



**Topic Paper**

**Environment**

**Version 1**  
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## 1.0 Purpose

- 1.1. This is one of five topic papers that provide a general overview of North Dorset and this one focuses on the environment, including the wider issue of climate change, summarising the evidence base which informs the policies in the Core Strategy and Development Management Policies DPD. The paper is very much a working document which will be updated as new evidence is produced and the consultation process proceeds.
- 1.2. This paper summarises the following as they apply to the environment:
  - The international, national, regional and county policy context;
  - Issues arising from stakeholder and community consultations;
  - Issues arising from evidence and research studies; and
  - Conclusions and implications for future policy.

## 2.0 Introduction

- 2.1. PPS12 introduces the concept of a Local Development Framework (LDF) and how it should be prepared<sup>1</sup>. The Core Strategy is the key document within the LDF. It must incorporate a “portrait” of the District as it is today, and a “vision” for how it will progress over the plan period. Where applicable, various options for delivering the vision should be set out and assessed in order to agree on the most sustainable option.
- 2.2. PPS12 requires that the contents of a Core Strategy are founded on a thorough understanding of the needs of its area and the opportunities and constraints which operate within that area. Thus, in order to inform policy, the Council has gathered together an evidence base about the area’s environmental assets and has commissioned studies by consultants where a better understanding of specific issues is required. These studies and other evidence are considered in more detail in Section 5.
- 2.3. The underlying geology and its associated soils and landforms are fundamental to understanding the environment of North Dorset and its potential for development in the future. There is a distinct “north-south” divide which generally runs from north-east to south-west across the central part of the District. The vast majority of North Dorset falls within two main ‘natural areas’ as defined by Natural England<sup>2</sup> (see Figure 2.1 below). The southern part of the District (including Blandford) falls within the Dorset Downs & Cranborne Chase Natural Area, whereas the northern part of the District (including Gillingham, Shaftesbury and Sturminster Newton) falls with the Blackmore Vale & the Vale of Wardour Natural Area. The Yeovil Scarplands Natural Area just clips the western edge of the District and includes Stalbridge.
- 2.4. The chalk outcrops of the Dorset Downs & Cranborne Chase Natural Area support chalk landscape types and a range of associated chalk landscape character areas<sup>3</sup>. Many of these landscapes are included within either: the Cranborne Chase and West Wiltshire Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) (to the north and east of Blandford); or the Dorset AONB (to the west of the town). The southern part of the District also supports habitats characteristic of chalk outcrops, such as lowland calcareous grassland (for example Fontmell and Melbury Downs Special Area of Conservation (SAC) to the south of Shaftesbury) and chalk streams (such as the North Winterborne south and west of Blandford).

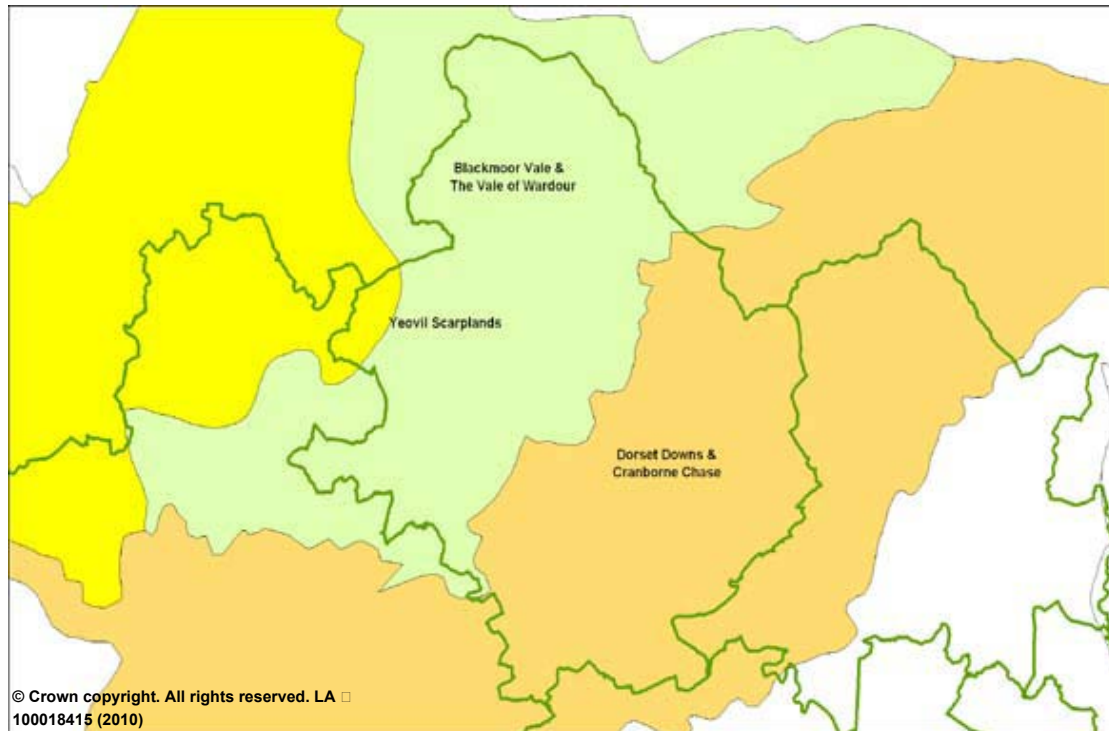
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<sup>1</sup> See also summary of PPS12 in section 3

