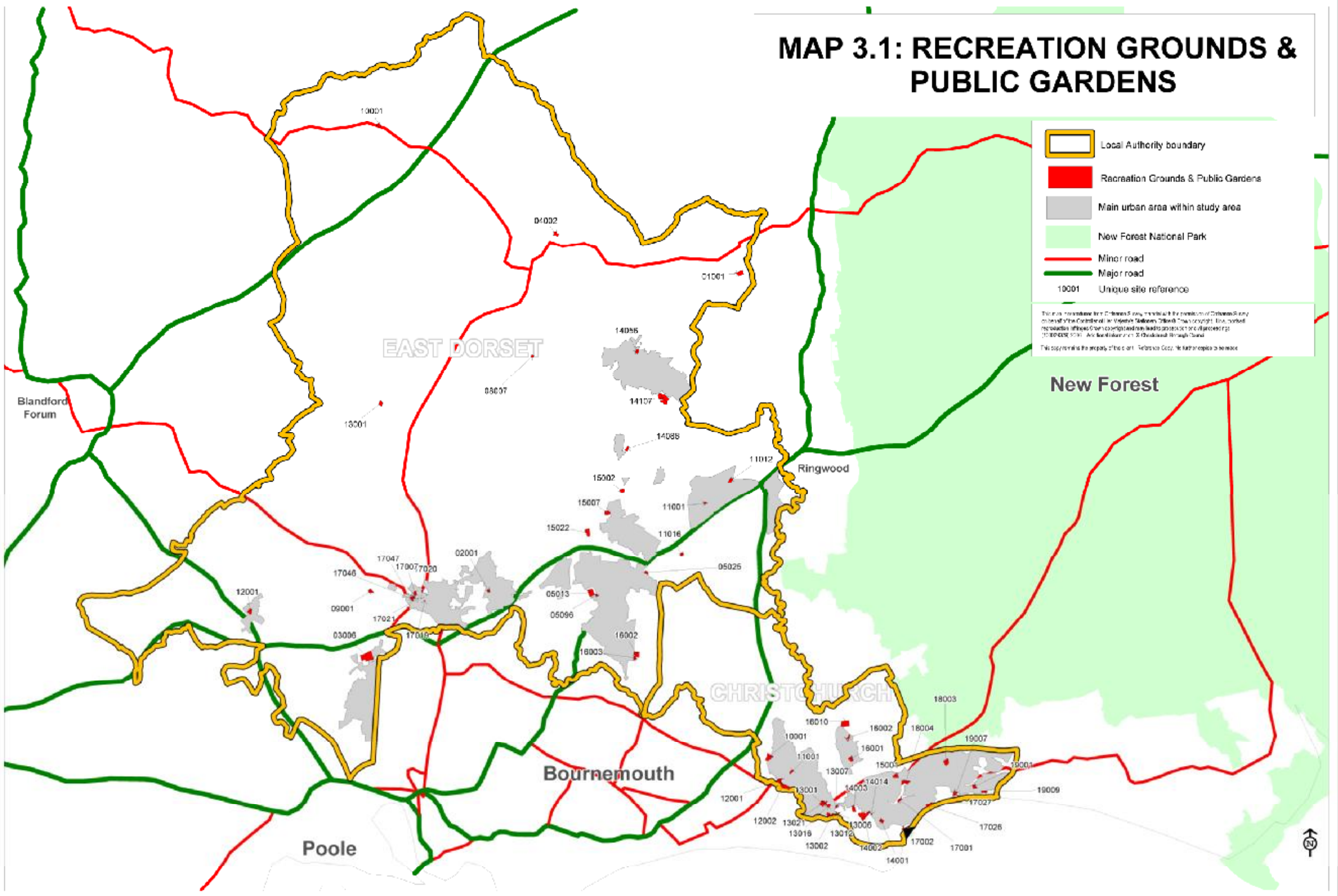
In areas where a shortfall in active sports space is identified, these educational facilities could be brought into use for the community through extended schools initiatives. These national government initiatives encourage the 'opening up' of schools to enable their use out of school hours and by groups other than just school pupils. Both local planning authorities will need to bear this potential provision in mind when addressing any identified shortfalls.

Education outdoor facilities are shown on Map 3.9 and are listed in **Appendix 2**.

3.16 Country Parks

Country parks are considered as planned and dedicated venues providing a natural, rural setting and informal recreation opportunities for visitors who do not necessarily want to go out into the wider countryside. Moors Valley Country Park is a well used site that lies within East Dorset District and is listed in **Appendix 2**..

