

Core Strategy

03 Managing and Safeguarding the Natural Environment Key Issue Paper

Options for Consideration Consultation
4th October – 24th December 2010



Prepared by Christchurch Borough Council and
East Dorset District Council as part of the Local Development Framework

October 2010

1 INTRODUCTION	2
2 BASELINE	3
3 IDENTIFICATION OF ISSUES	20
4 FORMATION OF OPTIONS	26
5 IMPLEMENTATION	48

1 Introduction

1.1 This background paper has been prepared as part of the Local Development Framework (LDF) to inform the development of the spatial strategy to address the protection and enhancement of the natural environment. This paper is one of a number of thematic background papers which address distinct spatial issues affecting Christchurch and East Dorset. The issues addressed in this document have been identified from the local policy, local development framework evidence base and the Community Plans of Christchurch and East Dorset. This document sets out the process of how the spatial strategy for the Christchurch and East Dorset Core Strategy has been refined toward the development of a preferred strategy following Issues and Options work undertaken in spring 2008. This paper sets out the critical issues, problems and challenges to be considered in planning for the future of the two districts. The development of a preferred spatial strategy to address these issues has been informed by the following:

- National and local policy
- Objectives of other relevant plans and programmes (National to local)
- Sustainability Appraisal
- Core Strategy Issues and Options Stakeholder Engagement
- Evidence studies undertaken by the Council and key stakeholders

1.2 It is often said that we cannot put a value on protecting our natural environment, and clearly the high quality of the local environment in Christchurch and East Dorset is what makes the area distinctive. The natural environment sustains human life, as well as enhancing its quality. The area is renowned for its special and often rare natural environment with large areas protected through law, European and National legislation, conventions and planning policy. The area also provides habitat for a wide range of flora and fauna, including some species which are protected in their own right through legislation. It is important to protect this natural asset for its own sake; however the protected environment heavily influences where future development in Christchurch and East Dorset can be located, which in turn puts greater pressure on areas outside these designations.

1.3 The formulation of a preferred spatial strategy provides the context for the preparation of specific policies to inform decisions about how best to protect and enhance the natural environment across the two districts. There is also a very significant 'action planning' element to the strategy which includes an implementation framework for the delivery of infrastructure and realisation of strategic objectives. Detail of the proposed implementation framework is included within this paper.

2 Baseline

Sustainability Appraisal Baseline Information

2.1 The Christchurch and East Dorset Sustainability Appraisal Draft Scoping Report (August 2008) sets out baseline information and identifies sustainability issues, those relevant to this paper are set out below. Figures have been updated, where new data is available.

Environmental Baseline Issues

Climate change

2.2 Climate change has the potential to affect the environment and the biodiversity within it through changes to weather patterns either directly through changes in the range of species, or more indirectly through changes to water levels with low flows in river, or greater frequency and extent of flooding. The Core Strategy will need to take in to account the robustness of species and habitats to these effects.

Biodiversity

2.3 The natural environment of Christchurch is diverse and of high quality, consisting of the coast, harbour and cliffs and, inland, of extensive areas of wet and dry heath and river valleys. A significant proportion of the Borough (18.6%) is protected by some form of nature conservation designation, from sites of local importance to international importance. East Dorset has a similarly rich natural heritage with 9.7% of the district covered by one or more nature conservation designations. The designations for both districts are shown on a series of maps in a later section of this paper.

2.4 The condition of Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs) in both Christchurch and East Dorset is unfavourable compared to national standards. This is due partly to poor management, but also the significant recreational pressures exerted on the heathlands, which make up the majority of the sites. Table 1 shows this as a percentage, along with key facts for other designated sites. Policies that can contribute towards improving the condition of the sites will need to be considered by the Core Strategy.

Countryside

2.5 Approximately 80% of the area of the two Districts is rural, within which about 20% of the overall population reside. This is in contrast to the southern part of Christchurch and Highcliffe and the towns to the south of East Dorset which are more urban and suburban in character. To contain urban sprawl and to maintain the separate identity of settlements, the South East Dorset Green Belt was introduced in the 1980s. The Green Belt has reduced the loss of green fields to development and also provides easily accessible countryside on the doorstep of many residents, without having to travel substantial distances. The majority of sites internationally designated for their nature conservation importance are within the Green Belt, particularly the Dorset Heaths.

Landscape

2.6 The north western part of East Dorset enjoys a high quality landscape which is designated as the Cranborne Chase and West Wiltshire Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. Areas of Great Landscape Value in East Dorset have also been identified and their character protected through planning policy in the East Dorset Local Plan. Although Christchurch has no designated special landscape areas, it does have the Environmentally Sensitive Area in the Avon Valley. The *Design and Landscape Character* Key Issues Paper will deal with the issues relating to landscape value, although it is acknowledged that there are close links to natural environment and biodiversity.

Water

2.7 The Stour and Avon flood regularly and wide areas of Christchurch are subject to both river and tidal flood risk. The floodplains are an important part of the river system as they provide necessary flood water storage and are important in biodiversity terms. The River Avon, which flows through the Borough of Christchurch in to the Harbour, is designated as a Special Area of Conservation (SAC), Special Protection Area (SPA) and a wetland of importance for birds under the Ramsar Convention. A large part of East Dorset is designated with Groundwater Protection Zones. Here groundwater is taken via boreholes to serve the needs of the community, and in some cases has resulted in incidents of groundwater flooding. Changes in groundwater levels can influence the flow of rivers and hence the biodiversity it supports.

Pollution

2.8 Pollution is a wide ranging topic, including air quality, light, noise and visual pollution, and land contamination. The main source of air pollution within Christchurch and East Dorset is from primarily car transport, although there are no Air Quality Management Areas within the area. Any proposals that may lead to an increase in car and air usage, such as at Bournemouth Airport for both aircraft and road traffic will need to consider the impacts of any increased levels of pollution on the natural environment associated with it. Water quality in both areas is rated highly, with all rivers in Christchurch rated as good or very good, and 93% rated similarly in East Dorset. Water quality has a significant impact on biodiversity, so it is essential that the resource remains protected from the risk of pollution through run-off from employment sites or over abstraction. This is particularly relevant to run-off in to the SSSI designated Moors River System.

Social Baseline Issues

Population

2.9 Christchurch has a population of 45,800, East Dorset 85,900 (ONS Mid Year Population Estimates 2008). Both districts have a higher proportion of elderly persons compared to national averages; whilst the population of the UK as a whole is ageing, the percentage over the age of 65 in East Dorset (26.1%) and in Christchurch (29.6%) far exceeds the national average of 16%. The districts also have two of the lowest proportions of population in the age group 0-39. The population as a whole and the demographic has an impact on the recreational uses of sensitive parts of the natural environment, in particular the areas of heathland.

Housing

2.10 A housing needs survey conducted in 2007, estimated that in Christchurch 243 affordable homes would be required per year and 440 in East Dorset. The draft Regional Spatial Strategy (proposed changes) looks to Christchurch to deliver 170 homes per year and East Dorset 320 homes per year, with at least 35% of these being affordable homes. The issues relevance to the natural environment relates to one of the key delivery mechanisms for affordable housing – this is through new development, in particular potential ‘greenfield’ urban extensions in both Christchurch and East Dorset. Previous housing growth has put considerable pressure on heathland habitats in south east Dorset as well as those in the adjoining New Forest National Park. This is essentially through the recreational pressures from the residents living in the homes constructed close to the heathland sites. The protection of the natural environment must be carefully balanced against both housing and affordable housing needs.

Culture, Leisure and Recreation

2.11 The districts provide a range of cultural, leisure and recreational facilities which are used by both residents and visitors. All leisure activities contribute to the quality of life of residents, and additionally they represent a tourism asset and their provision can result in economic benefits. The natural amenities of Christchurch lend themselves to recreational activities with riversides, harbour and coastal locations used for water sports and fishing. The rural areas provide significant opportunity for informal recreation although there is a conflict in both districts between recreation and the protection of the heathlands for their nature conservation assets. Suitable alternative open space to the heathlands is required to prevent an increase in the number of people wishing to use them for recreation.

Economic Baseline Issues

Tourism

2.12 Visitors to the area collectively generate approximately £75 million a year for the local economy in Christchurch and approximately £108 million in East Dorset (2007 figures). Christchurch’s natural capital, in the form of its coastal setting of harbour and beaches, riverside walks and wildlife areas attract visitors for a range of outdoor activities including water sports, rambling, wildlife viewing etc. Many visitors to East Dorset return again and again to explore the beautiful countryside of the Cranborne Chase and West Wiltshire Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, or to visit Moors Valley Country Park, which receives over 820,000 visitors each year, a similar number to Stonehenge. As with residents of Christchurch and East Dorset, visitors can also add to the recreational pressures on sensitive sites for nature conservation, in particular the heathlands.

Additional Baseline Information

Ancient woodland

2.13 Small areas of ancient woodland are found in Christchurch and to a greater extent East Dorset, some of which is not currently designated. However, it is now offered protection through government guidance, for which the Core Strategy Policies will need to take in to account.

Christchurch Harbour

2.14 Christchurch Harbour and its waterways are an important place for nature conservation providing a unique home for many plants and species and are designated as a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI). Many are of national importance, with key habitats in the harbour including reedbed, saltmarsh, mudflats and the water itself.

New Forest National Park

2.15 The New Forest National Park was designated in March 2005. There is a statutory duty under the Environment Act 1995 to have regard to the purposes of National Parks when considering development proposals, even where this development is outside the park boundaries. Large areas of the park have open public access and it has long been a popular destination for visitors, now attracting approximately 13.5 million visits each year. Current visitor levels combined with housing growth in Christchurch and East Dorset will increase visitor pressure on the New Forest National Park with associated recreational impact upon the Park's heathlands. Growth in road traffic associated with new development combined with growth of Bournemouth Airport may affect tranquillity and air quality within the National Park and the effects of which will need to be avoided or minimised.

Summary of Site Designations

		Christchurch	East Dorset
International	Total area of Internationally Designated sites (SAC, SPA & Ramsar)	774.22 Ha	1,717.38 Ha
	Total area of Internationally Designated Heathland sites (SAC, SPA & Ramsar)	397 Ha	1,674 Ha
National	Number of SSSI sites	10	22
	Total area of SSSIs	1,142.56 Ha	2,445.48 Ha
	SSSIs in favourable condition (%)	33.25%	14.76%
	SSSIs in unfavourable condition (%)	66.75%	85.23%
Local	Number of SNCI sites	23	193
	Total area of SNCIs	129.04 Ha	1,805.85 Ha
	SNCIs in favourable condition (good/fair) (%)	19.15%	37.56%
	SNCIs in poor condition (%)	2.81%	5.38%
	Number of LNR sites	4	10
	Total area of LNRs	72.43 Ha	82.12 Ha

Table 2.1 Summary of designated sites in Christchurch and East Dorset (Source: Dorset Environmental Records Centre and Natural England, reproduced in Dorset Data Book 2008 (DCC) - all data correct at April 2008)

Core Strategic Messages

- Climate change is a significant threat to the natural environment, and there is a need to provide opportunities to improve its resilience to the effects of climate change
- There are a significant number of designated sites for their nature conservation importance in Christchurch and East Dorset. Of those designated at an international level, the Dorset Heaths are the most significant, both in terms of area and impact
- The condition of SSSI sites across Christchurch and East Dorset is poor compared to national levels

- Internationally designated sites for nature conservation importance and in particular the Dorset Heaths are located in close proximity of the urban areas of Christchurch, East Dorset and the wider SE Dorset. This accessibility exposes them to urban pressures which directly impacts on their site condition
- East Dorset is covered in part by groundwater protection zones and changes in levels through increases in abstraction can affect biodiversity through changes in river flows
- Increases to car and air traffic movements is likely to impact on pollution (air and water quality), which in turn can directly affect biodiversity
- The protection and enhancement of the natural environment must be carefully balanced against the needs of both housing and affordable housing. Additional houses within 5 km will also increase the recreational pressures on the internationally designated heathlands, and will need to be properly mitigated for
- Pressures may also arise for sensitive sites from visitors as well as residents, and will need mitigation measures to deal with them
- Core Strategy policies will need to recognise the importance of ancient woodlands
- The statutory purposes and in particular the tranquillity of the adjoining New Forest National Park must be taken in to account in the Core Strategy policies

Policy Background

Natural Environment, biodiversity and geodiversity

INTERNATIONAL

- The World Summit on Sustainable Development (2002)
- The (Ramsar) Convention on Wetlands of international Importance (1971).
- The Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals (1979) (known as the Bonn Convention)
- The Convention on the Conservation of European Wildlife and Natural Habitats (1979) (known as the Bern Convention, ratified by the UK in 1983)
- The EC Council Directive on Conservation of Wild Birds (1979) (known as the EC Birds Directive)
- The EC Council Directive on the Conservation of Natural Habitats and of Wild Fauna & Flora (1992) (Directive 92/43/EC) (known as the EC Habitats Directive)

- Report to the 18th Meeting of the standing committee on the Convention on the Conservation of European Wildlife and Natural Habitats. T-PVS (98) 62. Strasbourg: Council of Europe, 1998.
- On-the-spot appraisal of the Dorset Heathland (United Kingdom): Report and recommendation to the standing committee on the Convention on the Conservation of European Wildlife and Natural Habitats. T-PVS (98) 29. De Molenaar, H.J.G. 1998.