<sup>2</sup> Natural Areas are defined as ‘biogeographic zones which reflect the geological foundation, the natural systems and processes and the wildlife in different parts of England’ (Biodiversity: The UK Steering Group Report, HMSO, 1995)

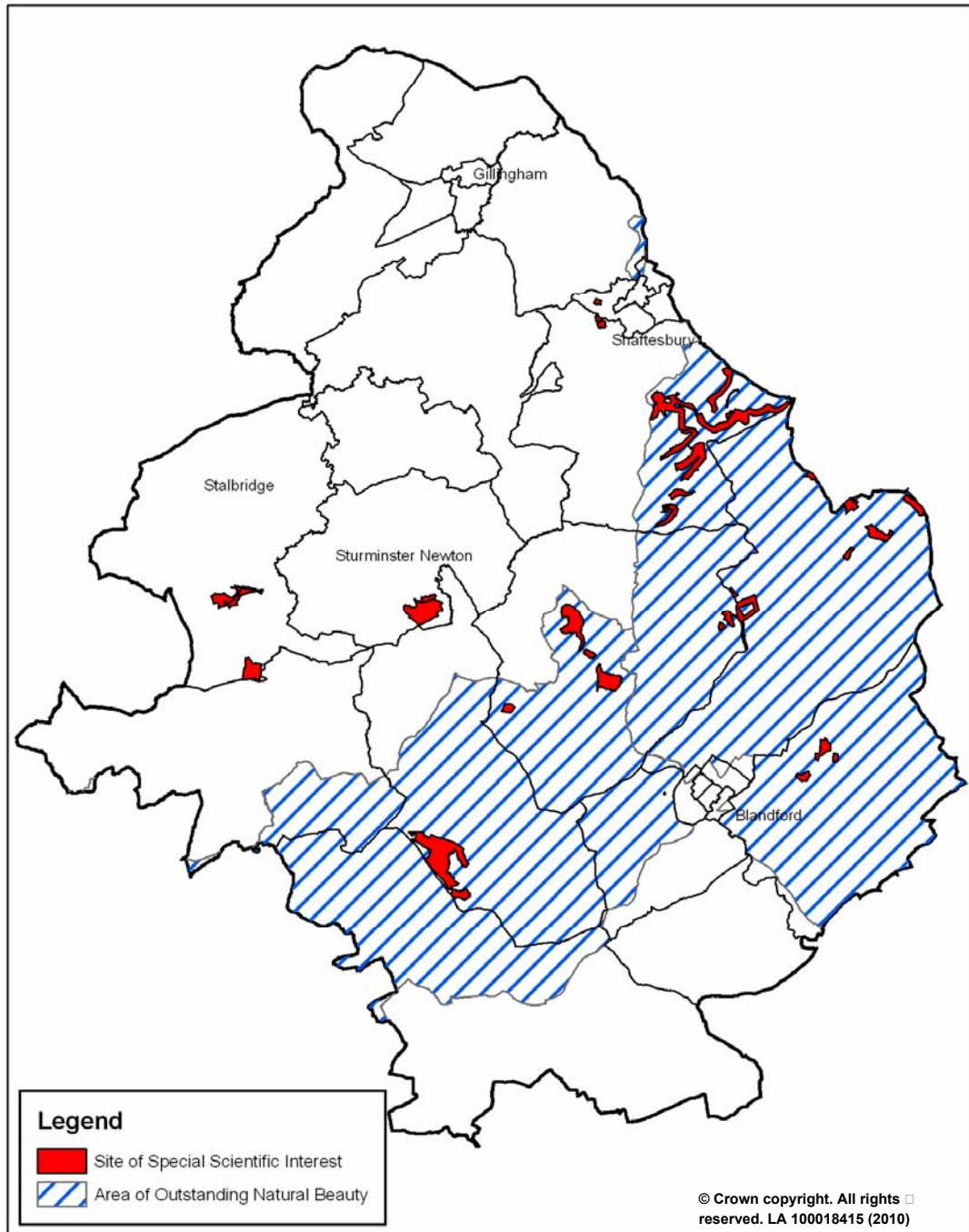
<sup>3</sup> See Section 5 of the North Dorset Landscape Character Area Assessment (March 2008)

