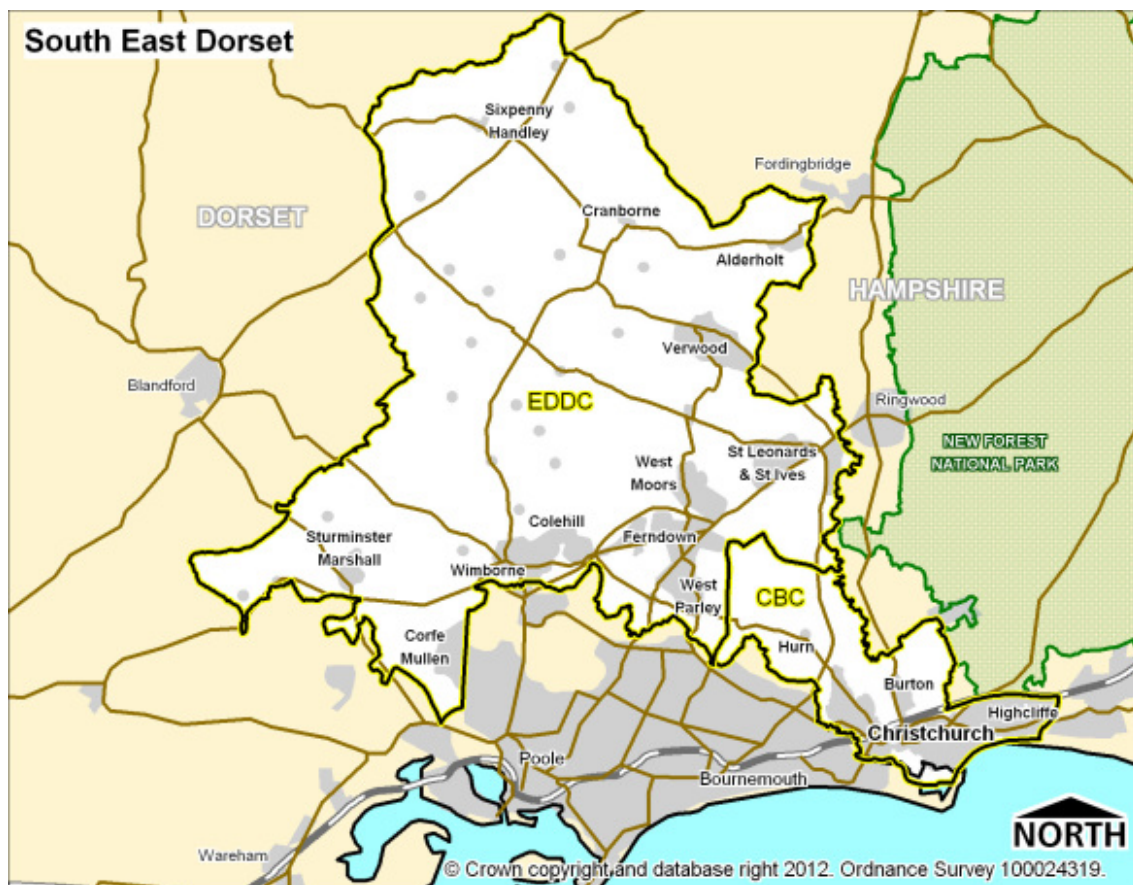


2 A Picture of Christchurch and East Dorset

2.1 The Core Strategy is based on an understanding of the area's characteristics. What follows sets out the key attributes that are important to consider when establishing a vision, objectives, policies and proposals. Further detailed information is available in a series of Area Profiles and the Annual Monitoring Reports produced by both Councils. These can be viewed at the Council Offices, or on www.dorsetforyou.com.

The Sub Region

2.2 The interaction of people and activity across the conurbation means that it is important to consider the wider context of Christchurch and East Dorset and the role that the area plays in the way that the conurbation functions. The South East Dorset conurbation is one of the South Coast's major urban centres. With a population approaching 500,000, it is the second largest urban area in the South West. The Core Strategy area has a population of about 130,000 people, representing 25% of the 'conurbation' population. The conurbation has a broadly-based economy, with significant specialisms in tourism, education, financial services, high tech and marine industry, retailing and entertainment. The area is served by Bournemouth Airport, and the Port of Poole but has barely adequate road and rail links to London, the South East and the north and west. Its setting in internationally recognised quality countryside and coastal environment makes it unique for a conurbation of its size. It is a place that attracts people to live, learn, work, relax and retire. It has seen significant growth over many years, principally through the in-migration of both people and companies, and substantially from London and the South East.



