

Chapter 8 – Community Issues

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8 COMMUNITY ISSUES

LOCAL PLAN OBJECTIVE:

Support social progress through the viability of existing centres of commerce and the provision of community facilities.

8.1 Introduction

- 8.1.1 A wide variety of community facilities and services are provided in West Dorset by various businesses and other organisations, such as: shops; financial and professional services; schools; doctors' surgeries; village halls; places of worship; restaurants; public houses; sports facilities; and public recreational open space. The provision and location of such facilities can play an important role in encouraging a sense of community in an area, as well as minimising the need to travel by private car. Many of these uses are required on a daily or very frequent basis, so that it is important that they are available close to where people live. Others are required less often, and may be best located close to each other, enabling people to visit several different facilities in a single journey, and to use public transport.

Government guidance on planning for community facilities emphasises the need to maintain the vitality and viability of town centres¹, to strengthen existing local service centres that offer a range of everyday community, shopping and employment opportunities² and to take full account of the community's needs for recreation³.

The District Council's spatial strategy focuses development, including new community facilities, on the more self-contained settlements where people have the opportunity to live, work and socialise near to all the facilities that they need, or where such facilities are readily accessible via public transport. This should sustain existing facilities by increasing their catchment population. The Plan aims to ensure that necessary facilities are provided to serve existing and proposed development. The site specific allocations in Chapters 13, 14 and 15 include proposals for the provision of new community facilities where these are known to be required and are likely to be implemented within the plan period.

8.2 Community Facilities – including Shopping and Commerce

- 8.2.1 Town centres have a wide variety of functions. They serve as: market places; business centres; educational, health and fitness resources; meeting places; arts, culture and entertainment zones; tourist attractions; transport hubs; and residential areas⁴. They enable a wide range of needs to be met in one trip and serve as a focus for the community and for public transport.

1 PPS6 Planning for Town Centres, 2005 ODPM

2 Para. 6, PPG13: Transport, 2001, DETR

3 PPG17: Planning for Open Space, Sport and Recreation, 2002, Office of the Deputy Prime Minister.

4 Table 2.1, page 11, Vital and Viable Town Centres; Meeting The Challenge, 1994, DoE / URBED

- 8.2.2 Many traditional town centres have been threatened by increasing competition from larger conurbations and out-of-town shopping developments. Retail outlets, offices and other commercial businesses that have traditionally sought town centre locations are increasingly seeking premises in more suburban or even rural areas, often on trading estates. As the town centre declines, people become more dissatisfied with the limited range of shops and services, lack of investment in infrastructure and the visual appearance of vacant and run-down premises. Facilities are dispersed to other more distant sites, posing a considerable threat to the achievement of a sustainable pattern of development.
- 8.2.3 The concentration of a variety of shopping and other service uses open to the public within a town centre is a major component of maintaining its vitality and viability. The existence of buildings open later in the evening, such as pubs and restaurants, can also add to the centre's vitality by encouraging people into the centre after shops have closed. While changes to the town centres cannot be prevented, it is important to find uses that retain their vitality and viability. The use of premises above ground floor level can contribute towards the mix of uses in the centre as a whole and can be of benefit in retaining life in the centre throughout the day.
- 8.2.4 The Government provides detailed guidance on planning policies to support the role of town centres. This clearly states that local planning authorities should aim to maintain the vitality and viability of existing town centres and should resist development outside the centres which would adversely affect them. Local plans should assess the role of town centres within their area, the essential qualities of the town centre and the scope for change, renewal and diversification within those centres to ensure that it meets the needs of the community it serves⁵.

West Dorset's Towns

- 8.2.5 Government guidance recommends that all planning authorities should undertake regular "health checks" of towns⁶. A town centre health check assesses the state of the town's vitality and viability, considering whether the town has: a wide range of attractions and amenities; an attractive environment; good accessibility to and within the centre; and the ability to attract investment for its continuing development and/or refurbishment. Town centre health checks were undertaken for Dorchester and Bridport in 2000/2001 and for Sherborne and Lyme Regis in 2002/2003 and will be undertaken for Beaminster. These will be updated on a regular basis.

⁵ PPS6 Planning for Town Centres, 2005, ODPM

⁶ PPS6 Planning for Town Centres, 2005, ODPM

Table 8.1: Towns within West Dorset⁷

Dorchester

Dorchester is a county town with strong historical links and associations, serving a catchment for major food shopping of approximately 38,500. Shopping is the key attraction for regular visitors to the town centre and the centre includes a mix of shopping (including two large foodstores and many national chains), community and professional services, and entertainment facilities. The core shopping area is pedestrianised, minimising conflict between pedestrians and vehicles, whereas the outlying areas, where the community and professional services and entertainment facilities are clustered, are heavily trafficked. Daytime footfall is very much concentrated in the retail hub in South Street. The weekly market outside the primary shopping area is well attended, but does not appear to attract local residents into the town centre to shop.