NATIONAL

- National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act 1949
- Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981
- Environmental Protection Act 1990
- Conservation (Natural Habitats, &c.) Regulations 1994 (known as the Habitats Regulations)
- Countryside and Rights of Way Act (CROW Act) 2000
- Natural Environment and Rural Communities (NERC) Act 2006 – Section 41 ‘Habitats and Species of Principal Importance in England’
- The Environment Act 1995
- Protection of Badgers Act 1992
- Hedgerows Regulation 1997
- ODPM Circular 06/2005 Biodiversity and Geological Conservation
- Consultation on revised version of ODPM Circular 06/2005 Defra Circular 01/2005 Biodiversity and Geological Conservation. Consultation (March 2010)
- Planning Policy Statement 1: Delivering Sustainable Development (2005)
- Supplement to Planning Policy Statement 1: Planning and Climate Change (2007)
- Planning Policy Statement (PPS) 7: Sustainable Development in Rural Areas (2004)
- Planning Policy Statement (PPS) 9: Biodiversity and Geological Conservation (2005)
- Planning for Biodiversity and Geological Conservation: A Guide to Good Practice (2006)
- Consultation paper on Planning Policy Statement: Planning for a Natural and Healthy Environment (March 2010)
- Planning Policy Statement (PPS) 25: Development and Flood Risk (2006)
- Working with the Grain of Nature: A Biodiversity Strategy for England (2002)
- Planning for the protection of European sites: Appropriate Assessment (DCLG, 2006)
- Local Sites: Guidance on their identification, selection and management (Defra, 2006)

SOUTH-WEST

- Our Environment: Our Future - The Regional Strategy for the South West Environment 2004-2014 (2004)
- South West Biodiversity Implementation Plan (Biodiversity: A Natural Advantage for the South West) (2004)
- South West Regional Forestry Framework 2005
- Action for Biodiversity in the South West – A Series of Habitat and Species Plans to Guide Delivery (1997)

- A Biodiversity Guide for Planning and Development Sectors in the South West (2000)
- South West Nature Map – A Planners Guide (Biodiversity South West, 2007)

HAMPSHIRE, DORSET AND SOUTH-EAST DORSET

- Bournemouth, Dorset and Poole Structure Plan CSP28 (2001)
- Dorset Biodiversity Strategy (2003)
- The Dorset Local Geodiversity Action Plan (2005)
- Dorset Heathland Interim Planning Framework and associated background paper (2007-2009, extended 2010-2011)
- Responses to Dorset Heathland Joint Development Plan Document: Issues and Options Consultation (2008)
- Dorset Heathland Strategy (Dorset Heathland Forum, 1990)
- Cranborne Chase and West Wiltshire Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty Draft Management Plan 2009-2014 (2009)
- Poole and Christchurch Bays Shoreline Management Plan (1999)
- Draft Poole and Christchurch Bays Shoreline Management Plan Review Sub-cell 5f (SMP2) (2009)
- New Forest National Park Management Plan Revised Draft (October 2009)
- New Forest National Park Core Strategy and Development Management Policies Submission Document (February 2010)
- Changing Patterns of visitor numbers within the New Forest National Park, with particular reference to the New Forest SPA (2008)
- River Avon SAC Developer's Advice Note
- Strategic Framework for restoration of the River Avon System (2009)
- Environment Agency Catchment Abstraction Management Strategies for the Hampshire Avon (2006) and the Dorset Stour (2004)

LOCAL

- Borough of Christchurch Local Plan Policies (2001)
- East Dorset Local Plan (2002)
- Nature Conservation and the planning process in East Dorset. Natural Environment supplementary planning guidance (2009)
- Draft Christchurch Harbour and Waterways Management Plan (2009)
- East Dorset Forest Design Plan (Forestry Commission, 2009)

Analysis

INTERNATIONAL

- The World Summit on Sustainable Development recognises the need to protect the environment, the prudent use of natural environment and Climate Change. These and other principles are followed up in UK guidance and strategies.

- The international directives offer high level protection for the environment, including both habitats and individual species, which is supported and clarified for the UK by national level guidance and strategies.
- The report to the standing committee of the BERN convention and associated on-the-spot appraisal formally acknowledged the existence of ‘urban pressures’ on the protected heathlands sites and concluded that decisive conservation action needed to be taken to avoid further degradation and looked also to facilitate the long term conservation of these habitats for future generations. It was recognised that the heavy and most threatening direct and indirect pressure being exerted on Dorset heathland was on those sites in the east of the County. Of the recommendations made to the UK Government, the most significant was to avoid any new development close to the sites and for new housing to provide areas other than heathland to avoid unwanted pressures on them.

NATIONAL

- The acts and regulations listed above provide the statutory ability to designate specific sites. On an international level, this includes Ramsar sites, Special Protection Areas (SPA) and Special Areas of Conservation (SAC) – these are collectively known as Natura 2000 sites through the Habitats Directive. On a national level, this includes Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) and National Nature Reserves (NNR). An SSSI can also be designated as an NNR or internationally designated as an SPA, SAC or Ramsar. Local Planning Authorities should also provide protection for currently undesignated priority habitats identified in section 41 of the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006. Additionally, under the same Act, Section 40 requests all public bodies have regard to conserving biodiversity in carrying out their functions – in planning terms, this is reflected through policies.
- There are various statutory instruments and government circulars that look to implement this legislation; of key relevance is ODPM Circular 06/2005 Biodiversity and Geological Conservation. The circular also provides sufficient detail for a project level application such as planning applications.
- The consultation on the update to ODPM Circular 06/2005 Defra Circular 01/2005 looks to complement the Planning Policy Statement: Planning for a Natural and Healthy Environment which is also out for consultation (see below). The key changes reflect the legal protection given to certain habitats and species as a result of recent case law.
- PPS1 states that planning policies should seek to protect and enhance the quality, character and amenity value of the countryside and urban areas as a whole. A high level of protection should be given to most valued wildlife habitats and natural resources. Those with national and international designations should receive the highest level of protection.
- The Supplement to PPS1 states that policy should conserve and enhance biodiversity, recognising that the distribution of habitats and species will be affected by climate change.
- PPS7 sets out the key principle of ensuring effective protection and enhancement of the environment.
- PPS9 states, ‘Planning policies and planning decisions should aim to maintain, and enhance, restore or add to biodiversity and geological conservation interests’. This document provides the key guidance to frame the protection and maintenance of the natural environment. Additionally, the good practice guide to this PPS describes the key elements required for an evidence base to support the planning policies
- The consultation on Planning Policy Statement: Planning for a Natural and Healthy Environment looks to replace current guidance in PPS9, PPG17, and sections of PPS7 and PPG20, so therefore streamlines many existing policies. A key objective is to bring together related policies on the natural environment, open and green spaces, both in rural and urban areas, to deliver healthy and sustainable communities that are also resilient

to climate change. This draft continues to include policies to maintain, enhance, restore and add to biodiversity and geodiversity, and in effect planning policy on biodiversity will remain the same.

- PPS25 describes nature conservation and biodiversity as a water-compatible use in its flood risk vulnerability classification.
- The Biodiversity Strategy for England seeks to ensure biodiversity considerations become embedded in all the main sectors of public policy. It looks to conserve and enhance biodiversity through the management of farming as well as agricultural land and woodlands. It also seeks protection for marine and coastal environments.
- The Appropriate Assessment of land-use plans in the UK has only occurred since 2006 due to an error in transposing the Habitats Directive in to UK law. Planning for the protection of European sites defined land-use plans as Regional Spatial Strategies, transitional plans, Development Plan Documents (DPD) and Supplementary Planning Documents, all of which should be subject to an Appropriate Assessment, until the Habitats Regulations were amended. An Appropriate Assessment is a procedure that requires the identification of the likely significant effects a plan or policy may have on internationally designated sites, then to set out mitigation and alternative solutions.
- Defra guidance on local sites provides information on the development and management of systems to identify them, which complement the series of internationally and nationally designated wildlife and geological sites. 'Local Site' is a generic term that includes SNCI, RIGS, etc.

SOUTH-WEST

- The South West Biodiversity Implementation Plan looks to provide a more joined up approach to biodiversity delivery. This is underpinned by generic priorities which include maintaining and enhancing biodiversity, develop integrated sustainable land management practices, increase awareness of the importance of biodiversity and understand and manage the dynamic process of change.
- Regional Forestry Framework aims to identify how the region can benefit from woodland and how policies and plans could have the ability to increase wooded environments.
- The Biodiversity Guide for Planning and Development Sectors explains how planners can contribute to biodiversity conservation through existing land use planning processes. Main actions include protection sites and species and plan for no net loss of biodiversity.
- The South West Nature Map – A Planners Guide, provides details on implementing the Nature Map and a landscape scale biodiversity approach as set out in Policy ENV4 of the Proposed Changes to the Regional Spatial Strategy. It describes that recognition has grown of the need to restore ecological health at the landscape scale to ensure long term environmental sustainability, especially in response to the growth threat of climate change. This requires conservation planning to look at wider processes functioning across landscapes rather than just protected areas and discrete wildlife sites. Existing priority habitats, together with landscape features which provide wildlife corridors, links or stepping stones from one site to another, help to form a network of habitats. The guide also describes some of the ways the Nature Map and the principles of landscape scale biodiversity could be incorporated in to the Core Strategy.

HAMPSHIRE, DORSET AND SOUTH-EAST DORSET

- Bournemouth, Dorset and Poole Structure Plan contains a series of saved policies concerning the protection of the environment (specifically internationally, nationally and locally designated sites) from development proposals. Additionally, policy EN.E looks to maintain and enhance

biodiversity, particularly through the re-establishment of 500 hectares of lowland heath and the replacement of appropriate habitats where damage or loss occurs through development.

- As signed up members of the Dorset Biodiversity Partnership, Christchurch and East Dorset have made a commitment to support and deliver the Dorset Biodiversity Strategy 2003, the overall aim of which is to enhance ecological quality, extent, capacity and function of habitats. The key principles of the Dorset Biodiversity Strategy are:
 - Managing our best habitats
 - Protecting natural assets
 - Partnership
 - Involving everyone
 - Raising awareness
 - Funding conservation action
 - Monitoring Dorset's biodiversity
- Of the 56 priority habitats for the UK listed by the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act, the 10 identified in Christchurch and East Dorset by the South West and Dorset Biodiversity Strategies are listed below. These are habitats for which the UK has international obligations, those at risk, those which are functionally important for species inhabiting a wider environment and those that are important for species of a particular conservation concern (the figures and locations in brackets below relate to the target amount of that habitat to recreate and the area within Dorset it can be delivered).
 - Coastal saltmarsh (200 Ha by 2015 in Solent and Poole Bay)
 - Lowland dry acid grassland (25 Ha by 2010 in Dorset Heaths)
 - Lowland heathland (1,000 Ha by 2010 in Dorset Heaths)
 - Lowland meadows (2 Ha by 2010 across Dorset)
 - Lowland mixed deciduous woodland (no target set)
 - Purple moor grass and rush pasture (no target set)
 - Wet woodland (50 Ha by 2015 in Dorset Heaths and Wessex Vales)
 - Lowland beech and yew woodland (100 Ha by 2015 within the East Dorset area of the South Wessex Downs)
 - Lowland calcareous grassland (2 Ha by 2010 in the Dorset Heaths and 200 Ha by 2010 in the South Wessex Downs)
 - Lowland wood-pastures and parkland (3 sites across Dorset)
- The Dorset Local Geodiversity Action Plan's aims are to promote the conservation and enhancement of the geological resource, provide guidance and increase the appreciation and understanding of the geological heritage of the area.
- To mitigate the harm caused by recreation to the protected Dorset Heaths, the Dorset Heathlands Interim Planning Framework (2007-2009, extended 2010-2011) requires all residential development (of one unit net gain and above) within 5km of the heaths to contribute a financial sum to a joint projects fund managed by the five partner Councils (including Christchurch and East Dorset). This approach is expected to continue through the emerging Joint Development Plan Document which will be in place for the long term.
- The Dorset Heathlands Interim Planning Framework acknowledges advice from Natural England that no conventional residential development should normally be allowed within 400 metres of these sites. It is likely that a significant part of this mitigation will be through the provision of Suitable

Alternative Natural Greenspaces (SANGs) to attract people away from the heaths. As levels of development increase, habitats and species will be increasingly affected by urban pressures such as noise, air pollution and recreation. It is highly likely that, as has been the case with the Heathland Interim Planning Framework, new development will continue to have to bear the cost of mitigating these impacts. Costs may increase over time as more innovative solutions need to be found.