Map 2.1 South East Dorset

2.3 The New Forest National Park lies on the border of both Districts and there are close road connections with Christchurch via the A35 and East Dorset via the A31(T). Both Christchurch and East Dorset have strong links with the wider conurbation and their residents have access to a range

of employment, leisure and cultural facilities provided by the larger towns of Bournemouth and Poole. Christchurch and East Dorset have an economic role in contributing to the provision of employment premises and land to meet the wider needs of the conurbation. Both districts are also part of a wider Bournemouth/Poole housing market area.

The Core Strategy Area

2.4 Christchurch is a relatively small Borough at around 5,169 ha with a population of about 47,000 (2009) and is set at the eastern edge of the South East Dorset conurbation. The town has expanded along its major roads and includes Highcliffe, which has its own district shopping centre. Burton has seen residential growth separated from the urban area.

2.5 The District of East Dorset lies to the north-east of Christchurch, has a population of 87,600 (2009) and at 35,441 ha is around seven times the size of Christchurch Borough. With its southern area relating to the Bournemouth and Poole conurbation, the district has a number of major settlements:- Wimborne, Corfe Mullen, Colehill, Ferndown, West Parley, West Moors, St Leonards and St Ives and Verwood, as well as a large rural area.

Our Environment

2.6 Natural

2.7 The natural environment of the area is diverse and of high quality, consisting of the coast, harbour, cliffs, extensive areas of internationally protected wet and dry heath, river valleys, ancient woodlands and chalk downlands.

- Christchurch – 24% of the area is covered by one or more nature conservation designations
- East Dorset – 9.7% of the area covered by one or more nature conservation designations. 45% of the area is covered by the Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty.

2.8 Historic

2.9 The historic town centres of Christchurch and Wimborne Minster are characterised by narrow streets, attractive older buildings and complemented by the Priory and Minster. Within Christchurch there are 12 designated Conservation Areas, around 287 Listed Buildings and 12 Scheduled Ancient Monuments. In East Dorset there are 19 Conservation Areas, 689 Listed Buildings and 152 Scheduled Ancient Monuments.

2.10 Rural and Urban Character

2.11 Christchurch Borough is smaller and more urban in nature than East Dorset. The vast majority of its population live in the urban area. However, around 70% of the Borough remains as open countryside, harbour or coast. East Dorset has more of the characteristics of a “rural” authority with about 93% of it being countryside and only 7% urban. The main centres of Wimborne and Ferndown, together with the other urban settlements, are located in the south and eastern part of the District. The north and western part of the District is more rural in character, a large proportion being within the Cranborne Chase and West Wiltshire Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty and contains villages, hamlets and isolated dwellings.

2.12 Climate Change

2.13 Climate change has the potential to not only affect the environment, but also the social and economic aspects of life in Christchurch and East Dorset. Although the precise nature of environmental changes is not fully understood, changes to rainfall levels (and river flow) and rising sea levels have significant implications particularly for Christchurch in terms of flood risk as mentioned above. Conversely, predicted hot and dry summers will cause problems of low flows for some of the chalk downland rivers in the area. Additionally, climate change could have a significant impact on agriculture and wildlife.

2.14 Water

2.15 The rivers Stour, Avon, Moors, Allen, Uddens Water and Bure Brook flood regularly and wide areas of Christchurch are subject to both river and tidal flood risk. Strategic Flood Risk Assessment work has identified significant areas within Christchurch and to a lesser extent within East Dorset which are subject to flood risk, particularly when taking into account the effects of climate change. In Wimborne there is risk of flooding on the eastern side of the town centre along the line of the River Allen. Other areas of concern exist in Sturminster Marshall, Verwood and West Moors. Areas at significant risk in Christchurch include some of Bournemouth Airport, parts of the town centre and parts of Stanpit and Mudeford.

2.16 The area is well catered for in relation to water supply. The recently completed Longham Lakes, along with the Blashford Lakes ensure that future supply can be provided to accommodate a growing conurbation. A Groundwater Protection Zone associated with the chalk downlands relates to an important aquifer that serves the conurbation.