The car is the predominant mode of transport used by locals visiting the town centre. However, public transport is provided in terms of bus (including a Wednesday park and ride service) and rail connections and a relatively high proportion of local residents walk into the centre. Parking congestion is perceived to be a problem during the peak summer months.

The food shops in the centre are competing with the out-of-town Tesco. It is important that the food shopping is retained and increased in the town centre, if the other uses are to continue to benefit from the trade this brings.

The entertainment provision – especially in terms of leisure and recreation – is poorly rated and considered to be in decline by local residents. There are also indications that the entertainment sector plans to invest in the town centre and improve the facilities provided, and this should be monitored.

Bridport

Bridport is a local service centre serving a catchment for major food shopping of approximately 19,200. Shopping is the key attraction for regular visitors to the town centre and is complemented by the twice-weekly local street market. The centre includes a mix of shopping (including one large foodstore and a number of national chains), community and professional services and entertainment facilities.



The core shopping area where footfall is concentrated is trafficked and there is conflict between pedestrians and vehicles, exacerbated by market stalls and on-street parking.

The car is the predominant mode of transport used by locals visiting the town centre and parking congestion is perceived to be a problem during the peak summer months and on market days. There is only limited public transport provision (bus) serving a large rural hinterland. A relatively high proportion of local residents walk into the centre.

The food shops in the centre are competing with the out-of-town Morrisons and (to a lesser extent) the out-of-town Co-op. The main competitor (Morrisons) has extended its premises. There is considerable leakage of non-food shopping (such as clothes shopping).

Sherborne

Sherborne is an historic and interesting town serving a catchment for major food shopping of approximately 14,100. The town centre contains over 100 retail outlets, including some nationals such as: Boots, New Look, Sainsburys, Somerfield and Woolworths. It competes with nearby Yeovil to the west, which has substantial shopping facilities.

⁷ Based on the Town Centre Health Checks and survey work undertaken by West Dorset District Council and Dorset County Council (as published in the Dorset Data Book, 2005, Dorset County Council)

Lyme Regis

Lyme Regis is a small coastal resort with much historic interest and charm. It has less than 100 retail outlets in the town centre, most local but including some nationals such as Woolworths, Boots and the Co-op. It serves a catchment population for major food shopping of approximately 6,100.

Beaminster

Beaminster, north of Bridport, is a small, charming, market town with less than 50 shops (all local) serving a catchment for major food shopping of approximately 3,000.

- 8.2.6 The District Council recognises that it is important to maintain the pattern, viability and attractiveness of the existing centres and to consolidate the position of the main towns of Dorchester, Bridport and Sherborne. A flexible approach, rather than the rigid insistence on certain uses, is most likely to retain life in the centres during times of economic change. The District Council will, therefore, enable the town centres to adapt to meet current demands, for example by encouraging specialist shopping uses, tourism (particularly that based on the heritage of the towns and surrounding countryside), employment, residential and leisure uses, whilst maintaining their character and local shopping roles. Site specific policies relating to development sites at the towns are identified within chapters 13 – 15 at Policies EA14, EA15, EA16, NA4, WA3, WA4 and WA6.

Town Centre Areas

- 8.2.7 The town centre area is defined as including the primary shopping area and areas of predominantly leisure, business and other main town centre uses within or adjacent to the primary shopping area⁸. These areas are within walking distance for those using the primary shopping areas. The primary shopping areas are the focus for retail development, with the wider town centre as the preferred location for other town centre uses. Smaller centres may not have areas of predominantly leisure, business and other main town centre uses adjacent to the primary shopping area, therefore in these settlements the town centre area and the primary shopping area are the same. Where the primary shopping area is identified separately from the wider town centre area, as is the case for Dorchester, retail development should be directed specifically to the primary shopping area.
- 8.2.8 In order to maintain the vitality and character of the town centre and provide facilities at a point that is accessible to those who travel on foot or by public transport, a variety of uses and services will be encouraged and safeguarded in this area. National planning guidance recognises that different but complementary uses, during the day and in the evening, can reinforce each other, making town centres more attractive to local residents, shoppers and visitors. It therefore advocates that, whilst recognising and supporting the shopping function of the town centre area, the local planning authority should encourage diversification of uses in the town centre as a whole. Local authorities are encouraged to identify those areas where mixed uses should be promoted⁹ and are advised to consider whether the character or appearance of these areas would be harmed by introducing different uses¹⁰.

⁸ Table 2 Annex A PPS 6 Planning for Town Centres, ODPM 2005

⁹ Page 9, PPG13: A Guide to Better Practice - reducing the need to travel through land use and transport planning, 1995, DoE & DoT

¹⁰ Para. 2.2.4, op. cit.