**Figure 1 – North Dorset - Natural Areas**



- 2.5. The Blackmore Vale & the Vale of Wardour Natural Area has a more varied geology and in North Dorset limestone and greensand ridges sit alongside rolling farmland and clay vale landscapes. Some remnants of ancient woodland remain (such as Piddles Wood Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) south of Sturminster Newton), as do important wetland habitats (such as Rookmoor SAC south of Stalbridge).
- 2.6. Figure 2 below shows the location of AONBs and SSSIs in the District.

**Figure 2 – AONBs and SSSIs in North Dorset**





### 3.0 International, National and Regional Policy and Local Policy Context

#### International Policy

- 3.1. International agreements and EU Directives drive much of our national agenda on sustainable development, climate change and other environmental issues, for example
- the Rio “Earth summit” in 1992 was an important first step in persuading governments around the world to commit to sustainable development and led to the UK’s 1999 strategy, “A Better Quality of Life”<sup>4</sup>,
  - in 1997 the Kyoto protocol resulted in governments signing up to binding agreements to reduce carbon emissions, and following a number of different targets, led to the UK government’s Climate Change Act 2008, which requires a reduction of 80% on 1990 carbon emission levels by 2050, and
  - Agreements and Directives to protect wildlife, in particular 79/409/EEC: The Birds Directive; 92/43/EEC: The Habitats Directive; and The Convention on Wetlands of International Importance especially as Waterfowl Habitat (Ramsar Convention 1971).

#### National Policy

- 3.2. Planning Policy Statements (PPSs) set out government’s national policies and principles on different aspects of planning and take forward requirements in legislation. Policies in the LDF must be aligned with national policies but should not repeat or reformulate them. Brief summaries are included here to provide a more detailed context for environment policies in the Core Strategy.

##### PPS 12 - Local Spatial Planning (2008)

- 3.3. This states that “*the planning system has been substantially reformed to embed community responsive policy-making at its heart and to make contributing to the achievement of sustainable development a statutory objective*”<sup>5</sup>. The planning system exists to deliver positive social, economic and *environmental* outcomes. Amongst other aims it should:
- Create a positive framework for action on climate change; and
  - Contribute to the achievement of Sustainable Development<sup>6</sup>.

##### PPS 1 - Delivering Sustainable Development (Feb 2005)

- 3.4. This sets out the key principles for achieving sustainable development. The original four aims have been updated in the more recent “Securing

<sup>4</sup> A Better Quality of Life, A strategy for sustainable development 1999 - now replaced by 2005 strategy

<sup>5</sup> Paragraph 1.5, page 3, PPS 12: Local Spatial Planning – DCLG (June 2008)

<sup>6</sup> Paragraph 2.1 PPS1

the Future - the UK Sustainability Strategy 2005” which takes a more integrated approach. Here the five guiding principles are

- Living within environmental limits
- Ensuring a strong, healthy and just society
- Achieving a sustainable economy
- Promoting good governance
- Using sound science responsibly.

3.5. Living within environmental limits means “respecting the limits of the planet’s environment, resources and biodiversity - to improve our environment and ensure that the natural resources needed for life are unimpaired and remain so for future generations”<sup>7</sup>. PPS1 requires that planning policies seek to protect and enhance the quality of the natural and historic environment, in both rural and urban areas<sup>8</sup>, and that this should be based on up to date information and recognise the limits of the environment to accept further development.

Energy White Paper: Our Energy Future - Creating a Low Carbon Economy (2003)

3.6. The White Paper sets a target for the reduction of CO<sub>2</sub> emissions of 60% by 2050 against 1990 levels. This target is the basis for climate change and renewable energy policies set out in national policy and the Regional Spatial Strategy. The 2009 Energy White paper set a higher target of 80% reduction by 2050.

PPS 1 - Planning and Climate Change Supplement (December 2007)

3.7. This draws to together the ways in which planning policy can help to achieve the government’s climate change programme and energy policies. This must be done through positive policies on renewable and low carbon energy generation, careful selection of development sites taking sustainable transport opportunities into account and encouraging sustainable construction. Local requirements for higher levels of building sustainability must be justified from a robust local evidence base.

3.8. National climate change policies are constantly evolving and date targets and standards have been subject to change in the recent past and may do so in the future. At present there are no penalties for not meeting targets but this could change over the lifetime of the Plan. In addition, there are likely to be new incentives: e.g. the proposed new “feed in tariff”<sup>9</sup> (also called “clean energy cashback scheme”), which will shorten the payback time for installing renewable energy technologies.