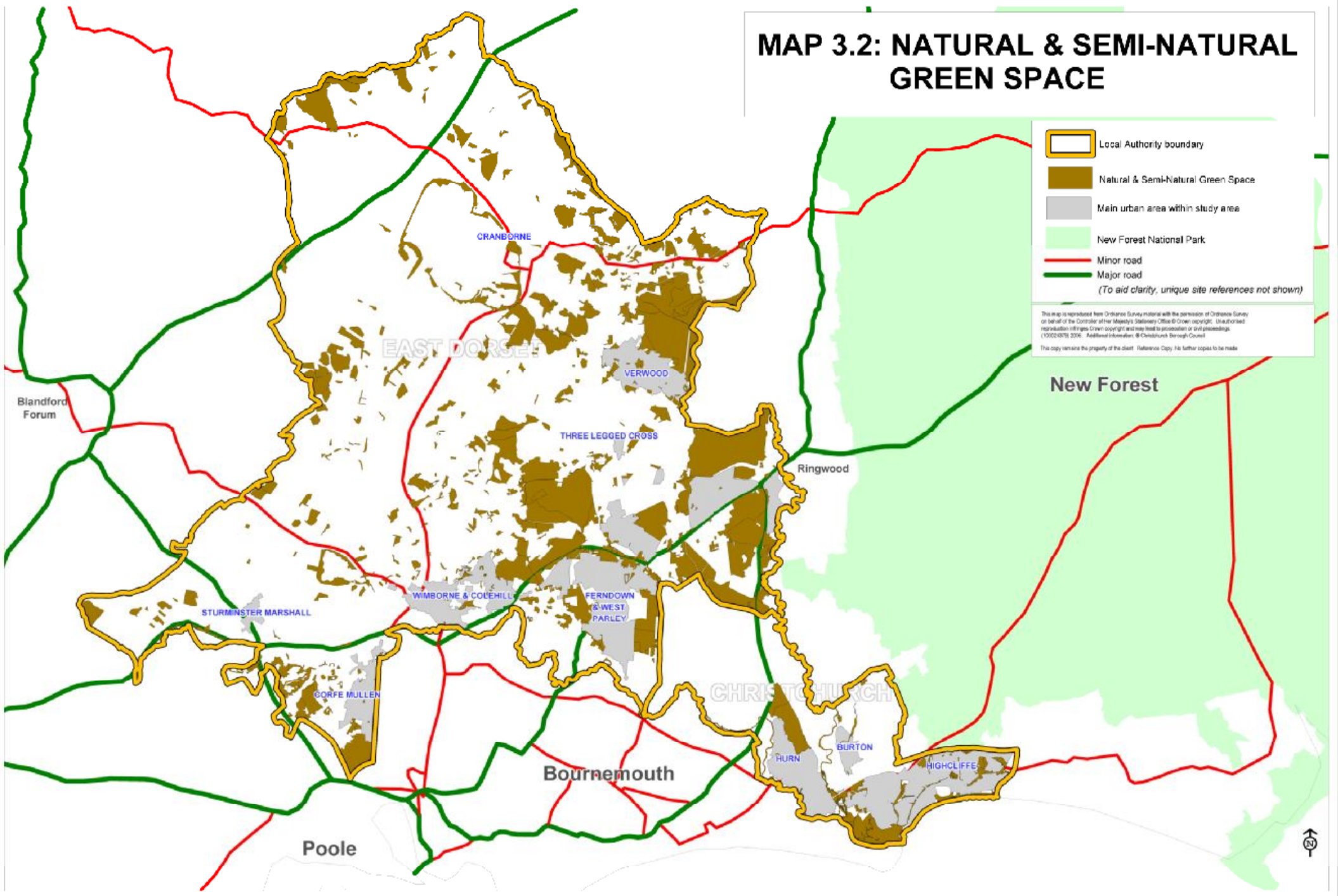
MAP 3.1: RECREATION GROUNDS & PUBLIC GARDENS



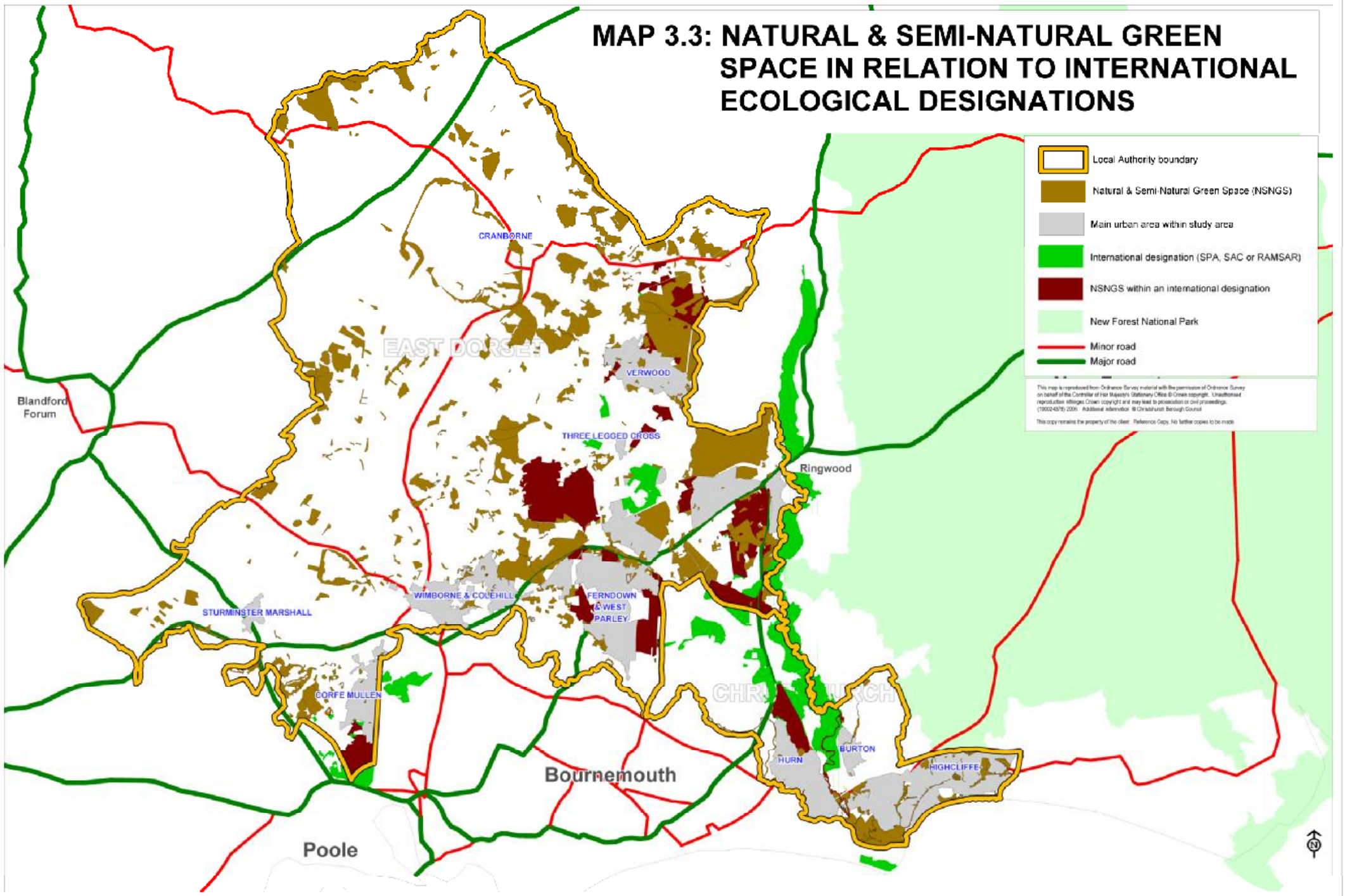
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MAP 3.2: NATURAL & SEMI-NATURAL GREEN SPACE