- 8.2.9 In assessing all proposals, impact on local visual or residential amenity by way of the design and operational activities will be considered. In some cases, premises for the sale of food and drink can cause significant environmental, highway or other problems (for example smells or late night noise). The need to install ventilation equipment and insulation systems to meet environmental health requirements can also cause problems in terms of the character and appearance of the building, particularly where the use is located in a Conservation Area and/or occupies a listed building. Proposals which are likely to generate such problems, which cannot be overcome by the imposition of appropriate conditions, will be resisted. All development proposals should be appropriate in type and scale to the particular town centre and the catchment population which is served. A high standard of design will be required in order to ensure that the centres retain and extend their vitality and viability.
- 8.2.10 Government advice¹¹ advocates adopting a "sequential approach" to the selection of sites for retail and other uses that attract large numbers of people¹². Town centres and primary shopping areas are the preferred location for retail and other uses that attract large numbers of people. The development of significant retail, commercial, entertainment and leisure facilities away from the town centres is not encouraged, as this type of development has the potential to compete with, rather than support, the existing centres, potentially undermining their function and sustainability and increasing dependency on the private car. Therefore, in assessing all significant commercial, entertainment and leisure facilities likely to attract people from beyond a strictly local catchment area, the District Council will apply the sequential approach as a test, taking the centres of Dorchester, Bridport and Sherborne as the first priority for development. Where town centre uses cannot be accommodated within these areas a need must first be demonstrated, and the sequential preference is for sites close enough to the centre to be readily accessible by foot from the centre, followed by local centres and only then out of centre sites - the last of the sequence of preferred sites. In those cases where it is not possible to find suitable sites either in or on the edge of town centres, the developments should be located where they will be easily accessible by a choice of means of transport.

POLICY C0 TOWN CENTRES

Development proposals for retail, leisure, offices and the arts should be directed to the town centres, as defined on the Proposals Map. In the case of Dorchester, retail development should be directed specifically to the primary shopping area within the town centre. All development proposals should be appropriate in type and scale to the particular town centre and the catchment population which is served. A high standard of design will be required in order to ensure that the centres retain and extend their vitality and viability.

Retail Development

- 8.2.11 The District Council aims to concentrate retail uses within primary shopping areas in order to maintain their viability and to provide shopping facilities at a focal point that is accessible to those who travel by public transport or on foot or cycle to shop. In smaller settlements this will be the same area as the town centre. However, in Dorchester retail development should be focused in the primary shopping area, which is identified separately to the wider town centre.

¹¹ Paras 2.44 – 2.47 PPS 6 Planning for Town Centres, ODPM 2005

¹² Such as: large commercial offices; higher education establishments; hospitals; cinema complexes or other large-scale entertainment uses – all schemes will normally be in excess of 1,000 m². The sequential approach should also be applied to extensions to existing facilities.

- 8.2.12 Food shopping facilities exist within the towns of Bridport, Dorchester, Sherborne, Lyme Regis and Beaminster. Further provision of shops is feasible through redevelopment and the reuse of existing premises. Smaller scale shops will be encouraged in all the town centres and also the neighbourhood centres and villages. All development will be expected to be appropriate in scale and type and required to conform to a high standard of design. Development which by virtue of its size or design would adversely affect the liveliness, attractiveness or character of the primary shopping area/town centre will not be permitted.
- 8.2.13 In assessing the acceptability of all retail development, the guidance clarifies the three key tests as:
- The likely impact of the development on the vitality and viability of existing town centres, including the evening economy, and on the rural economy;
 - Their accessibility by a choice of means of transport; and
 - Their likely effect on overall travel patterns and car use.
- 8.2.14 The compactness of retail uses within the primary shopping area is an important consideration and, although non-retail uses play an integral role in the functioning of the town centre, such uses can fragment the retail element of the primary shopping area and make it less attractive and convenient. The loss of an active retail use in itself, however, cannot be prevented through planning controls, and non-retail uses are generally preferable to retail units that remain vacant for long periods, provided the alternative use is open to, or provides services to, the public.
- 8.2.15 The conversion of underused upper floors to offices or residential uses is encouraged, as this often provides an appropriate location for such uses in a central and accessible location. Their use will add to the vitality and life of the town centres without fragmenting the core retail / service uses on the ground floors and help meet the requirements of people needing or wanting to live close to town centre facilities. Furthermore, the income from such uses can lead to improved maintenance of the fabric of the building, improving the appearance and character of the town centre.

POLICY CI RETAIL DEVELOPMENT

Development including change of use for retailing will be permitted within the primary shopping area of Dorchester and the town centres of the other towns as defined on the Proposals Map.

Within these areas, development proposals for financial and professional services or for food and drink (Classes A2-A5 in the Town and Country Planning (Use Classes) (Amendment) (England) Order 2005) will not be permitted if the proposal would either individually or cumulatively dominate the frontage so that it would undermine the vitality and viability of the shopping area.

Development which by virtue of its size or design would adversely affect the liveliness, attractiveness or character of the primary shopping area/town centre will not be permitted.

The use of upper floors for commercial uses or residential accommodation will be permitted.

8.2.16 Guidance on shop-fronts and advertisements is given in Policy DA9 in Chapter 11.

There is no policy C2.