- The Dorset Heathland Strategy of 1990 emphasised the areas of particular importance as being the Dorset Heaths, an internationally protected and fragmented habitat found across SE Dorset, large parts of which exist in Christchurch and the south eastern area of East Dorset, around the larger settlements of Verwood, St Leonards and St Ives, West Moors, Ferndown, West Parley and Corfe Mullen. It proposed a policy approach for future planning policy documents that should resist future development on heathland and protect remaining areas from damaging uses, such as particular forms of recreation.
- The Cranborne Chase and West Wiltshire Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) Draft Management Plan contains an objective to conserve and enhance characteristic habitats and species at a landscape scale. This will look to address the fragmentation of habitats by the creation of viable habitat corridors that allow species to respond to climate change. This is looked to be achieved through:
 - Encouraging the conservation and enhancement of habitats and species by extending and improving ecological connections between habitats at an appropriate landscape scale
 - Support partnerships that work towards providing these connections within the AONB
 - Support action to control invasive non-native species
 - Determine availability of baseline biodiversity data to help monitor the outcomes of land management work
- The current Poole and Christchurch Bays Shoreline Management Plan (SMP1) provides the basis for sustainable coastal defence and sets the objective for future management of the section of coastline. Christchurch harbour is described as an area of high ecological importance, with areas of saltmarsh, grazing marsh and intertidal mudflats. The spit at the mouth of the harbour protects it from erosion, and therefore should be maintained. However, the spit itself contains intrinsically important habitats and rare species which could be damaged from inappropriate coastal defence works. Stanpit Marsh is suffering from erosion and may become more inundated as sea level rises. Managed retreat is a possibility, but is likely to result in habitat loss through coastal squeeze (a process that occurs where sensitive areas such as saltmarsh back on to hard sea defences)
- The draft Poole and Christchurch Bays Shoreline Management Plan Review Sub-cell 5f (SMP2) sets objectives for the Christchurch's coastline section to minimise net loss of species/habitat (and identify compensatory habitat if any net loss occurs); maintain opportunity for natural development of the mosaic of habitats, particularly within Christchurch Harbour; maintain geological exposure of cliff line.
- The New Forest National Park Management Plan Revised Draft looks to maintain and enhance the tranquillity of the National Park, by reducing the impacts of noise, visual intrusion and inappropriate activity on tranquillity generally. This would involve working with the airport operators, Christchurch and East Dorset Councils and other relevant partners to reduce the impacts of aircraft noise and traffic along the A31 on park tranquillity.
- New Forest National Park Submission Core Strategy (February 2010) has a vision informed by the *Special Qualities* of the National Park. Those most relevant to Christchurch and East Dorset are its diversity of plants and animals, and its tranquillity. This is translated in to a strategic objective to protect and enhance the natural environment of the National Park, including the natural beauty of the landscape and the range of habitats and species. More specific policies include:
 - Policy CP1 protects the integrity of internationally designated sites from development, either individually or in combination with other plans or projects.

- Policy CP3 supports the creation of Green Infrastructure, and looks to work with adjoining authorities to ensure development outside the National Park boundary does not affect the international nature conservation designations.
- It is acknowledged that there is likely to be an increase in trip generation as a result of development outside the park boundary, including SE Dorset. There will be likely impacts on the park's Special Qualities, and particularly tranquillity, which will need further research.
- The 2008 study '*Changing patterns of visitor numbers within the New Forest National Park, with particular reference to the New Forest SPA*' concluded that new development within 20km of the National Park will be likely to generate additional recreational pressures which requires mitigation to prevent further harm to protected species.
- Both Councils have adopted the River Avon SAC Developer's Advice Note, with the aim being to ensure that development taking place within the River Avon valleys does not detrimentally affect the wildlife interest.
- The general conclusions of the Strategic Framework for restoration of the River Avon System are that the river is rarely naturally functioning and is mostly modified; the river channel is in unfavourable condition; and works to restore the river to favourable condition are required. Outline restoration options have been identified for the River Avon, and provide a base upon which further detailed planning can be undertaken, leading to eventual implementation of action on the ground. This will require further consultation with interested parties, when developing each specific option. It is also acknowledged that the needs of the Avon Valley SPA are still to be fully considered against the potential conflicts resulting from some of the proposed restoration options.
- The Catchment Abstraction Management Strategy for the Hampshire Avon identifies a possible threat to the integrity of the river's SAC status if water abstraction rates (due to meeting the needs of new development) were to increase. The Catchment Abstraction Management Strategy for the Dorset Stour highlights threats to the Dorset Heaths SAC and in particular the small areas of wet heath. The River Crane / Moors River System are considered the most interesting SSSI in the catchment, as it exhibits an unusually rich ecosystem. The River Allen is vulnerable to low flows, and to ameliorate abstraction impacts, groundwater is added to the river to support flows.

LOCAL

- Natural wildlife heritage is not confined to statutorily designated sites but can be found throughout the countryside and urban areas. Therefore many sites of local nature interest are designated for conservation by local authorities and local conservation organisations. These are shown in the Christchurch and East Dorset Local Plans as Sites of Nature Conservation Importance (SNCI) and Local Nature Reserves (LNR). Regional Important Geological / Geomorphological Sites (RIGS) are also identified in the same way.
- The Christchurch Local Plan has the general objective to protect and enhance the character, natural beauty and wildlife of the Borough's river valleys, coast, heathlands and other natural amenities. These are expressed in the saved policies ENV11, 14 and 15 which relate to SSSI sites, SNCIs and Green Corridors respectively.
- The East Dorset Local Plan has a general objective to protect areas of the best and most versatile farmland, productive woodlands, mineral resources, underground and surface water and areas of nature conservation value and importance for biodiversity against damaging forms of development. These are expressed in the saved policies NCON2 and NCON3, which refer to sites of local importance and seek to balance the interests when considering development proposals. Policy NCON4 provides protection for Heathlands.
- East Dorset's Nature Conservation Planning Guidance document, which further defines the important habitats in East Dorset using all the sources described above in to the following groups:

- Heathland
- Forests and woodland
- Rivers and watercourses
- Chalk downland
- Neutral grassland
- It continues by recognising the need to protect wildlife from the increasing pressures of development and sets out 7 principles to guide development, based on guidance in PPS9:
 1. Survey
 2. Avoid existing habitats and features
 3. Retain existing habitats and features
 4. Provide new benefits
 5. Mitigate against potentially adverse effects
 6. Compensate where damage is unavoidable
 7. Manage and monitor
- The Christchurch Harbour and Waterways Management Plan provides a framework for managing its many uses whilst balancing demands on the harbour as a natural resource. The Plan includes a strategic aim to ensure that all users work together to conserve and enhance the biodiversity and cultural features of the harbour and waterways and an objective to support the protection and enhancement of their special nature conservation interests.
- Forest Design Plan Objectives for the East Dorset Woodlands are to develop woodlands that provide opportunities for informal and formal public recreation, especially in areas on the urban fringe, with the aim to divert pressure away from more sensitive habitats. As well as providing a regular supply of quality timber to support local employment and local timber processing industries, the plan aims to sustain and protect existing habitats of nature conservation interest by:
 - Maintaining designated habitats in improving or favourable condition.
 - Restoring native broadleaf woodland on sites of ancient woodland.
 - Developing a network of habitat links to reduce the vulnerability of fragmented sites.
 - Increasing the length of edge habitat by ride edge and streamside enhancement and by developing a mosaic of woodland types and open space.
 - Providing a succession of temporary open spaces suitable for key heathland bird species.
 - Providing buffers of non-plantation woodland adjacent to important non-plantation habitats.
 - Protecting any veteran tree and retaining standing or fallen deadwood where not a hazard to the public.

Core Strategic Messages

The key message emerging from this legislation, policy and guidance documents is ensuring that protection is a critical material consideration for the natural environment when new development is proposed and implemented, as it is one of the key assets in Christchurch and East Dorset, and the greater south west. International legislation protects the most vulnerable habitats and species, although there is general recognition that all areas with biodiversity interest need an appropriate degree of protection.

A second key factor is the enhancement of the natural environment as well as the re-creation of certain priority habitats – in most cases, targets are set for these in the Dorset Biodiversity Strategy. Policy and guidance also takes this enhancement and re-creation further and asks for it to be viewed at a landscape scale, with the incorporation of the Nature Map in to the Core Strategy as one of the tools to enable this.

Of particular relevance to Christchurch and East Dorset is ensuring the continuing protection of the Dorset Heaths and the adjoining New Forest National Park from future development and how the urban pressures (such as recreation) can either be avoided or the potential adverse effects mitigated. The Core Strategy policies will be informed by the Habitats Regulations Assessment (HRA) for impacts on the internationally designated sites and in more general terms with the Sustainability Appraisal.

The Core Strategy will therefore need to both protect and enhance this environment, whilst considering the future potential for habitat re-creation, as stated in PPS9.

Table 2.2

Community Strategies

Community Strategies and Parish Plans

- Community Strategy for Dorset ‘Shaping Our Future’ (2007-2016)
- Christchurch Community Plan 2007-2010
- East Dorset Sustainable Community Strategy ‘Building Communities Together’ (2008)
- All Parish Plans for East Dorset were reviewed (Christchurch do not yet have any, although Hurn are currently preparing one); the key strategic messages of relevance to the Core Strategy contained in the following plans:
 - Alderholt Parish Plan (2006)
 - Corfe Mullen Parish Plan (2006)
 - St Leonard /St Ives Parish Plan (2007)
 - Colehill Parish Plan (2008)

Analysis

- The Community Strategy for Dorset ‘Shaping Our Future’ (2007-2016) looks to promote recognition and response to climate change in respect of the environment, as well as its general protection, conservation and enhancement. More specifically it wants to see the restoration of Dorset’s biodiversity to meet government targets for condition of SSSIs, farmland birds, priority species and birds.
- The vision of the Christchurch High Quality Environment Action Group as expressed through the Community Plan is a Borough where the high-quality natural environment and built environment is protected and enhanced. More specifically:
 - Investigate designation of three new Local Nature Reserves (LNR)
 - Support the Dorset Biodiversity Action Plan
- Part of the vision, an objective and focus for East Dorset’s Sustainable Community Strategy is a District that supports and enhances its environment. This includes:
 - Support for protection of the most fragile environments, whilst allowing greater access to more robust areas
 - Promote awareness for residents to respect their countryside and biodiversity so it can be enjoyed by future generations
- Alderholt: Parish Plan contains an action point relating to countryside access through footpaths and bridleways
- Corfe Mullen Parish Plan looks to the preservation of Green Belt and habitats within it, especially in Waterloo Valley / Pardy’s Hill
- St Leonards / St Ives Parish Plan contains an action point for the protection, maintenance and enhancement of greenspaces, SSSIs and their associated wildlife
- Colehill: Parish Plan contains an action point for the preservation of woodland, open space, wildlife and habitats

Core Strategic Messages

A clear message emerging from the County, local community strategies and parish plans are both the protection and enhancement of the natural environment, whilst taking in to account the pressures that influence this, such as climate change. With the exception of Christchurch’s aim to designate three new LNRs, this is expressed in relatively general terms across the whole District or Borough. However for East Dorset, some of the town and parish plans do look to provide a greater spatial detail, but possibly at a level too specific for the Core Strategy to deal with.

Table 2.3

Corporate Plans

Corporate Plans

- Christchurch Corporate Plan (2008 -2012)
- East Dorset Corporate Plan (2010-2016)

Analysis

- An objective of the Christchurch Corporate Plan is to maintain a high quality environment.
- East Dorset's Corporate Plan includes the Priority Area-Environment, to manage and safeguard the natural and built environment.

Core Strategic Messages

There is a clear message emerging from the corporate plans to manage and safeguard the natural environment.

Table 2.4

Conclusions and implications for preferred options

2.16 It is fully acknowledged that many sites and species are robustly protected by international and national legislation. Mindful of this, policies within the Core Strategy will first need to consider the legislative requirements, namely the Habitats Regulations, and avoid adverse impacts to the Dorset Heaths SPA, SAC and Ramsar sites, as well as the New Forest SPA and River Avon SPA, SAC and Ramsar sites. If the impacts are unavoidable, it will then need to formulate an approach to the mitigation of them, but if this is not possible then development cannot take place. The Core Strategy will also need to consider what additional controls are required above these statutory duties, which includes locally designated sites that also fulfil the objectives highlighted in the baseline and policy review of the protection and enhancement of the natural environment.

3 Identification of Issues

3.1 This section considers the validity of the questions posed in the Issues and Options consultation and how appropriate they are for continued consideration by the Core Strategy. A number of new issues have also been raised through the consultation, through discussions with stakeholders and members of the public and through recent changes to national and regional policy. The section concludes with a consolidated Issue for the development of preferred options in section 4.

Issues and Options Consultation

3.2 In March 2008 the Councils conducted a six week public engagement exercise on the Core Strategy, referred to as the 'Issues and Options' consultation. The document discussed the key planning issues that the Core Strategy will need to address and suggested a range of options to tackle each issue. In all, 210 individuals and organisations responded to the consultation, 150 of whom provided responses relating to the natural environment.

Issues raised through the Issues and Options consultation:

Issue NE1: How can we offer further protection for the protected heathlands?

- This issue was originally identified through planning work across South East Dorset and advice from Natural England in 2006 concerning the impact of residential development on protected heathlands. Responses to the issues and options consultation did not object to this being an issue to be addressed by the Core Strategy. This issue forms the consolidated Issue 1: 'How can we continue to protect sensitive habitats and species from the pressures of development?' in section 4 of this paper.

Issue NE2: Where should Suitable Alternative Natural Greenspaces be located?