MAP 3.3: NATURAL & SEMI-NATURAL GREEN SPACE IN RELATION TO INTERNATIONAL ECOLOGICAL DESIGNATIONS



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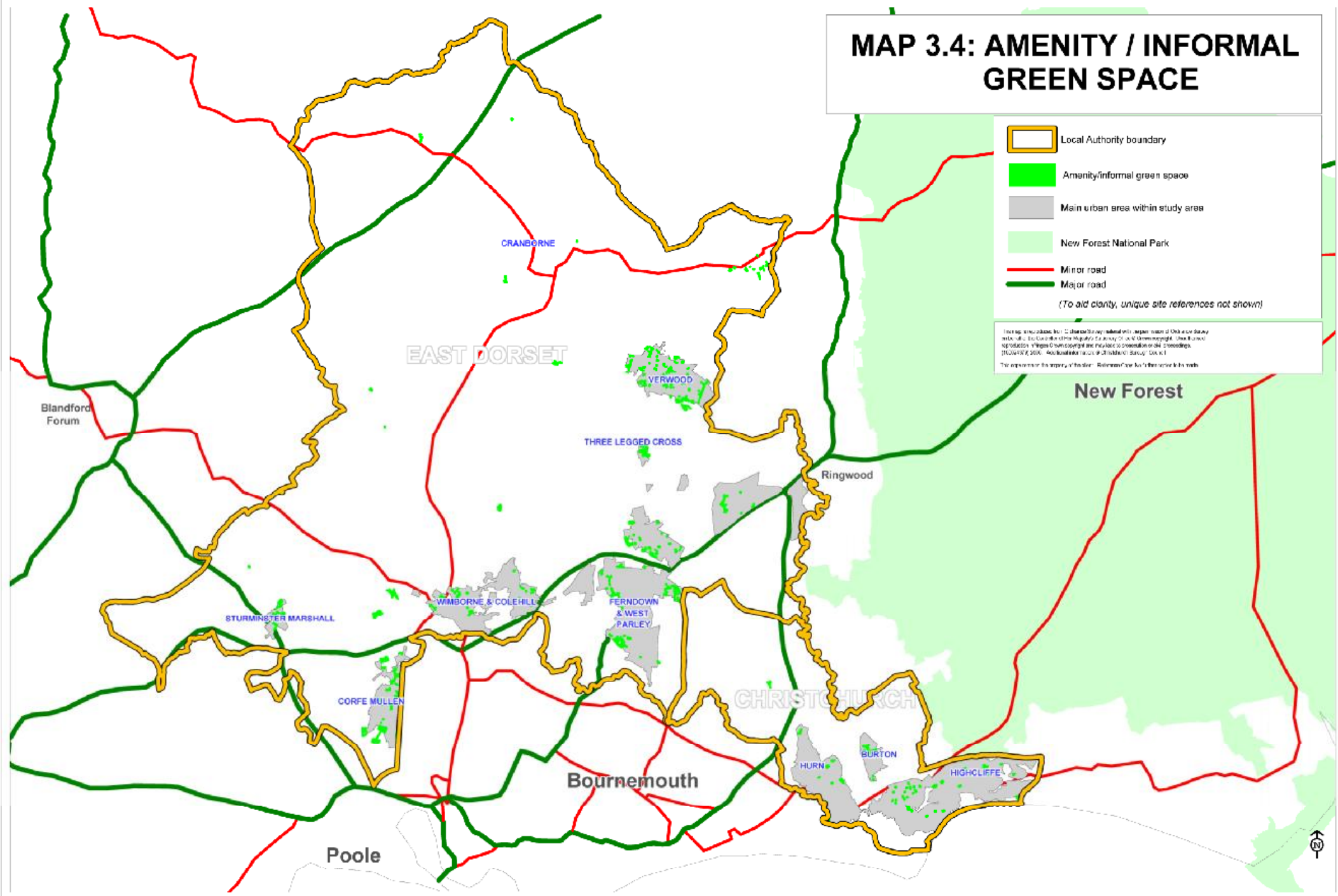