Local Centres

8.2.17 Government guidance advises that local authorities should encourage a wide range of functions in local centres to meet people's day-to-day needs, so reducing the need to travel. Such provision should be consistent with the scale and function of the centre¹³.

8.2.18 Many of the District's local community facilities, including newsagents, small foodstores, pharmacies and post offices, are located in small local centres such as village centres or suburban shopping parades. While these centres do not fulfil the shopping and community role of the town centres, they provide valuable opportunities for meeting day-to-day needs of local communities in walking distance of people's homes, and are often the only readily accessible facilities to those without access to a car. The concentration of facilities in such locations can help ensure that they are accessible by a variety of means of transport and encourage linked trips.

8.2.19 Ancillary retail outlets, such as farm shops, can also help support the rural economy, and augment the availability of local shops, where they can be reasonably located to serve their intended catchment population.

POLICY C3 LOCAL CENTRES

Within local centres, development, including change of use, of Class A1 (shops), Class A2 (financial and professional services), Class A3 (restaurants and cafes), Class A4 (drinking establishments), Class A5 (hot food takeaways), Class B1 (business), leisure uses and other community facilities, will be permitted provided it would not undermine the functioning of the local centre through its size, design, operational activities or traffic generation nor lead to the loss of community facilities or employment uses in accordance with Policies ET1 and C6.

Such development will also be permitted on land adjoining local centres, provided that the proposal is well related (both visually and physically in terms of access) to the existing local centre and that there are no suitable alternative sites available within the local centre.

Development outside Town Centre Areas

8.2.20 It is accepted that some development, such as retail warehouses, cannot be accommodated within the town centres. This may be due to space limitation and/or potential detrimental impact on the historic character of the towns. However, the District Council will need to be satisfied that the sequential approach has been followed in finding an alternative location for the development. Where a scheme is proposed outside a town centre area, the developer must demonstrate that there is a need for the use and that all potential options within the town centre area have been thoroughly assessed. In addition, a sustainability appraisal will be required to demonstrate that the proposed site is the best option available in terms of accessibility (including modes other than the private motor car) and impact upon the landscape and other environmental considerations. Where a proposed development is above 1,000 square metres it shall be regarded as 'major' as recommended in paragraph 7.9 of the Structure Plan¹⁴.

¹³ Para 2.41, PPS6, Planning for Town Centres, 2005, ODPM

¹⁴ Para 7.9, pg 74, Bournemouth, Dorset & Poole Structure Plan (CSP28), 2001, Dorset County Council

- 8.2.21 In line with advice in PPS6, developers will be expected to demonstrate innovation and flexibility in planning considerations of scale, format, car parking provision and the scope for disaggregation. The possibility of enabling the development to fit onto more central sites by reducing the footprint of the proposal should be fully explored¹⁵. In determining applications for proposals relating to main town centre uses, including extensions to existing facilities that create additional floorspace, applicants will have to demonstrate compliance with need and sequential tests. Local centres will generally be unsuitable locations for large scale new development even when a flexible approach is adopted, therefore it would be inappropriate to include them within the search area to be applied in the sequential test for large scale new development¹⁶.
- 8.2.22 Planning conditions may be required to control the sub-division of units and range of goods sold, in order to maintain the vitality and viability of the town centres. Other policies of the Plan, such as the retention of employment sites, will also apply (Policy ET1).

POLICY C4 DEVELOPMENT OUTSIDE TOWN CENTRES

Proposals for significant retail development outside the primary shopping areas and proposals for other key town centre uses (i.e. leisure, offices, the arts) outside the town centres will not be permitted unless:

- they first demonstrate a need for the development;
- secondly, they comply with the sequential site search test. This means that all options in the relevant centre (i.e. primary shopping area for retail and town centre for all other town centre uses), including the re-use of land and buildings, must be thoroughly assessed before less central sites are considered. Where no suitable central sites are available, preference will be given for edge-of centre-sites, and only then to out-of-centre sites which are accessible by a choice of means of transport.

In all edge-of-centre or out-of-centre sites where the need and sequential tests have been satisfied, development should be at a scale and of a type appropriate to the role and function of the towns in West Dorset and their catchment areas. Development should not harm the vitality or viability of existing centres (either individually or cumulatively with other existing or permitted schemes).

Extensions to existing out-of-centre sites which offer the opportunity for linked trips as a means of reducing the need to travel should be examined for their suitability before new out-of-centre sites are proposed.

Provision of New Local Community Facilities

- 8.2.23 The provision of community facilities such as schools, village halls, places of worship, car parks and recreation areas is important for the social and recreational needs of local communities. The need for additional facilities is likely to arise throughout the Plan period and may not be readily accommodated within existing town, village or local centres.