- This issue was originally identified through planning work across South East Dorset and advice from Natural England in 2006 as with Issue NE1. The work and advice specifically for SANGs was based on similar issues being faced in the Thames Basin Heathlands within the South East Region. Responses to the issues and options consultation did not object to this being an issue to be addressed by the Core Strategy. This issue is amalgamated into the consolidated Issue 1: 'How can we continue to protect sensitive habitats and species from the pressures of development?' in section 4 of this paper.

Issue NE3: Should we provide any additional protection to sites under significant pressure?

- This issue was identified through emerging regional guidance, the National, South West and Dorset Biodiversity Strategies and Planning Policy Statement 9 which states that policies should aim to maintain, and enhance, restore or add to biodiversity and geological conservation interests. The Supplement to Policy Planning Statement 1 also requires LDFs to consider the pressures of Climate Change on the natural environment. Responses to the issues and options consultation did not object to this being an issue to be addressed by the Core Strategy. This issue is amalgamated into the consolidated Issue 1: 'How can we continue to protect sensitive habitats and species from the pressures of development?' in section 4 of this paper.

Issue NE4: How far should landscape quality and character be protected throughout the rural area?

- This issue will be fully addressed by the Design and Landscape Key Issue Paper.

Issue NE5: How can we offer protection for the adjoining New Forest National Park through our development strategy and policies?

- This issue was originally identified in response to the New Forest National Park being designated in 2005. There is a statutory duty under the Environment Act 1995 to have regard to the purposes of National Parks when considering development proposals, even where this development is outside the park boundaries. This includes issues surrounding the tranquillity of the National Park. Issues similar to those raised in NE1 are also emerging surrounding the protection of the areas of designated heathland, which covers the majority of the National Park. Responses to the issues and options consultation did not object to this being an issue to be addressed by the Core Strategy. This issue is amalgamated into the consolidated Issue 1: 'How can we continue to protect sensitive habitats and species from the pressures of development?' in section 4 of this paper.

New issues raised through consultation***Issue: How do we help the natural environment adapt to Climate Change?***

3.3 Responses to the consultation suggested that the Core Strategy needs to recognise the threat that climate change poses to habitats in terms of increased rainfall, rising sea levels and changing weather conditions. This is supported by the supplement to PPS1 which states that policy should recognise that biodiversity will be affected by climate change, and policy ENV4 from the draft Regional Spatial Strategy (proposed changes) which supports linking habitats to create more functional units (habitats that can successfully support wildlife populations of plants and animals) which are then more resilient to climate change.

- This issue is amalgamated into the consolidated Issue 1: 'How can we continue to protect sensitive habitats and species from the pressures of development?' in section 4 of this paper. Climate change in the context of flood risk and renewable energy usage will be dealt with in the Climate Change and Sustainable Development Key Issues Paper.

Issue: How should we plan for landscape-scale biodiversity?

3.4 The RSPB, Dorset Wildlife Trust and others suggested that opportunities for landscape-scale biodiversity restoration and enhancement should be realised. This is in effect increasing the network of habitats across an identified strategic area of priority habitats through landscape features that can provide wildlife corridors, links or stepping stones. The Dorset Biodiversity Strategy also promotes the need to make connections between habitats within the surrounding landscape and is further reinforced by the inclusion within the draft Regional Spatial Strategy (proposed changes) of the South West Nature Map, which highlights areas to preserve or improve biodiversity at the landscape scale. There is a need to look further into the connections between landscape and biodiversity as a way of building the resilience of sites with biodiversity importance against threats such as climate change.

- This issue is amalgamated into the consolidated Issue 1: 'How can we continue to protect sensitive habitats and species from the pressures of development?' in section 4 of this paper. Landscape is also addressed through the Design and Landscape Key Issue Paper.

Issue: How can we prevent front garden loss?

3.5 The loss of front gardens to impermeable paving to allow car parking was raised as an issue because of the increase in surface water runoff and subsequent impact on habitats. Recent changes to the General Permitted Development Order at national level have addressed this issue. As planning permission is now required prior to laying any surface over 5 square metres in area, the affects of surface water can be managed through flooding policies proposed through the Climate Change and Sustainable Development Key Issues Paper.

- This issue does not need to be addressed further by this paper.

Issue: How should our policies protect the natural environment within urban areas?

3.6 A response received felt that the Issues and Option document implied that the natural environment only exists in the countryside and that issues of urban natural environment were not being considered by the Core Strategy. This was not the intention. Important habitats and species occur equally in and around urban areas and many natural urban environments are designated as SSSI, Local Nature Reserve or similar.

- The urban sites issue is amalgamated into the consolidated Issue 1: 'How can we continue to protect sensitive habitats and species from the pressures of development?' in section 4 of this paper. There are also links to Green Infrastructure, which are discussed in the Improving Sports and Leisure Facilities and providing Green Infrastructure Key Issues Paper.

Issue: What policy is required to address cross-border heathland impacts?

3.7 The Urban Heaths Partnership identified an issue with cross-border impacts on the Dorset heathlands resulting from development in neighbouring districts and another response was concerned how Christchurch and East Dorset's natural environment could be protected from development in the Ringwood area.

- Cross-border impacts on the Dorset Heaths and New Forest will be addressed through the Joint Heathlands DPD and will also be considered amalgamated into the consolidated Issue 1: 'How can we continue to protect sensitive habitats and species from the pressures of development?' in section 4 of this paper..

Issue: Will development in Christchurch and East Dorset result in a detrimental effect on backup grazing land associated with the New Forest National Park?

3.8 The New Forest National Park Authority raised this issue through the consultation. However, through subsequent consultation between the Councils and the Park Authority it has been agreed that no impact on backup grazing land is likely to result from policies in the Core Strategy.

- This issue does not need to be addressed further by this paper.

Issue: Can we make better use of school playing fields for biodiversity purposes?

3.9 The issue concerning use of school land and how it can be better used was raised, which includes opportunities for biodiversity.

- School playing fields are generally classified as ‘open space’ and will be considered amalgamated into the consolidated Key Issue pNE1: ‘How can we continue to protect sensitive habitats and species from the pressures of development?’ in section 4 of this paper. The recreational value of playing fields is addressed by the *Improving Sports and Leisure Facilities and providing Green Infrastructure* Key Issues Paper which proposes options to make better use of school facilities by opening them up to the public.

Issue: Does the issue of airport noise and its effect on habitats require policy control?

3.10 The issue of noise from Bournemouth Airport and noise mitigation was raised.

- The effect of airport noise in the context of a priority limit for airport growth is discussed in the *Bournemouth Airport* Key Issues Paper. Noise impacts on the internationally designated habitats from Bournemouth Airport and other sources will be assessed through the Habitats Regulations Assessment. Impacts on the New Forest National Park as a result of the route of the flight path in to Bournemouth Airport, which includes tranquillity, are discussed under into the consolidated Issue 1: ‘How can we continue to protect sensitive habitats and species from the pressures of development?’ in section 4 of this paper.

Issue: How can the Core Strategy balance the natural environment with other issues?

3.11 A specific comment was concerned that there should be greater consideration given to urban design and place / space issues.

- Urban design issues will be considered by the Design and Landscape Key Issues Paper. However, the Core Strategy will ultimately need to balance all of the issues facing Christchurch and East Dorset that are discussed in this and all of the other Key Issues Papers and reflect these in the policies it proposes. This issue does not need to be specifically addressed by this paper.

New issues raised through evidence studies

Issue: How should we provide a network of Green Infrastructure?

3.12 This issue was not addressed directly at Issues and Options but has been raised through the consultation and through partnership planning with other council areas in south east Dorset.

- The issue of Green Infrastructure (GI) is addressed by *the* Improving Sports and Leisure Facilities and Green Infrastructure Key Issues Paper, although it is acknowledged there are close linkages between GI and the mitigation of heathland sites raised in Key Issue NE1

Issue: Do SANGs provide effective mitigation for the protection of heathlands from urban pressures?

3.13 Studies carried out during 2008 to support the Joint Heathlands DPD, confirm that further evidence is required to ensure newly created SANGs provide effective mitigation for the effects of urban pressures.

- This issue is amalgamated into the consolidated Issue 1: 'How can we continue to protect sensitive habitats and species from the pressures of development?' in section 4 of this paper.

Issue: Should aspirational targets be set for habitat re-creation?

3.14 This issue was not addressed directly at Issues and Options but the draft Regional Spatial Strategy (proposed changes) recommends that priority is given to meeting targets for maintenance, restoration and re-creation of priority habitats, that includes lowland heathland.

- This issue is amalgamated into the consolidated Issue 1: 'How can we continue to protect sensitive habitats and species from the pressures of development?' in section 4 of this paper.

Issue: How should ancient woodlands and other important identified habitats be afforded protection?

3.15 This issue was not addressed directly at Issues & Options but is a requirement of Policy Planning Statement 9: Biodiversity and Geological Conservation and is to protect areas of ancient woodland where they do not have any existing statutory protection. Additionally, section 74 of the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2006 lists habitats of principal importance that should be protected and enhanced.

- Ancient woodlands and important habitats will be considered amalgamated into the consolidated Issue 1: 'How can we continue to protect sensitive habitats and species from the pressures of development?' in section 4 of this paper.

Issue: How can the uses of Christchurch Harbour be balanced with its nature conservation importance?

3.16 The Christchurch Harbour and Waterways Management Plan identifies a need for better management of the site, given an increasing number of activities taking place and demands on its natural resources. This issue has implications for both this Key Issues Paper and those concerned with recreation, tourism, design and landscape.

- Christchurch Harbour is designated as an SSSI and therefore already protected by national legislation. It is just one of many sites of strategic nature conservation, leisure and tourism importance within the two districts. It is not necessary to include specific policy for the harbour within the Core Strategy; generic policies to preserve and enhance the value and characteristics of such sites will be more appropriate as a means of managing the impacts of development. The harbour will be considered amalgamated into the consolidated Issue 1: 'How can we continue to protect sensitive habitats and species from the pressures of development?' in section 4 of this paper.

Issue: There is a need to ensure the protection and restoration of the River Avon

3.17 Particular types of development, up to some distance from the river, can have an impact on its ecological integrity. This is highlighted through the work of the River Avon Planning Forum. The River Avon SSSI has also been assessed as being largely in unfavourable condition.

- The River Avon is designated both nationally and internationally as an SSSI, SPA and SAC and so is already afforded a high level of protection. However, recognising that the river may come under increasing pressure from new development, it will be considered amalgamated into the consolidated Issue 1: 'How can we continue to protect sensitive habitats and species from the pressures of development?' in section 4 of this paper..

Cross-Border Issues

3.18 The key areas for cross-border natural environment issues include heathland protection across SE Dorset, provision on Green Infrastructure and the New Forest National Park. All of these issues are already covered above.

Summary of Identified Critical Issues

3.19 The following Key Issue consolidates the remaining relevant issues for the Core Strategy which were asked through the issues and options engagement, raised by consultees or suggested in response to the evidence base and other plans and strategies.

Issue 1: 'How can we continue to protect sensitive habitats and species from the pressures of development?'

3.20 This broad issue will consider how to provide an appropriate level of policy protection for sites which are already designated or are in need of designation, including the Dorset Heaths and New Forest National Park. The following issues asked at issues and options or identified through consultation and evidence will be addressed:

- **How can we offer further protection for the protected heathlands?** This issue was asked at issues and options (NE1).
- **Where should Suitable Alternative Natural Greenspaces be located?** This issue was asked at issues and options (NE2).
- **Do Suitable Alternative Natural Greenspaces provide effective mitigation for the protection of heathlands from urban pressures?** This issue was highlighted through evidence to support the Joint Heathlands DPD.
- **What policy is required to address cross border heathland impacts?** This issue was raised through the issues and options consultation.
- **Should aspirational targets be set for habitat re-creation?** This issue was highlighted through policy ENV4 of the draft Regional Spatial Strategy (proposed changes).
- **Should we provide any additional protection to sites under significant pressure?** This issue was asked at Issues and Options (NE3).
- **How can we offer protection for the adjoining New Forest National Park through our development strategy and policies?** This issue was asked at Issues and options (NE5).
- **How do we help the natural environment adapt to Climate Change?** This issue was raised through the issues and options consultation and new government guidance. Options to address climate change adaptation are proposed through the *Climate Change and Sustainable Development Key Issues Paper* but their relevance to the natural environment is clarified in this paper.
- **How should we plan for landscape-scale biodiversity?** This issue was raised through the issues and options consultation and the draft Regional Spatial Strategy (proposed changes).

4 Formation of Options

4.1 The formulation of preferred options set out within this section considers the outcomes of the Core Strategy Issues and Options engagement process, relevant evidence documents, Sustainability Appraisal and Habitats Regulations Assessment. The process includes a critical assessment of the options put forward to address issues identified in the Issues and Options paper. In some instances additional issues have been identified (see section 3) as a result of the issues and options engagement and the evidence gathering process which are also examined here.

Issue Identified at Issues and Options

NE1: How can we offer further protection for the protected heathlands?

Issues and Options Consultation Response

Options		Agree	Disagree	No opinion	Total
A	By requiring development to contribute to the provision of open space and recreation areas which offer potential alternatives to heaths	93	28	6	127
B	Other, please specify.				37

Table 4.1

4.2 The majority of people agreed with Option A and the principle of delivering alternative green spaces, funded by developer contributions. Comments from the development industry stressed that a balance should be achieved between heathland protection and housing delivery, with no requirements for further protection over and above current EU Legislation.