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<sup>7</sup> Page 16, Securing the Future, the UK Sustainability Strategy (2005)

<sup>8</sup> Paragraph 17, PPS1

<sup>9</sup> The UK Renewable Energy Strategy was launched in July 2009 and includes a number of financial incentives including “feed in tariffs” (green energy cashback) for small scale electricity generation from April 2010. A fixed rate will be paid for energy generated and a guaranteed minimum for exported to the market

### The Code for Sustainable Homes (December 2006)

- 3.9. This provides a standard by which the sustainability of new homes can be measured. It was calculated that in 2004, more than a quarter of the UK's carbon emissions came from energy used in our homes. In addition, the construction and use of our homes has a range of other environmental impacts such as water use and waste generation. The Code therefore sets a standard for key elements of design and construction which will form the basis of future Building Regulations, for example, Part L of the regulations will be gradually tightened to achieve zero carbon development by 2016 for residential development.
- 3.10. The document explains the Code and the criteria used by assessors to measure performance. Currently, it is mandatory to have a new dwelling assessed against the Code but not mandatory to achieve a particular Code level (except for social housing which is required to achieve Level 3). Technical guidance and updates are published periodically, the most recent being May 2009. Developers will be required to achieve the improvements in energy / carbon performance and water efficiency set in Building Regulations in line with the national timetable. In addition, the Council will encourage developers to achieve the highest Code level possible in new developments.

### PPS 7 - Sustainable Development in Rural Areas (2004)

- 3.11. This draws together principles from other PPSs as they apply specifically to rural areas. Policies for Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty and local landscape designations are of particular relevance to drafting environmental policy in North Dorset<sup>10</sup>.

### PPS 9 - Biodiversity and Geological Conservation (2005)

- 3.12. This requires that an integrated approach is taken to planning for biodiversity and geodiversity, and that the LDF makes clear the hierarchy of international, national, regional and locally designated sites and identifies sites for restoration or creation of new priority habitats. Policies for each type of designation are set out with reference, where applicable, to other EU and national regulations and directives.

### PPS 10 - Planning for Sustainable Waste Management (July 2005)

- 3.13. This explains how planning is pivotal to providing the necessary facilities to help break the link between economic growth and the environmental impact of waste.

### PPG 14 - Development on Unstable Land (April 1990)

Including: Annex 1: Landslides and Planning (March 1996) and Annex 2: Subsidence and Planning (February 2002)

- 3.14. This sets out broad planning issues relating to development on unstable land.

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<sup>10</sup> Paragraphs 21- 25, PPS7

### PPG 15 - Planning and Historic Environment (September 1994)

- 3.15. This lays out government policies for the identification and protection of historic buildings, conservation areas and other elements of the historic environment, and includes matters of economic prosperity, visual impact, traffic and the effect on the character of conservation areas. The DCLG Circular 07/2009 (July 2009) replaces and expands on the guidance in paragraphs 2.22-2.23 and 6.35- 6.37 relating to World Heritage sites.

### PPG16 - Archaeology and Planning (November 1990)

- 3.16. This sets out government policy on how archaeological remains should be preserved or recorded. They are irreplaceable and as such, should be considered as a finite environmental resource that need appropriate management to ensure that they remain in good condition.
- 3.17. The Government intends to introduce a unified and simpler heritage protection system, which would merge certain statutory designations and their associated consent regimes. The legislation required to bring about this change is likely to come into force during the lifetime of the Core Strategy. Prior to new legislation a new PPS15 *Planning for the Historic Environment* which merges elements of PPGs15 and 16 was published for consultation in July 2009.

### PPS 22 - Renewable Energy (2004)

- 3.18. This sets out the way in which planning policy should help achieve a reduction in carbon emissions through encouraging the development of renewable energy generation. Government targets of 10% reduction by 2010 and 20% by 2020 drive this PPS which require positive rather than restrictive policy on renewable energy. For the first time, the wider environmental and economic benefits of all proposals for renewable energy projects, whatever their scale, are stated to be material considerations which should be given significant weight in determining applications.<sup>11</sup> The PPS22 Companion Guide provides information and criteria for a variety of renewable technologies.

### The UK Renewable Energy Strategy (July 2009)

- 3.19. This sets out the government's plans for ensuring that it meets its legally binding target to generate 15%<sup>12</sup> of its energy from renewable sources by 2020. It includes new financial incentives. Additionally, it was also announced in July that elements of PPS 1 and PPS 22 will be brought together into a single PPS on climate change by the end of 2009, with a view to better integration in the delivery of renewable energy infrastructure and reducing carbon emissions.