¹⁵ Para 3.16, PPS6, Planning for Town Centres, 2005, ODPM

¹⁶ Para 2.42, PPS6, Planning for Town Centres, 2005, ODPM

- 8.2.24 The District Council will favourably consider the provision of community facilities in order to meet local needs, subject to the proposals meeting the requirements of other Local Plan policies. Proposals for a new hall or village shop within or adjoining identifiable villages will be looked upon favourably in order to maintain facilities available in rural areas. The reuse of rural buildings may be acceptable, subject to the proposal meeting the criteria of Policy SS4. It is important that proposed new facilities are located within easy reach of those wishing to use them.
- 8.2.25 The dual use of educational facilities by schools and the public can provide an efficient use of resources. The Council will continue to support the dual use of school facilities for both educational and community purposes throughout the District and will support appropriate development proposals which lead to improved facilities on a dual use basis.
- 8.2.26 Chapters 13, and 15 contain details regarding proposals for specific sites for community uses which are expected to be implemented in the plan period. Policies relate to new school sites at Puddletown and Crossways and an extension to the cemetery at Thorncombe.

POLICY C5 NEW LOCAL COMMUNITY FACILITIES

New local community facilities including shops, farm shops, garages, public houses, community buildings, places of worship and recreation areas/facilities will be permitted within existing villages, or adjoining them where they involve the reuse of rural buildings or, in the case of village halls or similar development, it is within reasonable and safe walking distance of its main catchment population, provided:

- i) the proposal would either serve a largely local catchment or, by reason of its scale or character, would not give rise to additional traffic on local roads to the detriment of rural amenities or generate significant single purpose trips by private car; and
- ii) the proposal would not undermine the commercial viability of shops or facilities in nearby local centres or an existing village shop which is better placed to service the needs of its surrounding community.

Regard will be had to the desirability of concentrating new community facilities in villages with Defined Development Boundaries, especially when new housing development is permitted, and Policies IN4 and IN5 are applied.

Retention of Local Community Facilities

- 8.2.27 The loss of local community facilities, such as shops, public houses and community buildings, is often harmful to the aims of sustainability and facilitating social interaction. Some facilities, especially those in smaller settlements, often incorporate other complementary functions (for example, public houses may also provide food and accommodation, a retail facility a meeting place for local groups and a good place for local advertising of public meetings or events). In determining planning applications that would result in the loss of local community facilities, the Council will take account of what other services and facilities are available locally and the likely effect of the change of use on the community / social vitality and character of the village or suburban area and, in the case of rural settlements, on the rural economy. It is recognised that such facilities are usually lost because it is no longer viable to provide them. However under some circumstances, particularly in the case of shops and public houses, an alternative management regime and/or the diversification of the business can result in the long-term viability of the facility being secured. The District Council will, therefore, seek to ensure that real efforts have been made to retain the facility and, if no need for the facility or its non-viability is demonstrated¹⁷, that other opportunities for conversion to alternative community uses have been fully considered.

POLICY C6 RETENTION OF LOCAL COMMUNITY FACILITIES

Planning permission will not be granted for proposals, including changes of use, resulting in the loss of local community facilities (such as shops, garages, public houses and community buildings) where it would result in an unacceptable decline in the standard of services for local people and visitors unless:

- i) it can be demonstrated that there is no local need for the facility or the retention of the facility is not economically viable; and
- ii) there is no reasonable likelihood of an appropriate alternative community facility being economically viable.

8.3 Recreation and Open Space

- 8.3.1 In recent years there has been a trend towards increased leisure time, greater mobility, increasing popularity of active pursuits and greater disposable income, which has led to a rising demand for recreational facilities.
- 8.3.2 Recreation contributes to people's quality of life. There are many different types, ranging from walking and enjoyment of informal open spaces to organised activities which require specialist facilities. It includes children's play, use of allotments and a wide range of sports.

¹⁷ The assessment of viability is likely to require the submission of evidence relating to trading accounts, valuation considerations and the marketing of the business or property, which is expected to have been advertised for sale at a reasonable price for a minimum of 12 months, during which time no reasonable offer has been refused.