MAP 3.4: AMENITY / INFORMAL GREEN SPACE

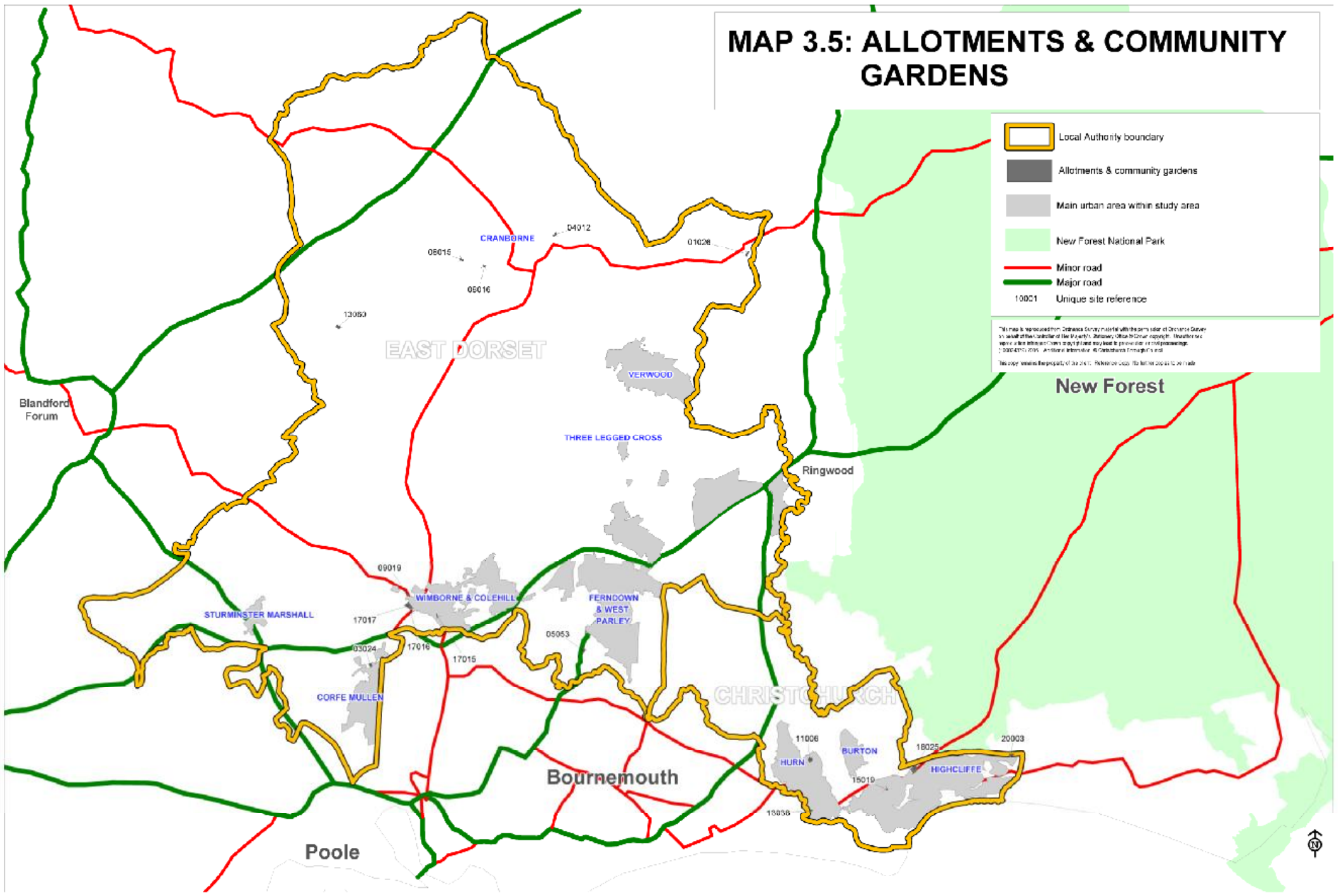
-  Local Authority boundary
-  Amenity/informal green space
-  Main urban area within study area
-  New Forest National Park
-  Minor road
-  Major road

(To aid clarity, unique site references not shown)

This map is not a planning tool. It should not be used to inform planning decisions. It is a summary of the data provided in the survey. It is not intended to be used for any other purpose. It is not intended to be used for any other purpose. It is not intended to be used for any other purpose. It is not intended to be used for any other purpose.