4.3 The Home Builders Federation (HBF) suggested that developer contributions should be delivered through the Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) approach as identified in the Core Strategy Issues and Options document, Issues FD1-4. Other responses from the development industry suggested that only on-site provision as part of greenfield developments would be likely to provide implementable and effective Suitable Alternative Natural Greenspaces (SANGs). Many comments suggested SANGs alone would not provide adequate mitigation for the impacts of development and that other methods of protection are also needed. These included wardens to patrol heathland sites, education programmes (to increase awareness, through the current and continued work of the Urban Heaths Partnership), access management, creation of new and enhancement of existing heathland areas, and financial contributions towards the upgrade and improvement of existing open space and recreation areas. Natural England suggested the principle of ‘heathland support areas’, which involve utilising undeveloped land adjacent to heathland sites to relieve pressure from the protected areas. Additionally, they suggested looking at the mitigation of heathland from a wider Green Infrastructure (GI) viewpoint. It was generally accepted that these options could be paid for through contributions received from developers.

4.4 Dorset Wildlife Trust (DWT) and others suggested that policies need to go beyond just mitigation and identify opportunities for enhancing, extending and re-creating heathlands, as well as for other habitats. This approach is supported by PPS9 and the South West and Dorset Biodiversity Strategies. Additionally, other comments suggested a widening of the 400 metre exclusion zone for residential development around heathland sites.

4.5 Under issue NE3, concern was expressed that emphasis on the protection of heathlands had detracted from the need to protect all wildlife habitats. Some responses expressed that any heathland re-creation should not be at the expense of woodland. In some cases heathlands are not a historically natural part of the landscape as they have developed from manmade practices and should continue to do so. Some also commented that there is already too much protection of heathlands.

Consideration of Evidence and Policy

4.6 There is strong evidence to support the conclusion that the Dorset Heaths are under significant pressure from urban development across the south east of the County. The baseline mapping in section 2 of this paper shows their extent and their close relationship to the main urban areas. This evidence is presented in the policy review in section 2 of this paper and is also summarised in *A literature review of urban effects on lowland heaths and their wildlife, English Nature Research Reports No. 623 (2005)* and *Evidence to support Appropriate Assessment of development plans and projects in south-east Dorset, Footprint Ecology (2006)*. It is backed up by international directives and national legislation (see policy review in section 3). The problems of urban pressures are also highlighted in the report *On-the-spot appraisal of the Dorset Heathland - a Report and recommendation to the standing committee on the Convention on the Conservation of European Wildlife and Natural Habitats*.

4.7 Table 1 of this report shows the amount of SSSI Heathlands in unfavourable conditions as 66.75%: for Christchurch and 85.23% for East Dorset, against national figures for lowland heath of just 19% (State of the Environment, Natural England, 2008).

4.8 Natural England advice reflects the evidence by requesting the provision of Suitable Alternative Natural Greenspaces as one of a suite of mitigation measures new development should provide. This was reflected by the former Draft Regional Spatial Strategy which specifically required the provision of Suitable Alternative Natural Greenspaces to relieve pressure on the Dorset Heaths SPA and that new residential development must secure effective minimisation, avoidance and mitigation of the potential adverse effects on their ecological integrity. One indicator of heathland integrity is the condition of SSSI sites, which are periodically assessed by Natural England; these are reproduced in the baseline section of this paper. Approximately 85% of those in Christchurch and 67% of those in East Dorset (the majority of which are heathland) are considered as being in unfavourable condition. This is a clear indication that this is a significant issue for the Core Strategy to address.

4.9 Some consultation responses questioned why impacts upon heathland have been elevated above those to other habitats and even suggested that the heathlands are already overprotected. Although the Core Strategy should clearly afford protection to all sensitive habitats, there has been far greater need and urgency (in planning terms) to protect the Dorset Heaths SPA/SAC (and potentially the New Forest heaths). This is largely due to the position of Natural England, the Government's advisor on nature and a statutory consultee for development plans and planning applications, who asserted in 2006 that residential development in Christchurch and East Dorset, would adversely impact on protected heaths unless mitigation measures were put in place and would therefore fail an Appropriate Assessment. This mitigation has since been provided by the Dorset Heathlands Interim Planning Framework (IPF) (2007-2009, extended 2010-2011) which requires all residential development (of one unit net gain and above) within 5km of the heaths to contribute a financial sum to a joint projects fund managed by the five partner Councils (including Christchurch and East Dorset). As the impacts of development within

400m of the heaths cannot be mitigated, no net gain in residential dwellings is permitted within this zone. This approach has been successfully defended at appeal and is expected to continue in some form under the emerging Joint Heathlands Development Plan Document (DPD) which will replace the IPF. The Core Strategy will need to provide the strategic policy basis for the Development Plan Document.

4.10 The need for SANGs has a direct relationship to new housing and contributions from new development will be essential to deliver this heathland mitigation; the local authorities simply cannot fund the necessary capital works and ongoing maintenance of SANGs through their own revenue streams. Since 2007, contributions have successfully been secured and allocated through the Dorset Heathland IPF. At present the south east Dorset authorities expect to continue with a similar approach under the long term Development Plan Document, although it is possible that contributions will in future be managed through the Community Infrastructure Levy. Whichever mechanism is finally used to handle the contributions, it will be essential that the Development Plan Document firstly identifies the required mitigation measures and sets the appropriate charge to development.

Issues and Options Sustainability Appraisal

4.11 Positive benefits were identified under objectives 1 (protection of habitats) and 21 (public accessibility to open space). The scoring demonstrates that the magnitude of these benefits are likely to increase over time as more open space improvements are delivered in step with new housing, providing more choice of sites for people to visit and thereby reducing the pressure on sensitive habitats. Uncertain impacts were identified under objectives 13 (suitable housing affordable for everyone) - impact on development viability, that has the potential of reducing contributions for affordable housing, and 15 (fear of crime) – uncertainty over the design of new sites and whether they can fully take in to account minimising the fear of crime in their design.

4.12 Issues proposed under option B 'other' could not be assessed against the Sustainable Appraisal objectives at Issues and Options stage as there were no specific options to test. New issues and policy options suggested through the consultation are considered by this paper and subjected to Sustainability Appraisal in section 6. In a 'do nothing' scenario there would be significant adverse impacts on the protection of the internationally designated heathlands from the new housing developments, conflicting not only with objective 1 (protect habitats) but also with the Habitats Regulations.

Conclusions and Implications for Preferred Options

4.13 First and foremost, the Core Strategy must comply with international legislation, primarily the Habitats Regulations (1994). Where evidence shows that harm to designated sites may occur as a result of development, a programme for mitigating that harm must be in place before development can be approved. Given the strength of evidence regarding heathlands and urban pressures, the preferred Core Strategy option should be to develop a detailed strategy – through the Dorset Heathlands Joint Development Plan Document – which prevents any possible degradation in the quality of the heaths that could result from any form of development.

4.14 Further evidence is required to inform a strategy for the protection of heathlands, particularly in terms of heathland visitor patterns and the effectiveness of different mitigation measures. Evidence currently being gathered for the Joint Development Plan Document, will assess a range of potential Suitable Alternative Natural Greenspaces sites and decide on an appropriate strategy. Suitable Alternative Natural Greenspaces are unlikely to be the only form of mitigation; the Development Plan Document will also utilise wardening, education and management of access to protected heaths among other measures. The Dorset Heathland Development Plan Document should continue with a developer-contribution funded mitigation programme and provide for the creation of new heathland and enhancement of existing sites.

4.15 A preferred option should also look to identify key strategic sites for Suitable Alternative Natural Greenspaces, as one of the key issues of their delivery is their identification in the first place. For sites not yet identified, a series of criteria based policies within the Core Strategy or referenced from the emerging Joint Heathlands Development Plan Document may be a possible option that would stipulate what a Suitable Alternative Natural Greenspaces must provide (delivered either on or off site ahead of a new residential development) in terms of its characteristics including its size, location and its accessibility.

4.16 Options outlined in the *Improving Sports and Leisure Facilities and providing Green Infrastructure* Key Issues Paper propose that heathland mitigation, local open space provision and green infrastructure all be drawn together in a closely integrated set of policies. This approach is intended to avoid double-charging developers.

4.17 Options to address this issue are set out below under Issue 1: 'How can we continue to protect sensitive habitats and species from the pressures of development?'

Issue Identified at Issues and Options

NE2: Where should Suitable Alternative Natural Greenspaces be located? and,

Issue identified through consultation and evidence

New Issue: Do SANGs provide effective mitigation for the protection of heathlands from urban pressures?

4.18 *These two issues are closely related and are therefore addressed together.*

Issues and Options Consultation Response (Issue NE2)

Option		Responses
A	Have you got a suggestion as to where Suitable Alternative Natural Greenspace could be provided?	70

Table 4.2

4.19 A variety of locations within both districts were suggested for this issue. Specific areas in Christchurch included:

- Chewton Common, Highcliffe
- Land adjacent to A35 across stream from Watermans Park
- To north of the proposed urban extension site at Roeshot
- Marsh Lane (Fairmile / Dudmoor)
- Improvements to Druitt Gardens

4.20 Specific areas in East Dorset included:

- Highwood, Alderholt
- End of Willow Drive, Colehill
- Adjacent to Leigh Road Public Open Space, Colehill
- Waterloo Valley, Corfe Mullen
- County Council land to the north of Corfe Mullen
- Northern slopes and floodplain, Corfe Mullen
- Blunts Farm to the west of the Ferndown Industrial Estate
- West of Ferndown Common
- Adjacent to Poor Common public open space (Holmwood Park), Ferndown
- Woodland at Woodland Walk, Tricketts Cross, Ferndown
- Henbury and banks of River Stour
- East of Parley Common
- Noon Hill Road in Verwood
- East of Burts Hill, Wimborne
- Expansion of Moors Valley Country Park
- Hardy Road, West Moors

4.21 Some consultation responses not listed above suggested locations to the north of Hurn airport and at Matchams, which are themselves areas of internationally designated heathland, so would not be suitable. The Core Strategy can only identify sites of strategic importance which are essential to its successful implementation; the remainder will go forward to be considered by the emerging Joint Heathland Development Plan Document. The New Forest National Park Authority suggested strengthening the role of Moors Valley and Avon Heath Country Parks and developing a new country park close to the proposed urban extension to the north of Christchurch. They felt this would provide the benefits of increasing outdoor recreation opportunities for the conurbation, act as a Suitable Alternative Natural Greenspaces to protected sites and help provide habitat links between the Dorset Heathlands and the New Forest. Support was also given to the establishment of a Stour Valley Country Park which could be linked to the urban extensions such as that proposed east and south of Ferndown.

4.22 Better use of school playing fields was suggested for both districts, along with the use of Forestry Commission land and the Green Belt generally. A number of comments, including from the Environment Agency, also recommended the flood plain to locate sites in.

4.23 Several comments suggested Suitable Alternative Natural Greenspaces should be incorporated within new developments and should include green links out of the site, connecting with other open spaces.

4.24 Natural England recommended the creation of heathland support areas, which are those areas of undeveloped land adjacent to designated sites that can be used to take recreational pressure from the heathland.

4.25 Some concern was raised by the development industry that too much focus was given to SANGs, above other forms of mitigation. Many comments suggested Suitable Alternative Natural Greenspaces alone would not provide adequate mitigation for the impacts of development due to a lack of evidence and that other methods of protection are needed. Several comments were concerned with the ongoing maintenance of sites and how they might accommodate other forms of mitigation, Green Infrastructure (GI) and accessibility measures more generally. This issue relates to one raised in NE1; ongoing maintenance is already factored into the Interim Planning Framework but needs further development within the emerging Joint Heathland Development Plan Document.

4.26 Other comments discussed the methodology for identifying new sites; Dorset Wildlife Trust requested that a thorough study of existing greenspace, heathlands and recreational links should be carried out to identify and target those areas most in need of alternative open spaces.

Consideration of Evidence and Policy

4.27 Please see the discussion of evidence and policy for issue NE1 above which is relevant to the location of Suitable Alternative Natural Greenspaces. In addition to the evidence studies previously discussed, the work currently being undertaken by the south east Dorset authorities to inform production of the Joint Heathlands Development Plan Document is looking at specific needs and opportunities across the County. This work will guide the selection and design of Suitable Alternative Natural Greenspaces and other mitigation measures. The unique circumstances of each heath and each Suitable Alternative Natural Greenspaces will need to be considered.

4.28 Amenity open space, nature conservation and biodiversity, outdoor sport and recreation are all considered to be water-compatible development as set out in table D2 of Planning Policy Statement 25 and could therefore be delivered on sites blighted by flood risk where housing or commercial uses would be inappropriate.

4.29 Research conducted to inform the IPF and forthcoming Development Plan Document argues that alternative sites should offer conditions similar to those users would find on the heaths e.g. large natural and relatively wild open spaces with the freedom to let dogs off the lead (source: *Access Patterns in South-east Dorset. The Dorset Household Survey 2008: Consequences for Future Housing and Greenspace Provision*, Footprint Ecology, December 2008). A related report suggests that further evidence is required to fully inform the design and delivery of Suitable Alternative Natural Greenspaces and recommends that the use of sites should be closely monitored before and after they are put in place (source: *Access Patterns in South-east Dorset: Dorset Household Survey and Predictions of Visitor Use of Potential Greenspace Sites*, Footprint Ecology, 2008).