Retention of Recreational Open Space and Recreational Buildings

- 8.3.3 Sport, both formal and informal, has an important role in creating balanced and sustainable communities and impacts upon social inclusion, health, education, crime reduction and encouraging community cohesion. Therefore, existing recreational open space and buildings are an important resource for the local community. Playing fields, whether school playing fields or those owned by other public, private or voluntary organisations, are of special significance for their recreational and amenity value and their contribution to the green spaces in the urban environment. Land used for recreation should not be developed unless the Planning Authority's assessments undertaken in line with Planning Policy Guidance 17 show them to be clearly surplus to requirements¹⁸. The recreational, ecological and visual importance of urban green spaces is emphasised in "Green Spaces, Better Places", published by the DTLR¹⁹.
- 8.3.4 The District Council in conjunction with consultants²⁰, has undertaken detailed work on the requirements for additional sports pitches and facilities throughout the district as part of the Council's sports strategy²¹. This provides baseline data regarding existing formal playing facilities and the need for additional facilities. It is of assistance in the implementation of policies C7a and C7b. A further assessment in line with the companion guide to PPG17²² is being undertaken to inform the preparation of the local development framework.
- 8.3.5 The Government has stated that the need for higher densities within urban areas should not compromise the important aim of protecting and creating areas of open and green space²³. Both formal recreational and informal amenity open space is not to be regarded as previously-developed land where housing development can take place²⁴. Planning Authorities should seek to ensure that networks of informal open space remain coherent.
- 8.3.6 The Structure Plan seeks to protect parks and other open spaces in the built up areas from development and also seeks to protect playing fields²⁵. Sport England is a statutory consultee on any application which falls into at least one of the following four categories, namely where an application:
- is likely to prejudice the use, or lead to the loss of the use, of land being used as a playing field;
 - is on land which has been used as a playing field within the previous 5 years;
 - is on land allocated for use as a playing field in a development plan (adopted or emerging); or
 - involves the replacement of the grass surface of a playing field with an artificial, man-made or composite surface²⁶.
- 8.3.7 The District Council seeks the retention of recreational open space and buildings which benefit the community. All recreational open space, including playing fields, playgrounds, children's play areas, public amenity open space and allotment gardens and also recreational buildings, will be protected from development.

18 Para 15, PPG17: Planning for Open Space, Sport and Recreation, ODPM2002.

19 "Green Spaces, Better Places: Final report of the Urban Green Spaces Taskforce, May 2002, DTLR.

20 Leisure Futures Ltd

21 "The Sporting Challenge" – a Strategy for Sport in West Dorset 2000 – 2010, adopted January 2000.

22 "Assessing Needs and Opportunities: the companion guide to Planning Policy Guidance note 17, ODPM, 2002.

23 Para. 2.1.10, Planning for Sustainable Development: Towards Better Practice, 1998, DETR

24 PPG3: Housing and PPG 17: Planning for Open Space, Sport, and Recreation

25 Community Facilities Policy E and Environment Policy I, Bournemouth, Dorset and Poole Structure Plan, (CSP 28), 2001.

26 The Town and Country Planning (General Development Procedure) (Amendment) Order, 1996

- 8.3.8 The Council does not rule out the development of ancillary buildings on existing recreational open space, such as changing rooms at the side of sports pitches, as such facilities may often improve the functioning of the open space. There may be circumstances where redevelopment of a recreational site is acceptable if adequate alternative provision can be made in a suitable location, either in or adjacent to the same settlement or neighbourhood. It is essential that accessibility to facilities is not reduced by the replacement. If it can be demonstrated that the recreational land and/or buildings are no longer needed for their existing use, consideration should be given to their use in meeting other needs for recreation in the wider community²⁷.
- 8.3.9 In line with national guidance, the Council will also give careful consideration to planning applications either within or adjoining open space to ensure that development does not have a detrimental impact upon recreational quality. It will be necessary to weigh any benefits that the development might offer to the local community against any loss of open space that may occur. More generally, local authorities are required to maintain or enhance the character of open spaces; ensure that the quality of open spaces is not undermined by increased overlooking, traffic flows or other encroachment; protect and enhance those parts of the rights of way network that might benefit open space; and consider the impact of any development on biodiversity and nature conservation²⁸.

POLICY C7a RETENTION OF PLAYING FIELDS

Planning permission for development on, or change of use of, playing fields will not be permitted unless:

- i) the development is ancillary to the use of the site as a playing field and does not affect adversely the number, size or quality of the playing pitches or their use; and/or
- ii) the development only affects land that is not capable of forming a playing pitch (or part of one); and/or
- iii) the playing field(s) that would be lost as a result of the development would be replaced by a playing field or fields of equivalent or better quantity or quality, in a suitable and equally accessible location; and/or
- iv) the development is for an outdoor or indoor sports facility in the same or an equally accessible position, and is of sufficient benefit to the local community, in terms of increased participation in sport, to outweigh the loss of the playing field.

POLICY C7b RETENTION OF OPEN SPACE AND RECREATION FACILITIES

Planning applications for development on, or change of use of, public open space, informal recreation areas, recreational buildings and allotment gardens will not be permitted unless:

- i) the development is ancillary to the use of the site and will support and / or enhance the existing open space or recreational use of the facility and / or its quality; or
- ii) alternative provision of at least equivalent community benefit is made available in a suitable and equally accessible location; or
- iii) there is an excess of such facilities in the area. If the application is not for an alternative recreational use, it must be shown that there is no need for alternative open space or recreational uses which could take place at the site.

²⁷ Para 10, PPG17: Planning for Open Space, Sport and Recreation, ODPM, 2002.

²⁸ Para 16, PPG17: Planning for Open Space, Sport and Recreation, ODPM, 2002.