2.17 Minerals and Waste

2.18 Planning for minerals and waste is dealt with by Dorset County Council. Separate planning documents are therefore prepared for these matters. Nevertheless, minerals and waste planning proposals need to be taken into account within this Core Strategy. The area to the south and east of the Cranborne Chase and West Wiltshire Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty are good sources for sand and gravel, particularly within the river valleys. Large areas of land are therefore proposed to be safeguarded for minerals extraction. Additionally, there are some major issues relating to waste disposal that are to be addressed in coming years and these need to be taken into account. There is to be less landfill and more recycling and other means of disposal. This will require locations for recycling and waste plants.

Communities

2.19 People

2.20 The population in Christchurch is about 47,000 and East Dorset is 87,600 (ONS 2009). The current proportion over retirement age (ONS 2008) is above the County and national average in Christchurch at 34% and in East Dorset at 32%, compared with 29% in Dorset as a whole and just 19% nationally. Despite death rates exceeding birth rates in the area, the population continues to increase as a result of in-migration from other parts of the Country rather than from abroad. In 2004 – 2008 more residents moved abroad from Christchurch and East Dorset than moved from other countries into the area. (ONS Long term international migration tables 1991 – 2008). The age profile of people moving to the area from elsewhere within the UK is younger than that of the current population, so it should not be assumed that people only move to the area to retire. However this trend is not significant enough to change the age structure of the current population to one which is less heavily weighted towards the older age groups.

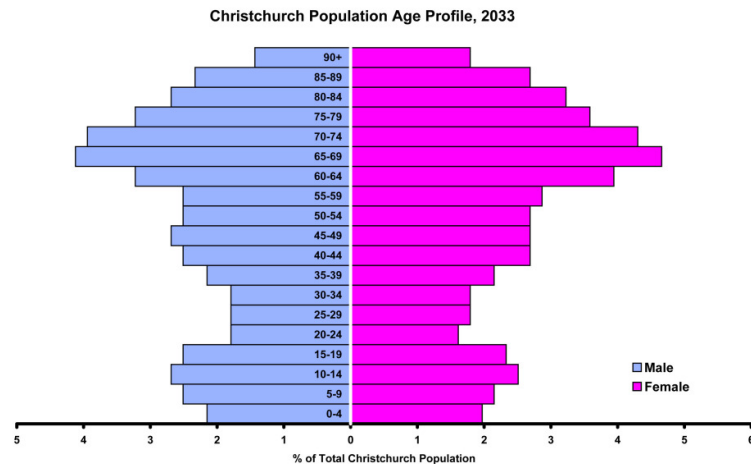


Figure 2.1 Christchurch Age Profile 2033 (ONS Sub-national Population Projections 2008 based)



Figure 2.2 East Dorset Age Profile 2033 (ONS Sub-national Population Projections - 2008 based)

2.21 Long term projections suggest that the population may grow to 55,900 in Christchurch and 100,800 in East Dorset by 2033. (ONS Sub-national Population Projections- 2008 based). Older people are expected to account for an increasing proportion of the population in future with the percentage of residents aged 65 in 2033 predicted to reach 38 per cent in Christchurch and East Dorset. (ONS Sub-National Population Projections 2008).

2.22 The proportion of population of working age in the area is relatively low, at only 50% in Christchurch and 52% in East Dorset compared with 54% in Dorset and 62% nationally. Working age population is predicted to drop to about 47% in the area by 2033. A shortage of people of working age has significant implications for sustaining and enhancing the local economy. However, this will be countered to a degree by changes in the retirement age. The ageing population also places increased pressure on the provision of health care services.

2.23 As well as a projected population increase, there is a predicted increase in households due to the following trends:

- Smaller households
- Fewer children per family
- Separation
- Older parents
- More people living alone
- Living longer

2.24 Ethnic minorities are a small but growing proportion of the total population. The 2001 Census identifies the ethnic make-up of the population as 99.92% classified as “White British” in Christchurch and 98.99% in East Dorset compared with 90.92% in England and Wales. In 2007 the proportion of “White British” had fallen to 97% across the area, compared with 88.7% in England and Wales (ONS Mid Year Estimates by Ethnic Group 2007).