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<sup>11</sup> Paragraph 1 (iv) PPS22

<sup>12</sup> NB - This includes energy used in transport so is not directly comparable to targets for carbon reduction quoted elsewhere in this document

### PPS 23 - Planning and Pollution Control (2004)

- 3.20. The government is committed to taking the precautionary principle when dealing with pollution as included in the 1992 Rio Declaration<sup>13</sup>. Pollution is strictly controlled by national and international obligations which are listed in this PPS together with a number of matters to be taken into consideration when dealing with planning matters.

### PPS 25 - Development and Flood Risk (December 2006)

- 3.21. This requires that planning authorities identify land at risk from all types of flooding, frame policies which avoid risk to people and buildings from flooding, and reduce risk from new development through location, layout and design.

## **Regional Policy**

### The Regional Spatial Strategy (RSS)

- 3.22. The RSS provides a broad strategy for the South West and reflects national policy as set out in the above PPSs. The Core Strategy is required to be in general conformity with the RSS. The Secretary of State's Proposed Changes were published for consultation in July 2008, and the next stage is for the Government to produce the final version.
- 3.23. The first 4 policies of the RSS are over arching and reflect the national sustainable development strategy as set out in the national context above. The policies are:
- **SD1 - The Ecological Footprint**, which requires that the region's ecological footprint be stabilised and then reduced;
  - **SD2 - Climate Change**, which requires that the region's contribution to climate change be reduced by reducing carbon emissions at least in line with government targets and adapting to anticipated climate change through a range of other policies;
  - **SD3 - The Environment and Natural Resources**, which requires that the regions environment and resources are protected and enhanced; and
  - **SD4 - Sustainable Communities**, which sets out criteria for managing growth and development in a sustainable manner.
- 3.24. Other policies<sup>14</sup> which relate to the environment expand on the above and also refer back to national policy as set out in the planning policy statements. They do not restate government policy but seek to ensure that local authorities take forward the national agenda at the local level.

<sup>13</sup> Rio Declaration on Environment and Development, made at UNCED 1992

<sup>14</sup> Development Policy G. Sustainable Construction; Development Policy H Reusing Land; Environment Policy (ENV)1 Protecting and Enhancing the Region's Natural and Built Environment; ENV3 Protected Landscapes; ENV4 Nature Conservation; ENV5 Historic Environment; F1 Flood risk; RE1 Renewable Energy Targets; RE3 Renewable heat targets; RE4 Meeting targets through development of new resources; RE5 Decentralised energy to supply new development; RE6 Water Resources; RE7 Sustainable Land Management; RE8 Woodlands and Forests; RE9 Air Quality; W2 Waste facilities

- 3.25. South West biodiversity targets are set out in Appendix 1 of the RSS, for example, the South West Nature Map<sup>15</sup> identifies the best areas in the region (and district) to conserve, create and connect wildlife habitats at landscape scale. The Map should be used at the local level to move from a site based to a wider landscape scale approach to wildlife protection and enhancement, with spatial planning policies designed to manage future development in a way which links, buffers and re-creates wildlife habitats, rather than further fragmenting them.<sup>16</sup>

## Local Policies and Strategies

### Dorset Sustainable Communities Strategy

- The major issues facing the rural County are set out in Dorset's Sustainable Communities Strategy (SCS)<sup>17</sup> which is also the SCS at the District level. The SCS recognises that the high quality, unspoilt environment of Dorset makes it an attractive place in which to live and work. It highlights the need to:
- Protect and develop the strengths of the district as an attractive place in which to live and work;
- Ensure development recognises local distinctiveness and contributes towards protection and enhancement of the district's natural and built environment; and
- Locate and build future development in a manner which minimises its carbon footprint and maximises the use of available renewable energy sources.

### Draft Joint Municipal Management Strategy

- 3.26. This builds on the Waste Strategy for England<sup>18</sup> which sets national targets for greenhouse gas emissions, household waste recycling and composting, household residual waste, municipal waste recovery and commercial and industrial land filled waste. These targets are in line with EU Regulations and form the basis for the review of the Joint Municipal Management Strategy for Dorset, currently being undertaken by the Council in partnership with other authorities, (final version close to adoption).

### Dorset Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan (2002)

- 3.27. This seeks to ensure that the national targets for species and habitats are met at the local level. It states that although Dorset is one of the richest Counties for wildlife in England, nevertheless it has seen widespread declines in semi natural habitats and populations of rare and common species. The need to reverse this fragmentation is made more urgent by predicted climate change. The UK Biodiversity Strategy

<sup>15</sup> [http://www.biodiversitysouthwest.org.uk/nm\\_map3dk.html](http://www.biodiversitysouthwest.org.uk/nm_map3dk.html)

<sup>16</sup> Biodiversity by Design TCPA 2004 provides wide ranging advice from best practice examples around the UK

<sup>17</sup> Shaping our Future: The Community Strategy for Dorset 2007-2016, Dorset Strategic Partnership (June 2007)

<sup>18</sup> The Waste Strategy 2007 published by the Government in May 2007

lists 45 priority habitats for action - of these 32 occur in Dorset and 6 in North Dorset.