Sites of strategic importance

4.30 Only sites which are required to support the delivery of the new neighbourhood options proposed Core Strategy need to be identified at this stage. Due to their size and the importance of alternative greenspace provision to their successful delivery, it is appropriate for the Core Strategy to identify land for Suitable Alternative Natural Greenspaces within or near to the urban extensions. The remainder (non urban extension) element of the housing requirement can be delivered within existing urban areas on smaller sites. The pressure on heathlands generated by these sites can be adequately mitigated through smaller Suitable Alternative Natural Greenspaces and other measures delivered through the Heathland IPF and emerging Joint Heathlands Development Plan Document.

4.31 Through ongoing work on the Joint Heathlands Development Plan Document and a county-wide Green Infrastructure strategy, options for a country park along the River Stour valley are being considered by the Dorset authorities. Proposals are still at a very early conception stage, but the Core Strategy may need to allocate land if plans for the park become more formalised.

Issues and Options Sustainability Appraisal

4.32 As Option A under issue NE2 did not propose any specific locations or criteria for Suitable Alternative Natural Greenspaces, it could not be assessed against Sustainable Appraisal objectives at Issues and Options stage. In general terms however, positive benefits would arise for objective 1 (protecting and enhancing the natural environment), objective 21 (public access to open space) and objective 7 (need to travel) if the sites put forward were located close to existing settlements thus reducing the need to travel.

4.33 A 'do nothing' option would have similar impacts to issue NE1, in that there would be significant adverse impacts on the protection of the internationally designated heathlands from the new housing developments.

Conclusions and Implications for Preferred Options

4.34 The Core Strategy should identify deliverable sites for Suitable Alternative Natural Greenspaces within, or in close proximity to each of the urban extensions, and for both Christchurch and East Dorset, this will be informed by master planning work currently being carried out by consultants. The exact requirements for sites should be discussed with Natural England but as a general rule sites should offer conditions similar to those users would find on the heaths, be of sufficient size to mitigate the additional pressures created by new development, and be easily accessible by both new and existing residents. As well as identifying their location, the Core Strategy will also need to determine costs for delivery of each SANG, the subsequent charge to new development, and the timescale for delivery. The forthcoming Joint Heathlands Development Plan Document will then clarify the detailed specifications and implementation plan. The Core Strategy may also need to allocate areas for a Stour Valley Country Park or other strategic site should the Joint Heathlands Development Plan Document or countywide Green Infrastructure work identify and formalise it.

4.35 Options to address this issue are set out below under Issue 1: 'How can we continue to protect sensitive habitats and species from the pressures of development?'

Issue identified through consultation and evidence

New Issue: What policy is required to address cross border heathland impacts?

4.36 In addition to the cross-border pressures on the New Forest National Park discussed, this issue also considers how to mitigate pressures on protected sites in Dorset as a result of development in neighbouring Hampshire.

Consideration of Evidence and Policy

4.37 Much of the evidence discussed above for Key Issue 1 supports the existence of cross-border impacts. Evidence demonstrates that the Dorset Heaths attract a significant number of visitors within a radius of 5km, an area which extends into Hampshire and includes the town of Ringwood and part of Fordingbridge. The *Core Strategy for the area of New Forest District outside of the New Forest National Park* (Adopted October 2009) plans for 330 dwellings to be built in Ringwood between 2009 and 2026 and 60 in Fordingbridge, Ashford and Sandleheath. In combination these developments will exert pressure on the Dorset Heaths (and indeed the New Forest National Park) and should therefore provide mitigation measures.

4.38 Policies in Christchurch, East Dorset or indeed the rest of Dorset cannot restrict development outside of the County; the necessary planning control needs to be developed by the relevant Hampshire planning authorities (New Forest District and the New Forest National Park Authority). Responsibility for the Hampshire natural environment falls to the south east office of Natural England which has not yet stipulated a requirement for mitigation of pressures on the New Forest or Dorset Heaths. A similar policy approach to the Dorset Heathlands Interim Planning Framework has been developed for the Thames Basin Heaths, but there is no policy requirement elsewhere in Hampshire for new development to mitigate the recreation pressures it generates.

Conclusions and Implications for Preferred Options

4.39 Where evidence shows that protected heathlands are likely to be affected by development in Christchurch and East Dorset, the Core Strategy will need to provide the policy basis for cross-border contributions or other appropriate form of impact mitigation and avoidance. Detailed policy should then be formulated through the emerging Joint Heathlands DPD.

4.40 The Core Strategy cannot make any policy requirements for development outside of Christchurch and East Dorset. National and international legislation and advice from Natural England is considered sufficient to ensure that the Hampshire authorities adequately mitigate any adverse development impacts affecting sites in Dorset. However, where possible we will work closely with the Hampshire authorities in the formulation of a cross border approach if directed to do so by Natural England.

4.41 Options to address this issue are set out below under Issue 1: 'How can we continue to protect sensitive habitats and species from the pressures of development?'

Issue identified through consultation and evidence

Issue: "Should aspirational targets be set for habitat re-creation?"

Consideration of Evidence and Policy

4.42 Environment Policy E, saved in the current Structure Plan states that biodiversity should be maintained and enhanced through the re-establishment of 500 hectares of lowland heath. This is in line with the South West Regional Biodiversity Action Plan which states a target of 1,000 Ha re-created heathland by 2010, and an aspirational 3,000 Ha by 2020 for relevant areas within the south west region. The Dorset Biodiversity Strategy sets targets for lowland heathland habitat re-creation of 1,000 Ha by 2010 across the whole of Dorset. East Dorset saved local plan policy NCON4 seeks to re-create heathland through the use of conditions or agreements.

4.43 In addition to heathland recreation, the Dorset Biodiversity Strategy also sets targets for other priority habitats, which Christchurch and East Dorset will in part need to contribute towards:

- Coastal saltmarsh (200 Ha by 2015 in Solent and Poole Bay)
- Lowland dry acid grassland (25 Ha by 2010 in Dorset Heaths)
- Lowland heathland (1,000 Ha by 2010 in Dorset Heaths)
- Lowland meadows (2 Ha by 2010 across Dorset)
- Lowland mixed deciduous woodland (no target set)
- Purple moor grass and rush pasture (no target set)
- Wet woodland (50 Ha by 2015 in Dorset Heaths and Wessex Vales)
- Lowland beech and yew woodland (100 Ha by 2015 within the East Dorset area of the South Wessex Downs)
- Lowland calcareous grassland (2 Ha by 2010 in the Dorset Heaths and 200 Ha by 2010 in the South Wessex Downs)
- Lowland wood-pastures and parkland (3 sites across Dorset)

4.44 PPS9 requires local authorities to *'identify any areas or sites for the restoration or creation of new priority habitats which contribute to regional targets, and support this restoration or creation through appropriate policies'* (Para 5ii).

4.45 Christchurch Council is currently looking at re-creating heathland at St Catherine's Hill (Town Common) and Chewton Bunny but it is uncertain at present what area of heath would be re-established as a result.

Conclusions and Implications for Preferred Options

4.46 Habitat and in particular heathland re-establishment not only meets the objectives of the South West and Dorset Biodiversity Strategies, it would result in the creation of undesignated heathland which could be promoted for recreation, which would in turn spread these pressures over a wider area and thereby reducing it on the designated sensitive heathland sites. It would also contribute towards creating larger areas of heathland habitat, thus making it more resilient to change. The issue for heathland re-creation is best addressed by the emerging Joint Heathlands Development Plan Document as a means of improving the condition of heathlands and creating alternative sites for recreation. Other habitat re-creation will need to be considered within the Core Strategy, reflecting the targets set in the Dorset Biodiversity Strategy and further informed through work with specialist partner organisations. This closely links to the topic of landscape scale biodiversity.

4.47 Options to address this issue are set out below under Issue 1: 'How can we continue to protect sensitive habitats and species from the pressures of development?'

Issue Identified at Issues and Options

NE3: How should we provide any additional protection to sites under significant pressure?

Issues and Options Consultation Response

Options		Agree	Disagree	No opinion	Total
A	Implement additional controls or constraints over and above existing designations	67	32	7	106
B	Do not increase controls beyond those existing	49	27	5	81
C	Other, please specify				

Table 4.3

4.48 The responses show a near even split between those who agree additional controls should be implemented and those who disagree, which is contradictory.

4.49 Some responses urged the Councils to commit fully to all the principles set out in the Dorset Biodiversity Strategy. Others were concerned with the destruction of hedgerows, etc. by developers or landowners in the belief that land with no apparent ecological interest will have a greater chance of gaining planning permission for development. Therefore a policy or similar would be required to protect against this. Dorset Wildlife Trust suggested that the Core Strategy should provide proportionate protection to Site of Nature Conservation Interest, Regionally Important Geological and Geomorphological Sites, Local Nature Reserves, as well as Ancient Woodlands and Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP) priority habitats as described in PPS9 (paras 10-11). The Environment Agency requested that all biodiversity interests should be protected and enhanced, including water features (such as streams, ponds etc) that are not designated for their conservation value, while other responses suggested that Christchurch Harbour, school playing fields and sites within urban areas also required specific policy.

4.50 Various comments saw the classing of back gardens as brownfield sites for redevelopment as an issue for this topic due to the loss of biodiversity, and the increase in flood risk due to surface water run-off.

4.51 Ferndown Town Council believed that there are too many controls in place already. With direct reference to heathlands in their Parish, whilst it was felt that they should be protected, they should also remain for the use of the residents – something further protection may limit. Other responses stated that additional controls or constraints should not be arbitrary and should relate to the potential impact of particular development proposals following the process of Appropriate Assessment. Suitable mitigation measures can then be introduced to enable development, where appropriate. The problem of reconciling the nature conservation importance and recreational uses of heathland is one of the key issues to resolve in this paper, in combination with the Joint Heathlands Development Plan Document.

4.52 In terms of the question this issue asks, climate change can be considered a ‘pressure’ to deal with. As raised by the East Dorset Environment Theme Action Group and the National Trust, the combined impact on biodiversity of climate change and new development should be considered carefully. To withstand the pressures of climate change, habitats outside those already designated for their nature conservation importance should be considered as part of an integrated land management approach to the development of East Dorset.

Consideration of Evidence and Policy

4.53 Rare species and habitats are robustly protected under international and national legislation (Conservation (Natural Habitats, &c.) Regulations 1994, Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981, Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006) which requires local planning authorities to consider how proposals for development will impact upon any site designated as a Special Protection Area (SPA), Special Area of Conservation (SAC), Ramsar bird habitat, Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI), National or Local Nature Reserve (NNR & LNR) or Marine Nature Reserve (MNR). Therefore it is not considered necessary to provide additional controls over and above the Councils’ statutory duties for the protection of these designated sites. In relation to the Regional Spatial Strategy areas of search in Christchurch and East Dorset, part of the master planning process currently being undertaken by consultants will need to ensure that the necessary ecological surveys are undertaken to avoid sensitive habitat being lost to development.

4.54 PPS9 highlights the ‘fundamental role’ of locally important sites of biodiversity or geological value in meeting national biodiversity targets. Where local sites do not meet criteria for national or international designation but are worthy of protection, councils have existing powers to designate sites under the 2004 Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act. The criteria for inclusion, and the level of protection provided, are defined at the local level. Examples of local designations include Sites of Nature Conservation Interest (SNCI) and Regionally Important Geological and Geomorphological Sites (RIGS). PPS9 also requires local authorities to protect habitats and species identified as ‘*of principal importance for the conservation of biodiversity in England*’ (Para 16). Priority habitats and species found within Christchurch and East Dorset are listed in the Dorset Biodiversity Strategy (for a list see policy review in section 3 of this paper). Defra provides further guidance on local sites and how they should be designated. The Core Strategy will focus on the principles of designating future sites, whilst later site specific documents in the Local Development Framework will provide the detailed individual site information.

4.55 PPS9 specifically mentions the need to identify, designate and protect ancient woodlands within local development documents. There are a number of areas of woodland in Christchurch and East Dorset which could benefit from a greater level of policy protection, which could be designated in later site specific documents in the Local Development Framework.

4.56 The Draft Christchurch Harbour and Waterways Management Plan (2009) identifies a need for better management of the harbour as a whole, given an increasing number of activities taking place and demands on its natural resources which could threaten the integrity of the Harbour’s Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) designation. Planning policy cannot resolve user conflicts and can only have an influence where an impact is likely to result from development. Existing legislation protecting SSSI sites is considered adequate for this purpose.

4.57 The River Avon is already designated internationally as a Special Area of Conservation (SAC) and nationally as a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI). The lower reaches are also internationally designated as SPA for its importance to bird populations and under the Ramsar convention for wetland areas of importance. However, the SSSI has been assessed as being largely in unfavourable condition and the river is the subject of both the *River Avon SAC Developer’s Advice Note* and the *Strategic Framework for restoration of the River Avon System* (2009). At present development across Christchurch and East Dorset is not assumed to have unacceptable impacts upon the Avon. The Core Strategy should however recognise that mitigation measures

may be required if future studies reveal a link between development and adverse affects on the integrity of the SAC or SSSI. Options in the *Climate Change and Sustainable Development* Key Issues Paper propose water efficiency measures as a means of preventing the need for harmful increased water abstraction from the Avon.