2.25 Housing



Figure 2.3 Tenure of housing in Christchurch and East Dorset

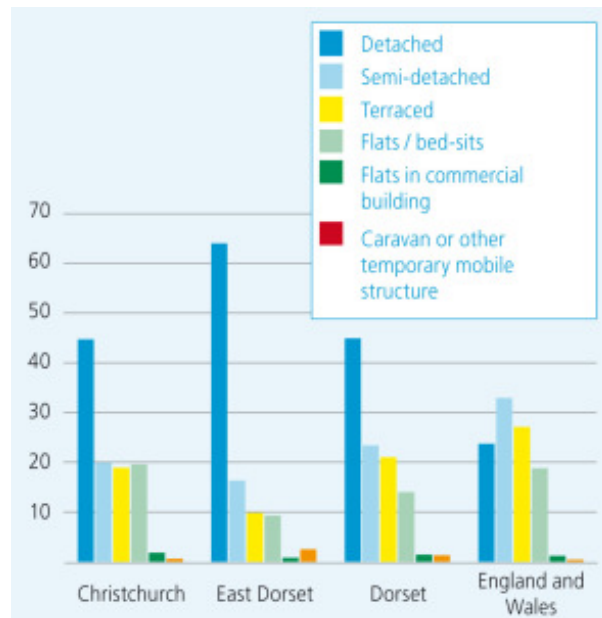


Figure 2.4 Types of housing in Christchurch and East Dorset

2.26 Demand for housing is high and there is a significant problem of affordability due to the high house price:income ratios in the area. Housing land supply is affected by environmental constraints, in particular, flood risk and proximity to heathland, as well as Green Belt and infrastructure constraints. Evidence on housing supply (Christchurch and East Dorset Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessments 2011) indicates a low number of larger sites likely to come forward within the urban area, hence a reliance on smaller sites and a need to maximise opportunities to meet housing needs.

2.27 The Dorset wide Strategic Housing Market Assessment update 2011 identifies the main characteristics of the housing stock. The profile is heavily weighted towards detached properties, although there are differences between the two districts. The graphs show the peculiarities of the two districts' housing stock and underline the fact that they are part of a wider housing market. East Dorset historically has provided housing for the more affluent commuters, whereas Christchurch provides a more urban cross section of house type.

2.28 The Strategic Housing Market Assessment (2011) estimates that in Christchurch approximately 330 affordable homes would be required per year and about 430 in East Dorset.

2.29 Even though there has been a slight fall in house prices over the past few years, the house price to income ratios for Christchurch (10.5 times) and East Dorset (11 times) remain significantly high, and are higher than the County (10.4 times) and England (7 times) averages in 2010. The median selling house price in Christchurch in 2011 was £238,000, and £250,000 for East Dorset compared to a national figure of £175,000.

2.30 The impact on the viability of housing schemes of increased affordable housing contributions, together with other contributions likely to be required was tested in 2009. The study at that time found all new housing schemes could provide 40% affordable housing, or an equivalent financial contribution, with the exception of some special circumstances.

2.31 Health

2.32 Life expectancy rates are some of the highest in the Country and compare well with national figures of 77.3 years for males and 81.6 years for females (Association of Public Health Observatories - APHO and Department of Health 2008). In Christchurch the figures are 80.3 years for males and 84.4 years for females, and in East Dorset 81.4 for males and 84.4 for females.

2.33 Health profiles (APHO and Dept of Health 2009) show that:

- The proportions of over 65s in Christchurch and East Dorset “not in good health” is significantly lower than regional and national averages.
- The proportion of people diagnosed with diabetes in Christchurch and East Dorset is significantly higher than regional and national averages, which may reflect the ageing population.
- Road injuries and deaths are significantly higher than regional and national averages in East Dorset, but not significantly different to these averages in Christchurch.

2.34 The Dorset Housing Needs and Demands Survey 2007 found that there are an estimated 4,983 households in Christchurch and 6,975 households in East Dorset with one or more members in an identified special needs group. Within this category, households with a ‘medical condition’ are the predominant group, closely followed by the frail elderly and those with a physical disability. Special needs households are more likely to contain older persons, hence the larger proportion within Christchurch.