#### 4.0 Issues Arising from Stakeholder and Community Consultations

- 4.1. The community's views on the key issues arising out of the national and emerging regional policy framework were sought when the Council undertook consultation on the issues and options<sup>19</sup> for a 'stand alone' core strategy in June – July 2007<sup>20</sup>. The consultation took place well before the RSS Proposed Changes were produced and the issues and options discussed were based on the draft RSS<sup>21</sup>.
- 4.2. The Council suggested that the contribution to, and the effects of, climate change could be mitigated in part by directing growth in a sustainable manner. In this way the potential impacts of pollution, carbon dioxide emissions and flooding would be carefully managed, and the need to travel would be minimised. In addition, development would be expected to incorporate sustainable construction methods and make a significant contribution towards meeting statutory targets relating to renewable energy. Various options for ways in which we could reduce the contribution to, and the effects of, climate change were suggested
- 4.3. The options were not mutually exclusive, and in general terms, respondents were supportive of a variety of solutions to address climate change.<sup>22</sup> The majority supported sustainable construction methods and integrated micro renewable targets that were higher than government standards on the grounds that current UK standards were lower than those in other European countries. There was also qualified support for renewable energy installations provided that they were medium scale community projects, with design and landscape issues being the main concerns.
- 4.4. With regard to environmental assets, the majority of respondents considered that the Core Strategy should take a wide view of environmental protection which encompasses enhancement as well as protection. Climate change, biodiversity and landscape character were considered important and the need to protect locally important, but undesignated, sites was also mentioned. Respondents were equally divided regarding the priority which should be given to the environment when considering the need for development although it was pointed out that environmental protection was controlled in most cases by national

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<sup>19</sup> Core Strategy: Issues and Alternative Options – North Dorset District Council (June 2007)

<sup>20</sup> Since this consultation the Council has now decided to produce a Development Plan Document (DPD) containing both the Core Strategy and a limited number of development management policies. Details of this (and other DPDs) can be found in the Council's Local Development Scheme 2009

<sup>21</sup> The Draft Regional Spatial Strategy for the South West 2006 – 2026 – South West Regional Assembly (June 2006).

<sup>22</sup> The Council has produced a summary of the main findings of the 2007 consultation and a comprehensive analysis of responses on an issue-by-issue basis. These documents, together with the original responses, can be viewed at the following link [http://www.north-dorset.gov.uk/index/living/building\\_planning/planning\\_policy/local\\_development\\_framework/core\\_strategy/core\\_strategy\\_2007\\_consultation.htm](http://www.north-dorset.gov.uk/index/living/building_planning/planning_policy/local_development_framework/core_strategy/core_strategy_2007_consultation.htm)



policy. The need for a more integrated approach to the planning, delivery and maintenance of open space through a “green infrastructure” strategy was fully supported by those who responded.

## 5.0 Issues from the Evidence Base

5.1. This section explains the evidence that has been used to respond to the requirements of the national and regional policy framework on environmental issues, including climate change. This framework is already prescriptive and requires targets to be met, for example on carbon emission reductions, documents to be commissioned, for example, a Strategic Flood Risk Assessment, and designated environmental sites to be protected. The following research has been used in order to fulfil these and other statutory requirements:

### **Bournemouth, Dorset and Poole Renewable Energy Strategy & Action Plan - Centre for Sustainable Energy (December 2005)**

5.2. This was commissioned by Dorset County Council in response to the policy requirements of PPS 22 but also in response to the urgent need for Dorset to play its part in the development of renewable energy resources to help mitigate climate change. An assessment undertaken as part of the Revision 2010 project informs the strategy and is the basis for the County-wide renewable energy targets set out in policies RE1 and RE3 of the RSS<sup>23</sup>. The Strategy sets out the types of technology which could be used in Dorset and from this assessment the Council has made its assumptions about the types of technology which may be appropriate in North Dorset. The strategy indicates that the bulk of the energy will be produced, at least in the short term, from on-shore wind power and that there are two areas within North Dorset where the wind resource would be suitable for such schemes. The rural nature of the district also lends itself to energy from biomass as an option. The strategy sets out the potential and the constraints for these and other technologies in a realistic manner. Neither the strategy nor the RSS suggests that the District should set its own target but requires that the Council include positive policies on renewable energy which will help achieve the county/regional target.