4.58 Sites designated as public open space (including school playing fields) may also have important biodiversity value. Where the site is designated for conservation, a site-specific management plan is generally adequate to manage conflicting uses so to ensure it can continue to be used for recreational uses as well as protecting the biodiversity. If a site is not already designated as SSSI or similar, and evidence justifies a need, then the Councils have existing powers to designate it for conservation purposes.

4.59 Regarding the issue of back garden loss, central Government are considering the possibility of re-classifying gardens as greenfield rather than brownfield land. The Councils already have powers to resist inappropriate back garden development where it would be detrimental to character, would impact upon a designated site of nature conservation, or would increase flood risk. Therefore it is not considered necessary to implement additional policy controls for back garden development.

4.60 Greater use of and consistency in methods used to report biodiversity change through new development is called for by the UK-Green Building Council task group (Biodiversity and the Built Environment, March 2009). Although Core Strategy Policy is a level too strategic to fully influence design of individual schemes, it still has a role to play in providing policies that put in place criteria for reporting the change, which may also ultimately lead to an increase in the ecological value of a site. Additionally, a key priority of the Dorset Biodiversity Strategy is for the monitoring of biodiversity.

4.61 East Dorset's Nature Conservation Supplementary Planning Guidance recommends 7 key principles of integrating nature conservation in to development, which should be reflected in Core Strategy policy. These are:

1. Survey
2. Avoid existing habitats and features
3. Retain existing habitats and features
4. Provide new benefits
5. Mitigate against potentially adverse effects
6. Compensate where damage is unavoidable
7. Manage and Monitor

Success of Existing Local Plan Policies

4.62 Annual Monitoring Reports produced individually by Christchurch and East Dorset help to report the progress of local plan policies and contain core output indicators which are used to measure this. Of relevance to this paper is the indicator for changes in areas designated for their intrinsic environmental value from international to local sites. In the period 2007/8, there was no change in the area for Christchurch, but an increase of 5 Ha for East Dorset. In terms of the success of the East Dorset policies, no permissions were granted against the advice of Natural England (English Nature) during 2007/2008 within consultation boundaries defined around SSSIs, SACs, SPAs and Ramsar sites. Additionally, in the period from 2007-2008, no appeals were allowed that cited the text from these policies.

4.63 This evidence suggests that existing local plan policies relating to the protection of designated sites are working successfully. However, as was shown in table 1 within the baseline data, the actual number of designated sites in favourable conditions is very low, meaning this is a key issue to address.

Issues and Options Sustainability Appraisal

4.64 Key benefits of option A were identified under objectives 1 (protection of habitats), 19 (enhancement of diversity), 21 (public access to open space) and 22 (enhancement of landscape). There were no obvious negative effects, although there is some uncertainty surrounding objectives 2 (wise use of land) and 10 (flooding) relating to the location of sites and what the additional controls or constraints may be involved in their creation.

4.65 When assessed against the SA objectives, option B has more negative impacts recorded, in the main contrasting the positive benefits identified for option A under objectives 1, 19, 21 and 22. There were also more neutral or unknown effects for this option.

Conclusions and Implications for Preferred Options

4.66 The Councils already have powers to provide policy protection to sites of biodiversity importance which are under significant pressure. Through existing controls, the Councils will be able to designate sites which are shown by evidence to be in need of protection. This would be done through later site specific documents in the Local Development Framework rather than the Core Strategy. In line with PPS9 a criteria-based Core Strategy policy should be considered, against which development proposals can be assessed. All development proposals will need to demonstrate that they will not result in unacceptable adverse impacts on any identified sites of biodiversity value. Where harmful impacts are likely to result, satisfactory mitigation measures will be required (a definition of 'satisfactory mitigation' in this respect will be provided by the Core Strategy).

4.67 The Core Strategy should also recognise the range of threats to undesignated sites which may result from other policy areas such as economy and employment, tourism, flooding and landscape. Policies within the Core Strategy should lead to enhancement of biodiversity through more sustainable development and integration with other policy objectives and land uses. This may be achieved through a commitment to the principles and objectives set out in the Dorset Biodiversity Strategy (of which Christchurch and East Dorset are member partners) which provides the strategic framework for local authorities to deliver the objectives set out in the UK Biodiversity Action Plan.

4.68 As highlighted by the Dorset Biodiversity Strategy and UK-Green Building Council task group, a policy that also looks to sets out criteria for reporting and monitoring changes to biodiversity as a result of new development will need to be considered.

4.69 Options to address this issue are set out below under Issue 1: 'How can we continue to protect sensitive habitats and species from the pressures of development?'

Issue Identified at Issues and Options

NE5: How can we offer protection for the adjoining New Forest National Park through our development strategy and policies?

Issues and Options Consultation Response

Options		Agree	Disagree	No opinion	Total
A	By requiring development to contribute to the provision of open space and recreation areas which offer a potential alternative to the New Forest	52	38	8	98
B	By protecting land from development which has been identified for back-up grazing use	74	14	13	101
C	By restricting new development within a certain distance from the boundary of the National Park	52	39	11	102
D	By resisting developments which would significantly increase vehicle traffic on roads across the National Park	64	32	11	107
E	Other, please specify				29

Table 4.4

4.70 The New Forest National Park Authority (NFNPA) highlighted that the Core Strategy must give appropriate weight to the requirements of the Environment Act 1995 and policy ENV3 of the draft Regional Spatial Strategy (proposed changes) in terms of taking full account of the statutory national park purposes. The Park Authority felt strongly that impacts upon the New Forest resulting from development in Christchurch and East Dorset should be considered.

4.71 Several comments highlighted that the issue of the risks posed by development in south east Dorset equally apply to the vulnerable New Forest habitats as they do to the Dorset Heaths. Dorset Wildlife Trust suggested that the same process for mitigating impacts of development should apply to the New Forest SAC/SPA as to the Dorset Heaths. Others suggested that only large scale proposals for open space and recreation which offer a critical mass can succeed in providing an alternative to sensitive areas such as the New Forest National Park. The RSPB felt that more information is needed on the impacts to the New Forest before any further decisions could be made.

4.72 Respondents from the development industry suggested that policies for the protection of the New Forest National Park should not be broad brush or arbitrary and should relate to the potential impact of particular development proposals following Appropriate Assessment. Suitable mitigation measures could then be introduced to enable development where appropriate.

4.73 A number of the 29 comments received for option E opposed gravel extraction adjoining Christchurch Borough. This is not a subject area that can be dealt with in this issue, but is being addressed directly with the minerals and waste teams in Dorset and Hampshire.

4.74 The issue of road safety was raised, and particularly the number of animals killed on them. This relates to traffic control, and is an indirect issue for Christchurch and East Dorset through the potential traffic new development will lead to, and how it will be managed.

Consideration of Evidence and Policy

4.75 The Habitats Regulations Assessment of the former draft Regional Spatial Strategy (proposed changes) identified the New Forest as a site of international nature conservation importance which is particularly vulnerable to harm from recreational activities as a result of its proximity to urban areas and its attractiveness for recreation to local residents or tourists. To ensure that planning decisions do not have an adverse impact upon the SPA/SAC, the south east Dorset planning authorities (which include Christchurch and East Dorset) have taken advice from the south east office of Natural England. To date, that advice has not identified a need to provide mitigation in a similar manner to the Dorset Heathlands IPF. In time however, this advice may change and the Core Strategy must be flexible enough to allow a solution.

4.76 The 2008 study '*Changing patterns of visitor numbers within the New Forest National Park, with particular reference to the New Forest SPA*' reported that visitor recreation impacts upon three protected bird species – the nightjar, woodlark and Dartford warbler – and is a key piece of evidence to suggest the existence of harmful urban pressures on the integrity of the internationally protected New Forest SPA. The analysis suggests that development within 7km of the National Park boundary will be the most significant driver for increased recreation in the future. Further a field, a substantial number of visitors are likely to come from within 20km of the boundary, a radius which covers the whole of Christchurch and all but a small part of East Dorset from Corfe Mullen westwards. The report therefore recommends that, along with various access management and visitor education measures within the National Park, alternative sites for recreation (SANGs) should be identified between the Park and the development areas in south east Dorset.

4.77 The issue of Green Infrastructure is discussed within the *Improving Sports and Leisure Facilities and providing Green Infrastructure* Key Issue Paper but is of relevance to mitigating pressures on the New Forest. As well as dedicated SANGs, other open spaces and routes can attract visitors away from sensitive sites, especially when they form part of a network of green infrastructure. Options proposed by that paper aim to closely integrate the delivery of heathland mitigation, open space provision and green infrastructure.

4.78 Disturbance to tranquillity is another aspect of pressure exerted on the National Park. However, most developable areas in Christchurch and East Dorset are separated from the National Park by between 2-3km of Green Belt, or lie on the other side of the Weymouth to Southampton railway line. A potential threat to tranquillity is therefore likely to come from traffic and emissions generated by the expansion of Bournemouth Airport and the proposed urban extension to the north of Christchurch, and increased visitor pressure on the Forest's protected habitats. The *Bournemouth Airport and Transport Improvements* Key Issues Papers propose options to prevent an increase in current emissions and noise disturbance, with the potential to reduce levels overall. The Core Strategy will attempt to achieve 'nitrogen neutrality' by reducing people's need to travel, reducing reliance on the private car, improving public transport and various carbon offsetting measures. Traffic management at the Christchurch urban extension is considered in full in *the Christchurch*

Urban Extension Key Issues Paper. The need for strategic transport infrastructure improvements will also be considered, informed by the master planning process and the outputs of the SEDMMTS – the South East Dorset Multi Modal Transport Study, with the *Transport Improvements Key Issue Paper* addressing the wider issue of traffic management / demand management.

4.79 The New Forest National Park Management Plan identifies the greatest influence by far on tranquillity throughout the National Park is the main road network with the A31 - a strategic regional route - bisecting the National Park from east to west, with wide ranging effects on large parts of the Park. A key priority of the Management plan is to agree a long-term strategy for reducing the impacts of the A31 on tranquillity and the physical severance of the Park in association with adjoining authorities.

4.80 In terms of aircraft noise from Bournemouth Airport and the proposed expansions in passenger numbers, the management plan highlights continued joint working and liaison as needed to influence the proposals for these facilities and where possible reduce the impacts of low level commercial aircraft and leisure flights on the Park.

Conclusions and Implications for Preferred Options

4.81 As required by national legislation the Core Strategy will have to take full account of the statutory National Park purposes, its natural beauty, wildlife and cultural heritage. There are two distinct areas of pressure which the Core Strategy should address; impacts upon the internationally designated heathland areas of the New Forest, and more general disturbance to the key functions and attractors of the National Park such as biodiversity and tranquillity. With regard to the protection of heathlands, the south east Dorset local authorities are already considering the need to avoid or mitigate development pressures on the parts of the New Forest designated as Special Protection Area. This issue will therefore be addressed through the Joint Heathlands Development Plan Document.

4.82 Specific threats to the National Park that may come from traffic and emissions generated by the expansion of Bournemouth Airport and the proposed urban extension to the north of Christchurch are also discussed in the *Transport, Bournemouth Airport and Christchurch Urban Extension Key Issues papers*. Additionally, the Habitats Regulations Assessment of the Core Strategy will assess the impact of the development options on the generation of emissions and therefore influence policy in the context of internationally designated sites of nature conservation importance. However, noise is an issue primarily addressed by the Civil Aviation Authority who set the flight paths to and from airports.

4.83 Core Strategy policies should ensure that development options avoid or mitigate against adverse impacts on the National Park. Where mitigation measures are required these should be agreed with the National Park Authority, Natural England and Dorset County Council as appropriate.

4.84 Options to address this issue are set out below under Issue 1: 'How can we continue to protect sensitive habitats and species from the pressures of development?'

Issue identified through consultation and evidence

New Issue: How do we help the natural environment adapt to Climate Change?

Consideration of Evidence and Policy

4.85 The need for climate change mitigation and adaptation is primarily identified through the climate change supplement to Planning Policy Statement 1. All habitats will be affected by changes in annual temperatures and rainfall, while those in riverside or coastal locations will be particularly susceptible to sea level rise, coastal erosion and changes to river flows. Working with organisations such as Natural England, local authorities will need to consider how to improve the resilience of biodiversity to these anticipated changes and recognise opportunities to actually improve the natural environment.

4.86 Natural England's *Character Area Climate Change* project identifies the Dorset Downs and Cranborne Chase as a character area in need of specific policy focus due to its contrasting habitats and landscapes that are likely to be affected by climate change. The final report of this project - *Responding to the impacts of climate change on the natural environment: Dorset Downs and Cranborne Chase (2009)* - identifies particular threats to landscape and habitats from predicted warmer and wetter winters and hotter, drier summers. The report proposes a number of adaptation options which focus on improving the condition of existing habitats and proposes re-establishing, restoring and creating new habitats while ensuring that adequate undeveloped areas remain to fully support biodiversity and allow for habitat substitution where appropriate.

4.87 PPS9 promotes reconnecting fragmented habitats and establishing wildlife corridors as a means of improving the ability of species to live in and move through urban areas. Such measures would also help species move between areas affected by climate change and would support the creation of a network of green infrastructure.