MAP 3.5: ALLOTMENTS & COMMUNITY GARDENS

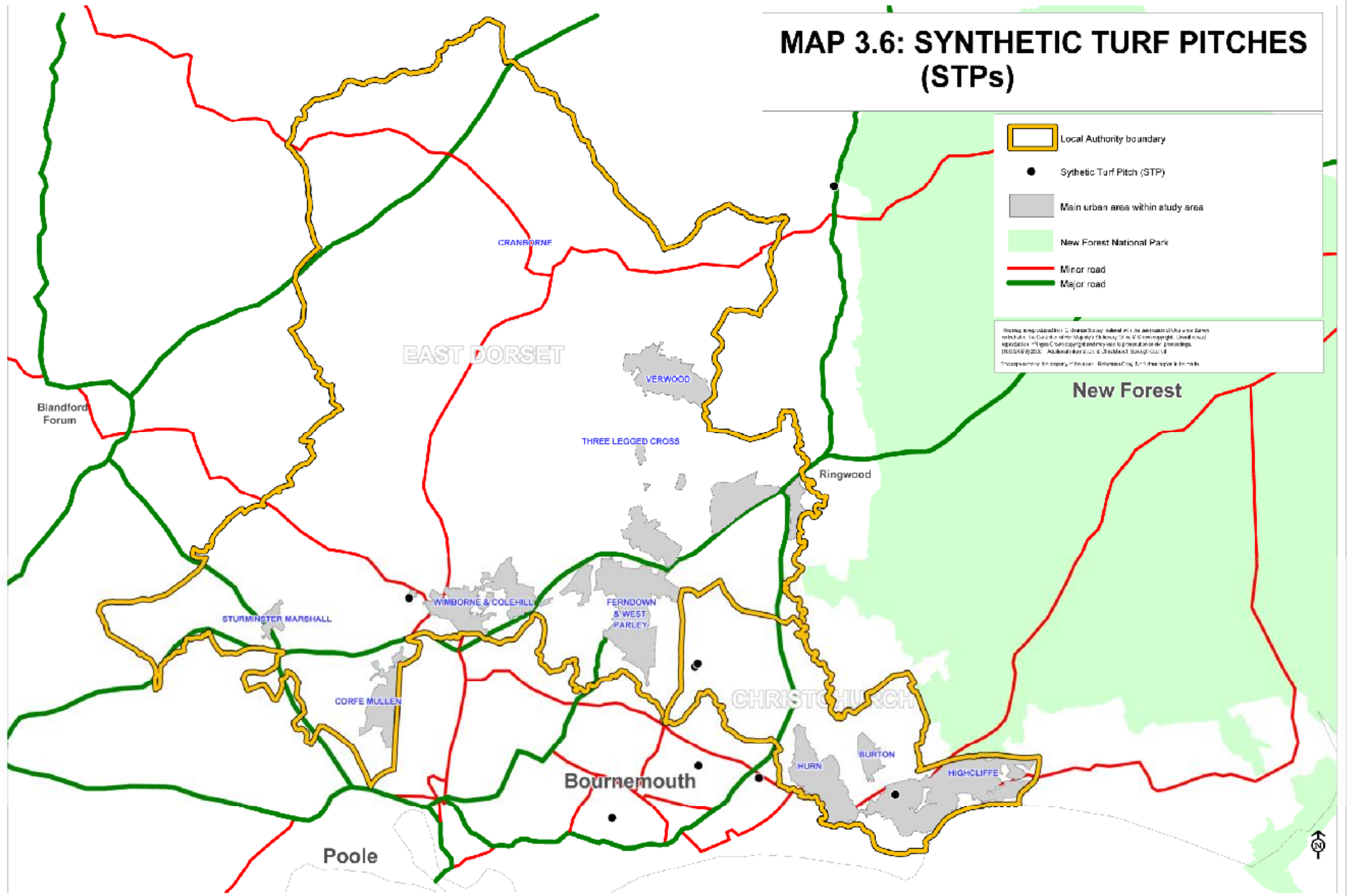


	Local Authority boundary
	Allotments & community gardens
	Main urban area within study area
	New Forest National Park
	Minor road
	Major road
	Unique site reference

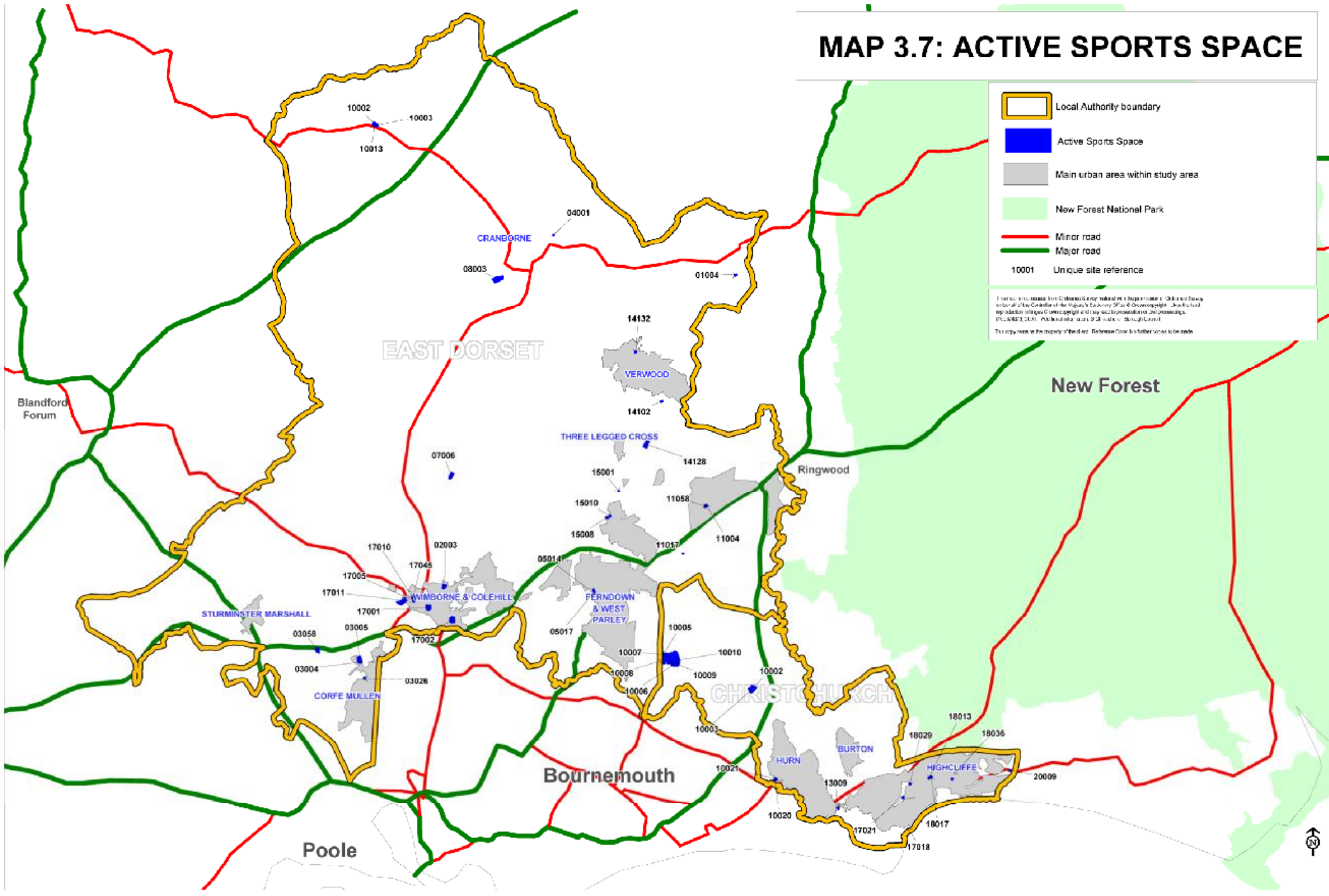
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MAP 3.6: SYNTHETIC TURF PITCHES (STPs)