Proposed New Sites for Recreational uses

- 8.3.10 Government guidance considers that it is essential for local authorities to assess the local need for recreational facilities²⁹. The District Council, in conjunction with consultants³⁰, has undertaken detailed work on requirements for additional sports pitches and facilities throughout the District as part of the Council's Sports Strategy³¹. Overall, the study concluded that there was need for improvements in the quantity, quality and accessibility of sports facilities throughout the District. The Strategy shows Sports Action Zones at the larger areas of population where the need for additional pitches, multi-use games areas and other facilities are identified. The need for additional water space (swimming) was identified at Dorchester and Sherborne. The Strategy states that the Parish and Town Councils should be encouraged to produce local sports strategies to prioritise the provision for new facilities and to establish a plan to enable these to be provided.
- 8.3.11 In addition to the use of land for formal recreation, the informal use of areas of public open space within and adjoining settlements is considered valuable to residents and visitors.
- 8.3.12 The proposals for new sites for recreation or public amenity open space shown in Table 8.3 below are those that are expected to be implemented within the Local Plan period. The sites are shown on the Proposals Map and the proposals appear as site-specific policies in chapters 13 and 15. They include sites to meet needs identified in the Sports Strategy as well as proposed informal open space areas (which were not covered by the Sports Strategy).
- 8.3.13 The Local Plan has not allocated other specific sites following adoption of the Strategy as it is intended that these will come forward as the local sports strategies develop. The Local Plan policies, in particular Policy C5 (New Local Community Facilities), provide a framework for the consideration of such proposals. Some proposals have already come forward and have been implemented.
- 8.3.14 Multi-use games areas (MUGAs) are particularly valuable in providing a local facility which can serve a range of sports as well as general training. Floodlighting is considered necessary if the full benefit of the area is to be achieved. Careful consideration must be given to the siting of these areas in order that the amenity of adjoining areas is not adversely affected. (Cross refer to Policy DA8 Lighting Schemes).
- 8.3.15 Section 10.5 in Chapter 10 Infrastructure, relates to the provision of recreational space in new housing developments, and planning obligations for the provision of community infrastructure. Some of the new recreational facilities identified in Table 8.3 will be financed, in whole or part, from developer contributions as part of the planning process. The District Council will seek contributions towards the provision of some of the facilities identified in Table 8.3 as part of the planning process.
- 8.3.16 An audit and assessment of open spaces, sports and recreational facilities in the District is being undertaken in line with PPG 17 and its companion guide³². The findings of the study will update those of the Sports Strategy and will feed into the Local Development Framework.

29 Para 1, PPG17: Planning for Open Space, Sport and Recreation, ODPM, 2002.

30 Lei sure Futures Ltd.

31 "The Sporting Challenge" – a Strategy for Sport in West Dorset 2000 – 2010, adopted January 2000.

32 Planning Policy Guidance 17: Planning for Open Space, Sports and Recreational Facilities, 2002, ODPM and Companion Guide: Assessing Needs and Opportunities.

Table 8.3: Proposed New Sites for Recreational Uses

Proposed new site		Policy
Bridport:	land is allocated for amenity open space adjoining St Mary's Church.	WA8
Charlton Down:	land is allocated for public amenity open space (informal and formal).	EA3
Chickerell:	land at North Square is allocated as amenity open space.	EA8
Dorchester:	land to the north, west and south of development at Poundbury and south of the Castle Estate is allocated as public amenity open space.	EA21
Puddletown:	land at the west is allocated for an extension to the sports pitch.	EA32
West Knighton:	land to the west of the village is allocated for recreational use.	EA34

Countryside Recreation Proposals

- 8.3.17 Visiting the countryside is one of the most popular forms of recreation. The countryside is of value for the wide range of opportunities it provides for informal recreation such as walking and cycling, and also for activities which require special facilities.
- 8.3.18 The District has a wealth of opportunities for informal recreation. There is an extensive network of public footpaths and bridleways throughout the countryside and along the coast with many nature trails and picnic sites. The District Council is working in partnership with the County Council to implement the National Cycle Network within the District, increasing opportunities for leisure cycling.
- 8.3.19 There is a demand for a range of recreational facilities in the countryside which requires associated buildings or structures, for example proposals for golf courses, shooting ranges, and equestrian activity. Government guidance³³ states that in rural areas sport and recreation facilities which are likely to attract significant numbers of people should be located in, or on the edge of, country towns. Smaller scale facilities are acceptable in or adjacent to villages to meet local needs. Development in the open countryside will require special justification and can receive favourable consideration if part of a farm diversification project.
- 8.3.20 The Structure Plan allows for the provision of countryside recreational facilities subject to criteria³⁴. The District Council seeks to limit the numbers of buildings in the countryside in order to protect its character. However, the demand for such facilities is recognised.
- 8.3.21 The development and change of use of land and buildings for recreation will only be permitted in locations where they would not have a detrimental impact on the character of the countryside. Cross reference is made to Policy DA8, Lighting Schemes. Development should not result in an "urban fringe" appearance where the openness of the countryside is eroded by the proliferation of buildings and other structures related to non-agricultural uses. Any structures should be of a simple design, constructed and sited to minimise their impact on the landscape. Cross reference is made to Policy DA7, Detailed Design and Materials, in Chapter 11. Consideration will also be given to the potential impact of recreational development upon biodiversity and the need to avoid the deterioration of existing wildlife habitat (Policies SA11 and SA12 refer).