2.35 Education and Training

2.36 The percentage of the working age population in Christchurch (8%) and East Dorset (9%) without qualifications is below the national average of 12%. The percentage qualified to degree level or above is about the national average for Christchurch (29%) and above average for East Dorset (31%). (Annual Population Survey 2008).

2.37 In general, school facilities provision currently meets the needs of the areas. However, predictions for population increases (ONS) and future residential development will put pressure on some education facilities. With increases in school rolls over the next fifteen years some schools may need to be extended. Although some schools may have capacity to accommodate the increase in population, others, for example in Wimborne, Highcliffe, Christchurch Infant/Junior and Mundeford may be affected. The councils will continue to work closely with Dorset County Council to ensure that the capacity of schools is continually kept under review and future needs are effectively planned for.

2.38 The percentage of Christchurch and East Dorset pupils achieving 5 or more GCSEs at A-C grades in 2008, including English and Maths was the same at 55% which is above the national average for England at 47.8% (DCC, Secondary School Achievement and Attainment Tables 2008).

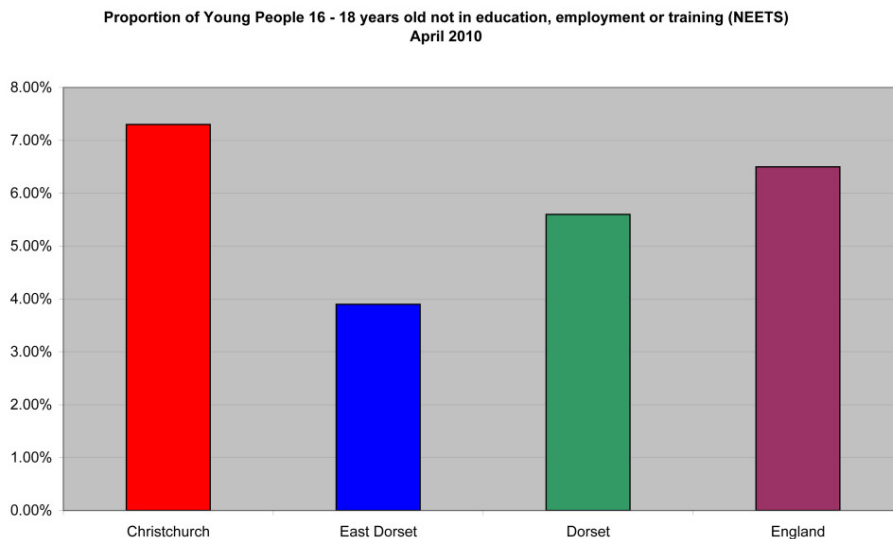


Figure 2.5 Proportion of Young People 16-18 years old Not in Education, Employment or Training (NEETs) April 2010 (Connexions)

2.39 The proportion of young people not in education, employment and training (NEET) is currently high in Christchurch at 7.3 %. This is above the County average of 5.6% and national average of 6.5%. East Dorset's proportion is currently 3.9% which is below the County and national average (Connexions, April 2010).

2.40 Deprivation

2.41 Deprivation is low in the national context, particularly for East Dorset District. However, there are pockets of deprivation within each district. Information provided at a more local level shows that Somerford East and Somerford West within Christchurch are ranked amongst the 20 most deprived areas in Dorset and are within the top 25% nationally. Within East Dorset, the Heatherlands and Leigh Park areas are ranked at 14th and 26th most deprived areas within Dorset respectively. (Index of Multiple Deprivation 2007)

Economy

2.42 The economy of the area is centred on the service sector with more than half of all firms falling into two broad categories: distribution, hotels and restaurants; and banking, finance and insurance. There is a relatively high proportion of manufacturing firms within both districts. Tourism is a key part of the local economy in relation to visitor spend. The area has low unemployment but wage levels are below the national average.

There are around 2,020 firms in Christchurch and 4,340 firms in East Dorset. A market segment assessment (Christchurch and East Dorset Employment Land Review 2007) identifies that the vast majority of employment land supply within the area falls within the 'General Industrial / Business Area' segment. These sites generally comprise older, more established land and buildings in industrial use.