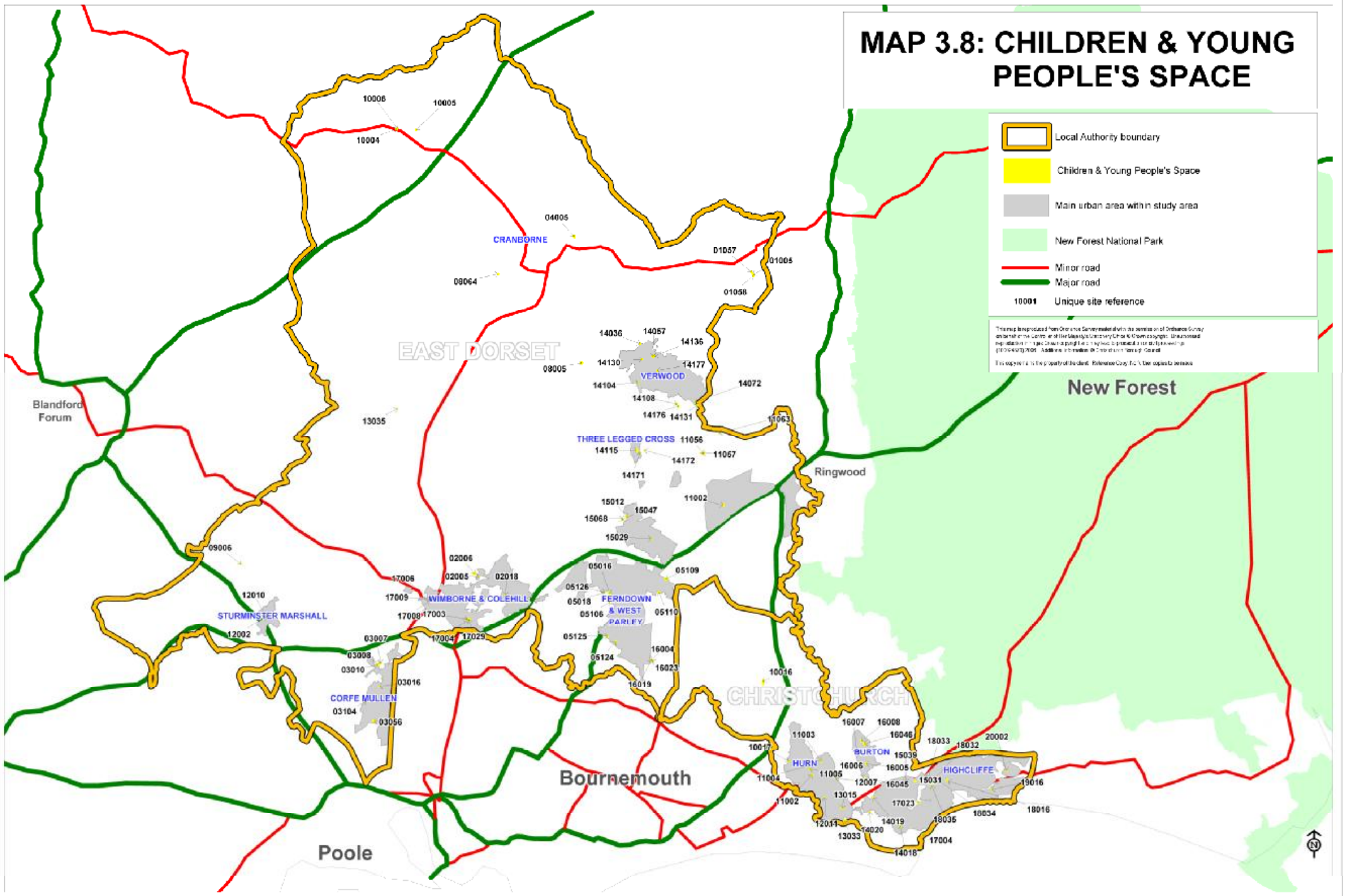
MAP 3.7: ACTIVE SPORTS SPACE






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MAP 3.8: CHILDREN & YOUNG PEOPLE'S SPACE