³³ PPG 17, Planning for Open Space, Sport and Recreation, ODPM, July 2002.

³⁴ Community Facilities Policy C, Bournemouth, Dorset and Poole Structure Plan (CSP28), 2001.

POLICY C8 COUNTRYSIDE RECREATION PROPOSALS

Proposals for the provision of recreational facilities in the countryside will be permitted provided that:

- i) their scale is in keeping with the surrounding environment and they would not be visually intrusive in the landscape;
- ii) the amenities of local residents and visitors are safeguarded;
- iii) the potential increase in daily vehicle movements and impact on the local highway network would be acceptable to the Highway Authority;
- iv) they can be accessed by as wide a range of means of transport as reasonably possible; and
- v) in the case of significant built development or engineering works a satisfactory independent assessment is received regarding the long term viability of the enterprise.

8.3.22 The section in Chapter 5 regarding the re-use and adaptation of rural buildings includes provision for the reuse of rural buildings for recreation. There may be opportunities for the conversion of suitable buildings to a recreational use; and such opportunities should be considered as a preference to new-build. The District Council will allow the conversion of suitable rural buildings to recreational uses where the proposals meet the criteria of C5 (New Local Community Facilities), Policy C8 (Countryside recreation proposals) and SS4 (Adaptation and change of use of rural buildings).

Equestrian Development

8.3.23 Horse riding is a popular leisure activity, which generally requires a countryside location. Farm diversification and changes in the rural economy have also resulted in an increasing trend toward equestrian businesses being established in rural areas. Equestrian development can range from domestic stables to livery yards, riding schools, stud farms and racing stables and includes all weather training areas and gallops.

8.3.24 Government advice³⁵ encourages Local Planning Authorities to support proposals for equestrian development in the countryside. However, it is important that development for commercial or recreational equestrian purposes is not permitted where it would harm the visual quality of the countryside, the rural character of the area or the amenities of nearby residential properties. Consideration will also need to be given to other Local Plan policies and attention is drawn particularly to Policies SA1 (Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty), SA3 (Landscape Character Areas), and DA7 (Detailed Design and Materials).

8.3.25 Applications for equestrian developments that involve the fragmentation of agricultural land will be looked at particularly carefully. Where larger fields are divided into smaller paddocks and sold off separately, the general degradation of the landscape can result from poor grassland management, overgrazing and weed infestations. Where a change of use is considered acceptable, the District Council will resist the proliferation of stable buildings or field shelters on small individual holdings. The various owners will be encouraged to submit a joint scheme for consideration. Preference will be given where possible to the re-use or adaptation of existing rural buildings for equestrian purposes.

35 Para 32, PPS7: Sustainable Development in Rural Areas, ODPM, 2004

- 8.3.26 To avoid additional pressure for new buildings in the countryside, the District Council will seek to retain existing purpose built equestrian development located outside the Defined Development Boundaries, for equestrian use. Proposals to re-use or adapt such buildings for other non-equestrian uses will be resisted unless the continued use of the buildings for equestrian purposes is inappropriate. The reuse of original buildings, capital, energy, materials and service provision represents a sustainable approach and helps protect the countryside from new development, however it is accepted that there will be instances where reuse would be problematic. In such cases the applicant will be required to demonstrate that the site could not reasonably be reused for equestrian purposes, before other uses are proposed.
- 8.3.27 In assessing proposals for large equestrian establishments, particularly where new buildings are proposed, it would be appropriate to consider the long term financial viability of the enterprise, together with the possible need for new on site accommodation. The Council would need to be satisfied that the development could be supervised adequately without the need for a new dwelling in the countryside. The proximity and accessibility of existing bridleways are also considerations in the suitability of a site.

POLICY C9 EQUESTRIAN DEVELOPMENT

New equestrian development, including extensions to existing premises, will be permitted provided that:

- i) it is designed to blend sympathetically into the countryside and it is sited in such a way so as to have minimal adverse impact on the landscape. It should relate well to existing buildings, making use of existing buildings where possible, and not result in sporadic development leading to a proliferation of buildings in the countryside;
- ii) it would not harm the amenities of neighbouring residents or other occupiers of adjoining properties;
- iii) the scale of development is considered appropriate to the site, the proposed use and the number of horses to be kept;
- iv) adequate supervision can be provided without the need for new or additional on-site residential accommodation;
- v) a satisfactory means of access and parking is provided and the existing highway network is adequate to serve the use; and
- vi) in the case of substantial built development proposals a satisfactory independent assessment is submitted regarding the long term economic viability of the enterprise.

Proposals to re-use or adapt equestrian buildings for other non equestrian uses will only be allowed where it can be demonstrated that the continued use of the buildings for equestrian use is inappropriate and/or unviable.