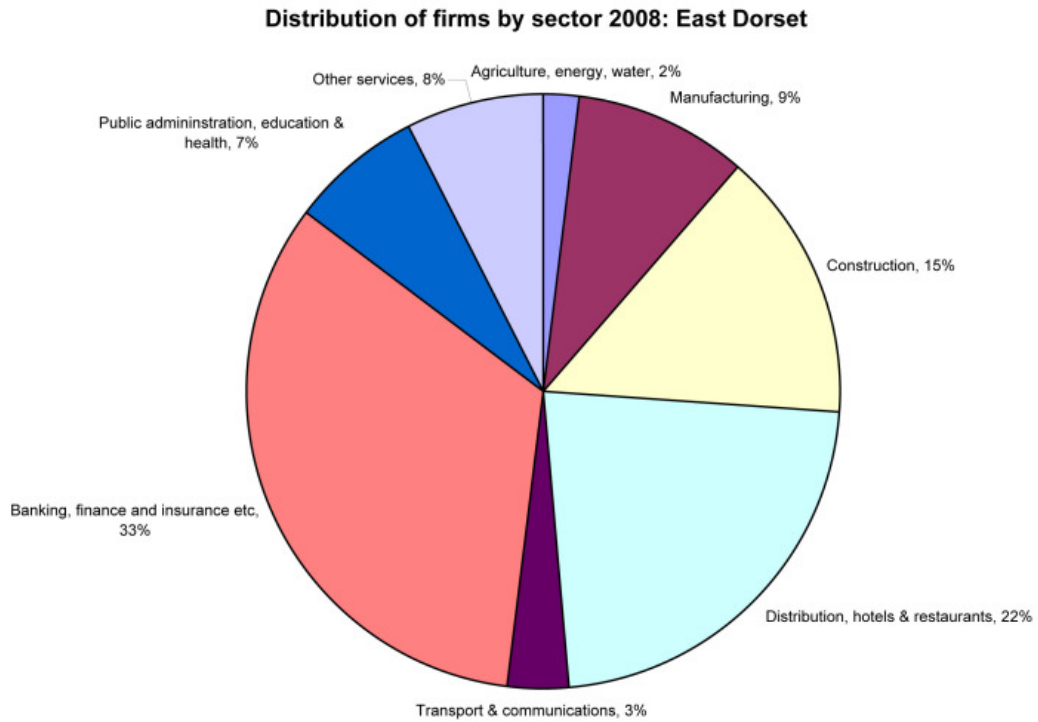


Figure 2.6 Distribution of East Dorset Firms by Sector 2008

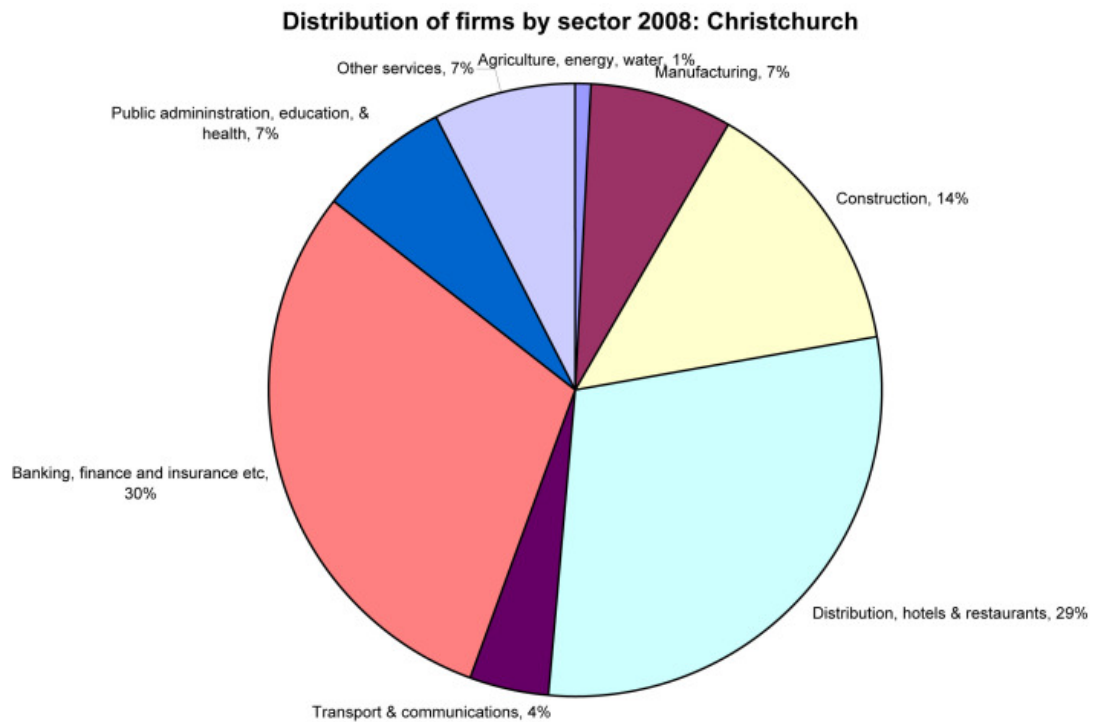


Figure 2.7 Distribution Christchurch Firms by Sector 2008

2.43 Town and District Centres

2.44 There are six town and district centres within Christchurch and East Dorset which are of differing size, significance and function – Christchurch, Highcliffe, Wimborne, Ferndown, Verwood and West Moors. These are complemented by a variety of local and neighbourhood centres in the villages and suburban areas. A joint Retail Study (2008) has indicated that both Christchurch and East Dorset will face demand to accommodate increased levels of non-food retail outlets in the period up to 2026. It concludes that the local town centres are healthy but need to adapt to changes in the demands of shoppers and visitors.

2.45 Tourism

2.46 Tourism is very important to both Christchurch and East Dorset due to the high quality of much of the historic environment, riversides, harbours, coastal and countryside areas. The table below sets out how significant tourism is to the economy of the area.

Key Facts	Christchurch	East Dorset
Trips by staying visitors	195,000	308,000
Staying visitor nights	838,000	1,214,000
Spend by staying visitors	£35,176,000	£41,965,000
Day visits	827,473	1,443,000
Spend by day visitors	£35,674,613	£59,034,000
Other related tourism related spend	£4,665,000	£7,805,000
Jobs related to tourism spending	1862	2443
% of employment supported by tourism	10%	6%

Trips, nights and spend to each area by visitors (The Value of Tourism Key Facts, 2007)

2.47 Earnings

2.48 Workplace pay in Christchurch is higher than East Dorset, but both are still below the national average (95% of average pay in Christchurch and 87.6% in East Dorset – 2009 data). Levels of earnings vary across the districts, with areas of deprivation suffering from low wages. Residents who live in East Dorset earn just about the national average wage, whereas residents in Christchurch earn 88.6% of this wage. This implies that more residents in East Dorset commute to higher paid employment. 9% of employees in Christchurch firms are in high pay employment. This is above the average for East Dorset and Dorset (both 7%), but below the national average for Great Britain (12%). Bournemouth has 16% of its employees in high paid employment and Poole 12% (Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings 2009 data and Annual Business Inquiry 2008).