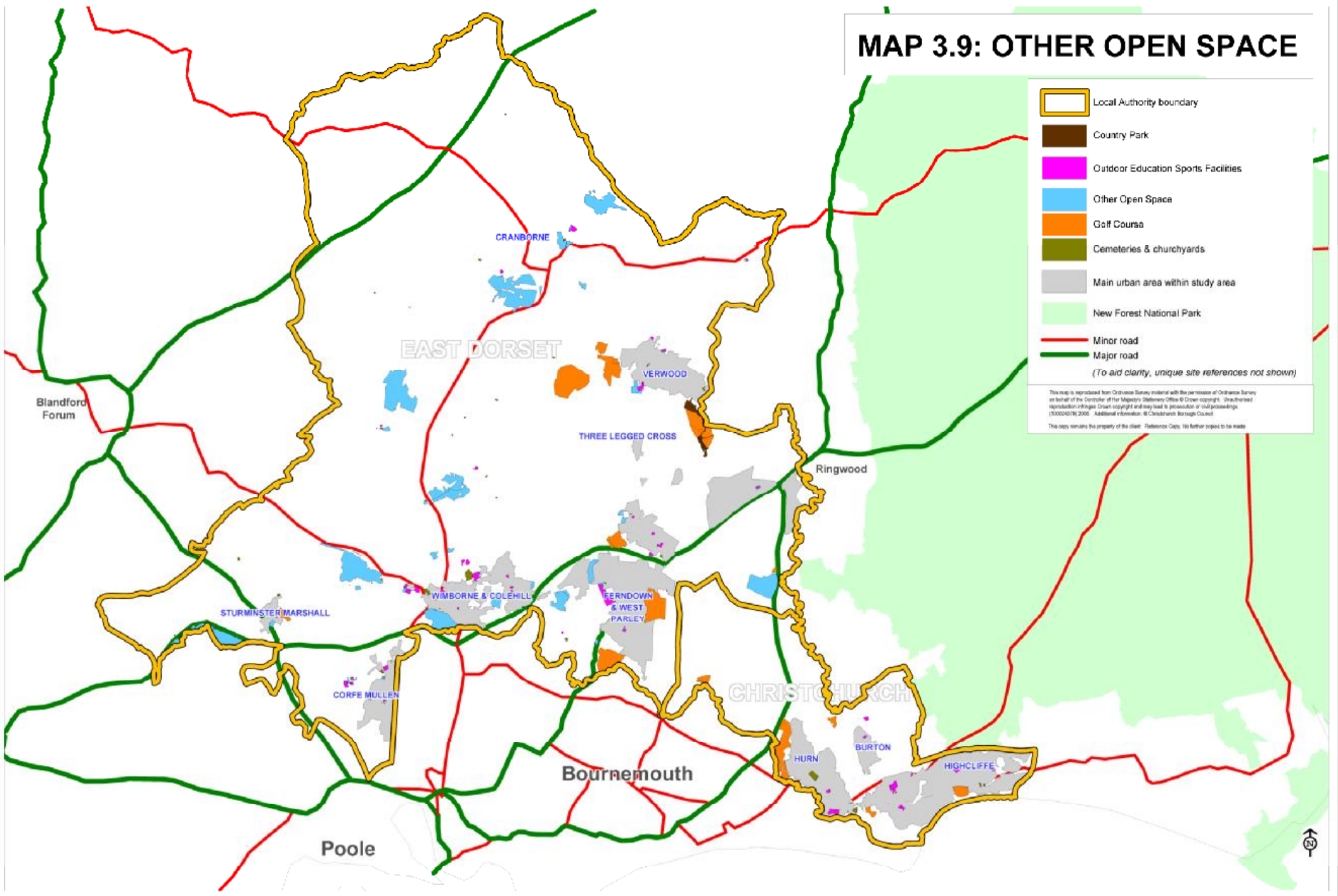


-  Local Authority boundary
-  Children & Young People's Space
-  Main urban area within study area
-  New Forest National Park
-  Minor road
-  Major road
-  Unique site reference

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MAP 3.9: OTHER OPEN SPACE



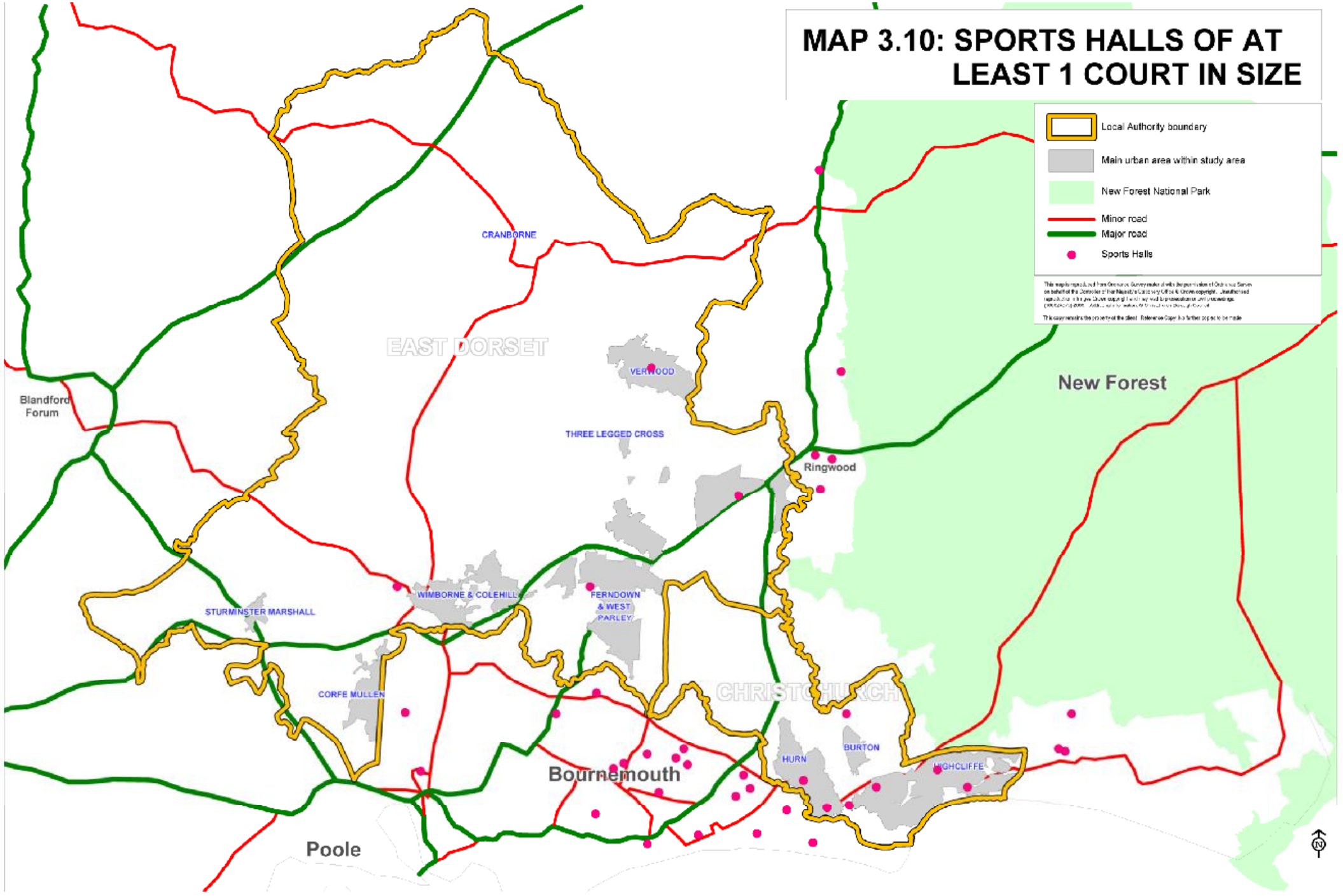
	Local Authority boundary
	Country Park
	Outdoor Education Sports Facilities
	Other Open Space
	Golf Course
	Cemeteries & churchyards
	Main urban area within study area
	New Forest National Park
	Minor road
	Major road