### **The Bournemouth, Dorset and Poole Energy Efficiency Strategy and Action Plan - Centre for Sustainable Energy (February 2009)**

5.3. This strategy complements the renewable energy strategy by placing the emphasis on the need to improve energy efficiency and curb energy demand before looking to the need to produce more energy, albeit from renewable resources. Many of the actions tackle the need to engage the community in reducing their energy use and are therefore outside the remit of planning policy. However, the research undertaken paints a picture of current energy demand and the need for a huge step up in the level of retro fitting and lifestyle change to achieve the level of

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<sup>23</sup> RE1 Renewable Electricity Targets: Local Development Documents will include positive policies to enable the achievement of 64-84 MWe installed capacity, from a range of onshore renewable energy technologies, by 2010. RE3 Renewable Heat Targets: No County target but a regional target of 100 installed thermal capacity of 100MWth by 2010. Research is being undertaken to inform 2020 targets for both types of energy.

reduction in carbon emissions set by the government. The Council is therefore working with the Carbon Trust and Energy Savings Trust to identify opportunities and actions to work towards national targets.

### **Level 1 Strategic Flood Risk Assessment (SFRA) (February 2008)**

5.4. This was jointly commissioned by the authorities<sup>24</sup> located within the Stour and Avon catchment areas in response to the requirements of PPS 25 and its associated Good Practice Guide. It is a desk based study using existing information to allow application of the Sequential Test as set out in Table D1 of PPS 25 and to identify whether application of the Exception Test is likely to be necessary. It indicates that:

- Climate change is predicted to exacerbate both river and groundwater flooding. Flood zone maps, taking climate change into account, have been produced. Where new development is necessary in areas of higher risk the Council will need to apply the “sequential test” and, if necessary, the “exception test”. Information in the SFRA enables the authority to undertake these tests;
- North Dorset is susceptible to groundwater flooding from the chalk aquifer as well as river flooding from the River Stour and its tributaries. Groundwater events can be inconsistent and difficult to predict but can cause severe disruption. The mapping of historical flood events is the only means of understanding current susceptibility;
- There are historical incidents of sewer flooding, probably due to network incapacity, but Wessex Water intends to implement solutions by March 2010. These are considered appropriate for the areas which have already been extensively developed;
- There are 12 reservoirs which pose various levels of risk. If development downstream is proposed, a detailed breach and overtopping assessment would be required;
- Similar assessment would be required for any development proposed behind existing flood defences (e.g. in Blandford Forum, Gillingham and at locations along the River Winterborne);
- In the application of SUDS techniques, it is recommended that priority is given to surface water techniques due to the generally permeable soils. However, each site should confirm that infiltration will not increase the risk of groundwater flooding.

### **The River Stour Catchment Flood Management Plan (due September 2009)**

5.5. The draft, prepared in December 2006, acknowledges that it will never be possible to eliminate flooding but it aims to manage flooding in a way which minimises the chance and the impact of flooding. It

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<sup>24</sup> Jointly commissioned by Bournemouth BC, Christchurch BC, East Dorset DC, North Dorset DC and the former Salisbury DC.

concludes that the main influences on future risk will be climate change and farming practices. The management policies to be applied in North Dorset will be added when the final document has been published.

### **District-wide Landscape Character Assessment (March 2008)**

5.6. This was commissioned by the Council to provide a structured framework for describing the landscapes of North Dorset. It fulfils the requirements of paragraph 13 of PPS7 which states that authorities should encourage good design in rural areas utilising tools such as Landscape Character Assessments. There are 17 landscape character areas identified in the district. The assessment describes their key characteristics. If these characteristics should change or be lost, there would be significant consequences for the current character of the landscape.

### **Wildlife and Heritage Assets**

- 5.7. The Council holds records of designated sites in North Dorset, including designated wildlife sites, scheduled monuments, listed buildings, conservation areas etc. These include:
- Internationally, nationally and locally designated sites. 2 internationally important sites, 40 Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs), 201 Sites of Nature Conservation Interest (SNCl) and 11 Regionally Important Geological Sites (RIGS) cover about 6% of the District;
  - Priority habitats listed in the UK Biodiversity Action Plan. 6 of the 45 national priority habitats have been identified<sup>25</sup> as being priorities for North Dorset. They are: lowland mixed deciduous woodland; wood pasture; species rich hedgerows; calcareous grasslands; chalk streams; and ponds;
  - Ancient semi-natural woodlands, including ancient replanted woodlands which have the potential to be restored through appropriate management. Ancient replanted woodlands are ancient semi-natural woodlands that have been densely replanted with broadleaves, such as Beech, or conifers.
  - As stated above, the protection and enhancement of such sites is closely regulated by national policy.