4.88 Many of the principles outlined in the Dorset Downs and Cranborne Chase report apply equally to other areas of Christchurch and East Dorset and could be promoted at the Core Strategy level. Several options – such as re-creation of habitats – also meet objectives under other issues identified through this paper.

Conclusions and Implications for Preferred Options

4.89 In terms of the natural environment, adaptation through the Core Strategy should focus on improving the condition of existing habitats and building their resilience to the effects of climate change. Measures should ideally be delivered as part of a broader strategy to improve the natural environment and protect it against the many pressures it faces.

4.90 Options to address this issue are set out below. Options for climate change adaptation and mitigation in the context of new development and flood risk are provided in the Climate Change Key Issues Paper.

Issue identified through consultation and evidence

New Issue: How should we plan for landscape-scale biodiversity?

Issues and Options Consultation Response

4.91 This issue was not asked through the Issues and Options consultation but several responses to issue NE3 related to biodiversity on a landscape scale. Dorset Wildlife Trust and others further highlighted the draft Regional Spatial Strategy requirements under policy ENV4, the consideration, using the South West Nature Map as guidance, of opportunities for biodiversity enhancement. The Nature Map focuses on landscape-scale biodiversity opportunities "creating more functional units which are more resilient to climate change". However, Dorset Wildlife Trust also see Green Infrastructure as integral to this through the projects that can potentially go towards it as being multifunctional, covering areas of, for example, nature reserve, floodplains and historic sites in addition to the Regional Spatial Strategy's definition of Green Infrastructure as "a chain of linked green routes to provide for informal recreation needs".

4.92 Natural England made a specific comment about Badbury Rings to the north west of Wimborne in East Dorset, which is protected for its archaeological interest, but has no nature conservation protection against major recreational pressure. A wider historic landscape setting to buffer the effects was suggested to offset this and provide a robust resource for Wimborne. This can be interpreted as an issue for which landscape scale biodiversity enhancement could address.

Consideration of Evidence and Policy

4.93 The draft Regional Spatial Strategy (proposed changes) identifies areas for landscape scale biodiversity enhancement and creation, which should be taken forward with partner organisations. It is further described in Policy, where a Nature Map is also provided to identify broad locations where there is potential for this to occur. The blocks of land identified on this map are termed Strategic Nature Areas (SNA). These areas are not formal environmental designations, but represent large scale areas of opportunity. SNAs may comprise a number of formally designated sites as well as land that has no designation for biodiversity conservation. These are expected to be used to identify where most of the major biodiversity concentrations are found and where targets to maintain, restore and re-create might best be met, help formulate sustainable choices for development, develop partnerships and projects for biodiversity and provide a focus for projects that will help biodiversity to adapt to climate change. Accompanying notes on the Nature Map stress that land outside of the SNAs also contain wildlife sites and species that are important in their own right. There are many different tools and mechanisms in place that contribute to their conservation, and the Nature Map is a significant addition to the wider strategy for biodiversity conservation in the region.

4.94 The *South West Nature Map – A Planners Guide* (Biodiversity South West, 2007) describes why biodiversity viewed at the landscape level is so important, as although Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP) targets have been developed and refined for the priority habitats, recognition has grown of the need to restore ecological health at the landscape scale to ensure long term environmental sustainability, especially in response to the growth threat of climate change. This requires conservation planning to look at wider processes functioning across landscapes rather than just protected areas and discrete wildlife sites. Existing priority habitats, together with landscape features which provide wildlife corridors, links or stepping stones from one site to another, help to form a network of habitats.

4.95 The guide also describes some of the ways the Nature Map and the principles of landscape scale biodiversity could be incorporated in to the Core Strategy. This includes:

- SNAs are best added to the Core Strategy due to their regional strategic significance.
- Detail to be informed by a locally developed evidence base
- SNAs should appear spatially on a key diagram or illustrative map
- Setting a policy or objective that states what action will be taken in these areas towards meeting targets for maintenance, restoration and protection from adverse impacts that may compromise their future potential. It should be noted however that these objectives will be delivered through the planning system as well as other mechanisms such as national agri-environment schemes

4.96 The AONB management plan has a policy to encourage the conservation and enhancement of habitats and species by extending` and improving ecological connections between habitats at an appropriate landscape scale.

4.97 The Dorset Biodiversity Strategy acknowledges the links with landscape scale initiatives that address the issues of habitat fragmentation and the long term viability of wildlife populations, particularly in relation to the effects of climate change. The Strategy advocates the need for large areas of wildlife to be identified and created through a landscape scale planning process.

Conclusions and Implications for Preferred Options

4.98 A successful policy approach for this issue will require a shift in emphasis from a site based approach towards a wider landscape scale, which can be seen as connecting in to a more general response to the natural environment outside of existing designated sites, whereby a criteria based policy sets out the approach to follow when planning new development. The Core Strategy is required to enable the linking, buffering and re-creation of wildlife habitats through a strategic approach. One of the ways for this to be enabled is to show the SNAs on the final key diagram, with an accompanying policy or objective setting out targets, etc.

4.99 This relatively generic policy approach for the Core Strategy could then provide the basis for steering later site specific policies.

4.100 Options to address this issue are set out below under Issue 1: ‘How can we continue to protect sensitive habitats and species from the pressures of development?’

THE OPTIONS

Issue 1: How can we continue to protect sensitive habitats and species from the pressures of development?

4.101 The Options can be found in the Managing the Natural Environment chapter of the Core Strategy

Preferred Option ME1: Criteria-based development assessment for Biodiversity and Geodiversity

4.102 Core Strategy policy will be based upon the principle of avoiding adverse affects to designated sites of biodiversity or geological importance (not just within Dorset) that may occur as a result of development. Policy will aim to protect, maintain and enhance the condition of nature conservation sites through the development process. In doing this, the policy should reflect the commitment to the Dorset Biodiversity Principles, with those specifically relevant to the Core Strategy:

- Reflect targets identified for local areas for species and habitat protection
- Help raise awareness of the need for biodiversity conservation in the local context
- Look for opportunities for conservation and enhancement of the whole biodiversity resource
- Provide a basis for monitoring progress in biodiversity conservation

4.103 Applicants will need to demonstrate that any proposed development will not result in adverse impacts on any internationally, nationally or locally designated site. To determine the likelihood of harm occurring, the following criteria should be addressed when development is proposed:

- Assess if any existing habitats, species and/or features of nature conservation importance are likely to be affected by the development, and to carry out a survey to document the results. The method of survey and level of detail will vary according to size and type of development, whether any protected species or habitats exist on site and may involve consultation with Natural England
- Informed by the initial survey information, avoid existing sensitive habitats and species through careful site selection, development design and phasing of construction work.
- Site layout and design should retain existing habitats and features of interest and provide buffer zones around sensitive areas
- Provide new benefits to biodiversity by enhancing existing habitats or creating new ones, with consideration of the priority habitats referred to in the Dorset Biodiversity Strategy and the Strategic Nature Areas identified on the South West Nature Map
- Where harm is likely to result, developments will be expected to provide measures to adequately avoid or mitigate that harm. If adequate mitigation cannot be provided, development may be refused
- Provision must be made for the appropriate management of the retained and new features. Species and habitats should also be monitored for a suitable time period after the development to indicate any increases or declines in species numbers or habitat quality. Any declines would require corrective measures to halt or reverse the trend.

Preferred Option ME2 Internationally and nationally designated sites

4.104 With regard to heathland Special Protection Areas, the emerging Dorset Heathlands Joint Development Plan Document will specify the types of development affected by option pNE1a and will identify a mix of appropriate mitigation and avoidance measures, their nature, scale, location and design. Where adequate mitigation measures cannot be provided on-site as part of the development, a financial contribution to the Councils will be required. The Dorset Heathlands Joint Development Plan Document will provide the type of development circumstances and a list of projects which will be funded by developer contributions and the calculated contribution amounts as they apply to different types of development. Projects delivered through the Interim Planning Framework/Development Plan Document will include Suitable Alternative Natural Greenspace (SANGs), heathland access and management,

wardening, education, habitat re-creation and other appropriate measures. Due to their significance to the successful delivery of development, the Core Strategy will identify key SANGs of strategic importance such as those required to mitigate the pressures resulting from development at the urban extensions. This includes:

- North of the Railway Line for the Christchurch urban extension
- Cuthbury allotments and south of Ferndown / West Parley urban extension, which may also include the proposed Stour Valley Country Park which would also serve the wider south east Dorset
- North of Wimborne for the East Dorset urban extension
- North and west of Corfe Mullen for the East Dorset urban extension

4.105 Detailed specifications for the SANGs will be provided through the Joint Heathlands Development Plan Document.

4.106 In addition, and in recognition of the function of the New Forest National Park, the Core Strategy will look to avoid any adverse impacts on the New Forest as a result of development, which includes impacts on the tranquillity of the park through traffic generation resulting from new development in Christchurch and East Dorset. Specific options to achieve this are proposed through the Bournemouth Airport, Transport and Access and Christchurch Urban Extension Key Issues Papers.

Preferred Option ME3 Locally designated sites

4.107 All sites protected by policies within the Christchurch and East Dorset Local Plans will continue to be identified under the Core Strategy and their present designation, which includes Site of Nature Conservation Interest, Regionally Important Geological and Geomorphological Sites, Local Nature Reserves, will remain the same. Option pNE1a will apply to all these sites.

Preferred Option ME4 Protection for undesignated sites

4.108 Key undesignated sites of biodiversity or geological value which are shown by evidence to be under significant threat from pressures generated by new development will be identified and designated locally in partnership with local biodiversity stakeholders. These sites may include priority habitats identified in the Dorset Biodiversity Strategy, green corridors and ancient woodlands that are not already designated. Once designated, options ME1 and ME3 will apply.

Preferred Option ME5 Climate Change adaptation

4.109 Through options ME1 to ME4 the Core Strategy will promote improvements to the condition of sites of biodiversity importance through new development, thereby increasing their resilience to climate change. Reconnecting fragmented habitats and establishing wildlife corridors will be included as objectives within a strategy to develop a network of interconnected Green Infrastructure (an option proposed through the Improving Sports and Leisure Facilities Key Issue Paper). Design principles delivered through the Green Infrastructure strategy and options proposed through the Design and Landscape Key Issues Paper will promote 'permeability' to allow wildlife to move through new developments and 'green corridors' (such as those currently identified in the Christchurch Local Plan) will be designated. Management plans should be produced for sites which are likely to be significantly affected by climate change such as those within areas threatened by sea level rise or more frequent flooding.

Preferred Option ME6 Landscape scale biodiversity

4.110 In order to further protect, manage and enhance Christchurch and East Dorset's biodiversity and to create habitats more resilient to change, with particular reference to climate change, the Strategic Nature Areas set out on the South West Nature Map are identified on the key diagram. They are shown as areas with potential for landscape-scale habitat enhancement and re-creation, and those referred to in preferred option ME1. Strategic Nature Areas are identified as the best areas to maintain and expand priority habitats.

4.111 Biodiversity improvement associated with new developments is one of the delivery mechanisms for the enhancement and re-creation of the Strategic Nature Areas. Conservation organisations, those involved with agriculture or forestry as well as more general national funding sources are the others, which may lead to future partnership working to aid delivery. To ensure effective progress is being made, monitoring will need to be undertaken on a large scale by organisations such as local wildlife trusts or records centres, as those who have the best knowledge of the wider areas.

5 Implementation

Possible Funding Sources

The Dorset Heathlands Interim Planning Framework and Joint Heathlands Development Plan Document

5.1 For the purposes of mitigating the impacts new development has on internationally designated heathland sites, Bournemouth, Poole, Christchurch, Purbeck and East Dorset have adopted the Dorset Heathlands Interim Planning Framework which applies to residential development. A tariff is collected from all new net residential developments within 5 km of the protected heathlands. An executive group has been established with elected member representation from each authority for the purpose of prioritising projects for receipt of funds that are collected across SE Dorset through the scheme. It is likely that the longer term replacement to the Interim Planning Framework, the Heathlands Development Plan Document will continue with a similar tariff scheme.

Heathland Mitigation for the Urban Extensions

5.2 The strategic SANGs that will be identified for each of the proposed urban extension sites in Christchurch and East Dorset will need to be delivered as part of the overall development itself. Details of how this will be undertaken will be included in the relevant *Urban Extension* Key Issue Papers, informed by the ongoing master planning work.

Landscape scale biodiversity

5.3 Landscape scale biodiversity initiatives can be delivered through biodiversity improvements that may be required as part of a specific development. Another method is to secure financial contributions from new developments through the Community Infrastructure Levy and legal agreements. However, because this will have to compete with many another needs, including heathland mitigation, affordable housing provision, transport improvements, open space and green infrastructure provision, there is limited scope for its inclusion. Therefore, other sources which are identified in guidance suggest that sustained resources should come from central Government, the private sector (such as landowners) and voluntary bodies (such as local wildlife trusts). To date, no specific funding has been identified, although it is expected to come from sources such as:

- Aggregates Levy Sustainability Funds
- English Woodland Grant Scheme
- Environmental Stewardship
- Heritage Lottery Funding
- Wildspace Grant Scheme