(To aid clarity, unique site references not shown)

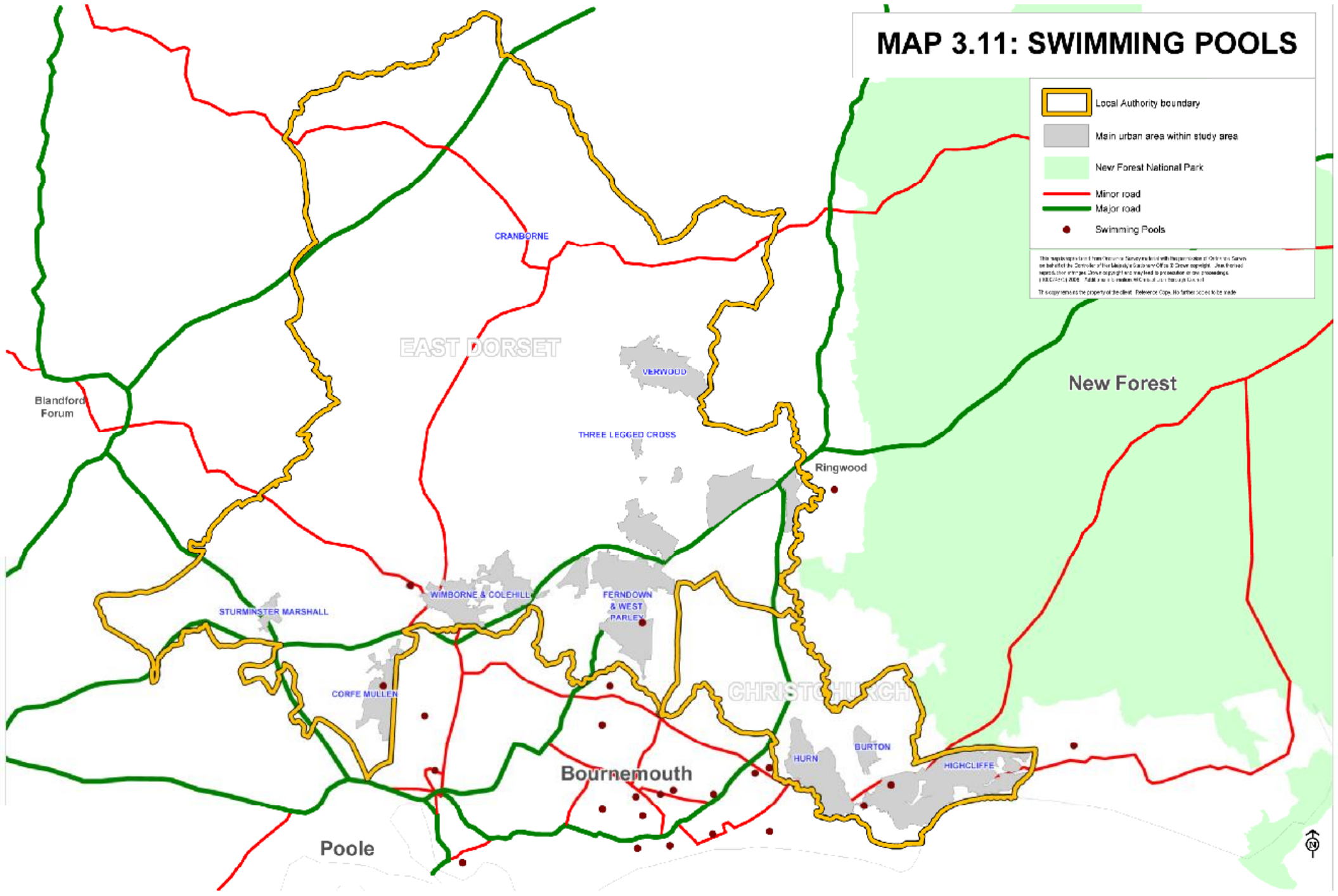
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MAP 3.10: SPORTS HALLS OF AT LEAST 1 COURT IN SIZE



MAP 3.11: SWIMMING POOLS



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