### **Draft Habitats Regulations Assessment (HRA) (in preparation)**

5.8. The Council is required to produce a HRA to assess the potential impacts of the Core Strategy and Development Management Policies DPD on internationally important wildlife sites (collectively known as 'Natura 2000' sites or N2K sites). A draft HRA will be produced to support the draft DPD and a revised version will accompany the pre-submission version of the DPD.

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<sup>25</sup> In The Dorset Biodiversity Strategy – Dorset Biodiversity Partnership (2002)

- 5.9. The potential threats to the region's N2K sites were examined through the RSS process<sup>26</sup>. This analysis provided the basis for a 'screening report', which outlined the general nature of the potential adverse effects from development in North Dorset on N2K sites. The HRA will need to examine these potential adverse effects in more detail.
- 5.10. The N2K sites within the District that could potentially be affected are:
- Melbury Downs Special Areas of Conservation (SAC) to the south of Shaftesbury; and
  - Rooksmoor SAC, south and west of Sturminster Newton.
- 5.11. A number of other internationally important wildlife sites are located outside, but within a few kilometres of, the District boundary, including heathland sites to the south and watercourses in the catchment of the River Avon to the east. The HRA will also need to consider the indirect implications (for example as a result of recreational pressure or drainage patterns) for these sites.

#### **Cranborne Chase and West Wiltshire Downs (CCWWD) Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) and Dorset AONB Management Plans**

- 5.12. Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONBs) are nationally important protected landscapes<sup>27</sup>. The Council has worked as part of the partnership boards to support the publication of their management plans which were reviewed and endorsed by the Council in December 2008. They set out in detail the features which make the areas special, their visions for the future and the actions necessary to realise the visions. The Action Plans cover a wide spectrum of issues identified in the main body of the management plans. In addition, both partnerships have commissioned extra studies to address specific issues, for example, a Historic Landscape Characterisation<sup>28</sup> (HLC) by the CCWWD AONB and the Winterbournes Project<sup>29</sup> by the Dorset AONB.

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<sup>26</sup> In the South West Regional Spatial Strategy Proposed Changes – Habitats Regulations Assessment Final Report: Prepared for the Secretary of State for Communities & Local Government by Land Use Consultants in association with Levett-Therivel Sustainability Consultants (July 2008)

<sup>27</sup> AONBs are designated under the National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act 1949. The Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 confirmed their significance and created improved arrangements for their management. Under Section 89 of the Act North Dorset has acted jointly with other local authorities to produce a management plan for each AONB in our administrative area.

<sup>28</sup> Cranborne Chase and West Wiltshire Downs AONB Historic Landscape Characterisation Project - Emma Rouse on behalf of Cranborne Chase and West Wiltshire Downs AONB and English Heritage

<sup>29</sup> The Dorset AONB's Winterbournes Project focuses on conserving two chalk streams including the North Winterborne <http://www.dorsetaonb.org.uk/text01.asp?PageId=311>

## 6.0 Conclusions Drawn from the Policy Context and Evidence Base

- 6.1. The concept of sustainable development is far reaching and covers a range of issues. Policy needs to set out how the District will achieve more sustainable development in the light of international, national and regional policies. The three main issues are considered to be:
- Addressing the causes and effects of climate change;
  - Delivering sustainable forms of development; and
  - Delivering a sustainable pattern of development.
- 6.2. Legislation requires Councils to address the causes and effects of climate change issues. The District will need to take measures to both reduce its greenhouse gas emissions (the cause) and to adapt to predicted changes (the effects). The main issues are considered to be:
- Improving energy efficiency and therefore reducing demand;
  - Using sustainable construction methods;
  - Generating energy from renewable sources; and
  - Address the risk of increased flooding (see next bullet point).
- 6.3. North Dorset is already susceptible to both river and groundwater flooding and the risk will increase with predicted climate change. Policies are required which will:
- Locate new development in areas at low risk of flooding; and
  - Manage surface water in a sustainable manner.
- 6.4. The protection of designated sites is covered by national policy but locally important environmental assets do not have protection. Policies may therefore be required which will recognise and give protection to:
- The key landscape characteristic identified in the Dorset-wide Landscape Character Assessment;
  - Unlisted buildings of architectural or historic importance; and
  - Designed landscapes, historic parks or gardens of regional or county importance.
- 6.5. The Habitats Regulations Assessment (HRA) screening report identifies certain N2K sites where development may potentially have an adverse effect. The Council therefore needs to:
- Undertake a HRA; and
  - Take account of any implications in planning policy.
- 6.6. There are two Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty within North Dorset. Their management plans identify a series of actions which will complement the statutory spatial plan. The Council will continue to work in partnership with their boards to forward their primary purpose