2.49 Transport and Accessibility

2.50 The A35 connects Christchurch to Southampton and the M27, the A338 runs north-south through the Borough and Christchurch railway station is on the main line to London. Bournemouth Airport is a regionally significant airport also located in the Borough. Public transport is frequent on major routes, although some of the suburban areas are less well served. East Dorset has no railways and is poorly served by bus services. The main A31(T) runs through East Dorset linking the M3/M27 to Dorset. This route is the main east-west route into Dorset and the south west from Hampshire and feeds traffic into Bournemouth, Poole, Purbeck, West Dorset and Christchurch. There are links to the A354 and A338 to Salisbury.

2.51 The A35 running east-west through Christchurch has been identified as a traffic congestion hotspot. The A337, A338 and B3073 also have particular problems along with the A31(T) and routes in and around Ferndown, particularly at the Canford Bottom roundabout. Also, in both areas the River Stour is crossed only in a few places which restricts movement to the main conurbation, especially if a crossing is blocked.

2.52 Both areas have high levels of car ownership with 80.6% of households having access to a car in Christchurch, while East Dorset has the highest level of car ownership in the Country with 88% of households having at least one car. In Christchurch 5.6% of the workforce get to work by public transport whereas in East Dorset the proportion is only 2%, a reflection of the very high levels of car ownership in the district. (2001 Census)

Places

2.53 Key characteristics and issues for the different places throughout Christchurch and East Dorset are set out in relevant area chapters. These not only help to inform policies relating to those particular places, but also those that cover the whole area.