

Chapter 1

Introduction

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Local Plan Area

- 1.1 The area covered by the Local Plan comprises the whole of the Borough of Christchurch. It is the most easterly Borough in the County of Dorset and adjoins the Borough of Bournemouth to the west, East Dorset District to the north-west and New Forest District in Hampshire to the east.

Development Plan System

- 1.2 In Britain land use is regulated by the Town and Country Planning system. Development plans set out the local planning authority's policies and proposals for the development and use of land in their area. The Town and Country Planning Act (TCPA) 1990, as amended by the Planning and Compensation Act 1991 provides for a two-tier development plan system comprising structure plans and local plans. The Structure Plan is prepared by the County, Bournemouth and Poole Councils and sets out key strategic policies as a framework for local planning. Local Plans are prepared by District/Borough Councils, these set out more detailed policies to guide development including proposals for specific sites. The exception is for proposals for minerals extraction and waste disposal, which are the responsibility of the County Council.
- 1.3 The 1991 Act introduced changes to the Development Plan system, one of which is that District/Borough Councils are now required to prepare a local plan covering their whole area. Previously local plans were only prepared for those parts of Districts/Borough Council's where it was considered necessary.
- 1.4 The status of Development Plans has been enhanced by legislation. The Planning and Compensation Act 1991 amended the TCPA 1990, amongst other matters, by adding Section 54A which requires decisions on planning applications to be in accordance with the Development Plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise. This strengthens the requirement of the 1990 Act in that local authorities are to have regard to the provisions of the Development Plan. Development Plans themselves must have regard to national planning guidance in the form of Circulars, Planning Policy Guidance Notes and Regional Planning Guidance.

Previous Local Plans in the Borough

- 1.5 The Highcliffe, South Christchurch and Town Centre areas of the Borough were covered by Local Plans prepared under the old legislation, the Town and Country Planning Act 1971. The Highcliffe and District Local Plan was adopted in 1989 and amended in 1993. The South Christchurch Local Plan was adopted in 1993 and the Christchurch Town Centre Local Plan in 1995.

- 1.6 In the North Christchurch area the Council was delayed in preparing a Local Plan owing to strategic difficulties relating to major road proposals. However, a series of issues reports for this area were published and the results of public consultation have been used in the preparation of the Borough-wide Local Plan.

Sustainable Development

- 1.7 'Green Issues' are high on the political agenda. The Government in September 1990 published the Environmental White Paper 'This Common Inheritance', Britain's first comprehensive report on the Environment. The document looked at all levels of environmental concern and set out the Government's programme for action. The White Paper refers to the provisions of the Environmental Protection Act 1990, a major piece of legislation that gives an increased emphasis to environmental issues by introducing an integrated pollution control code, revised guidelines for the management treatment and disposal of waste, statutory nuisance and the like. The White Paper first introduced the term 'sustainable development' into the UK and attempted to define it. Internationally, the concept of sustainability led to the UN Conference on Environment and Development (the Earth Summit) held in Rio de Janeiro in 1992, and the European Community now, as a result, publishes an increasing number of directives concerning environmental issues. Individual countries were recommended to prepare sustainable strategies and in January 1994 the United Kingdom published its "Sustainable Development – the UK Strategy" endorsing the principle of sustainability.
- 1.8 Since 1990 several Planning Policy Guidance Notes (PPG's) have been issued by the Government which pay particular attention to environmental considerations in local plans. Development Plans and Regional Planning Guidance PPG12 (1992), for example, emphasises the importance of environmental issues, introducing the concept of sustainable development. It recognises the need to make provision in plans for development and at the same time take account of the need to protect the environment. It states "The sum total of decisions in the planning field, as elsewhere, should not deny future generations the best of today's environment". Although local plans have in the past balanced the development pressures against environmental constraints, the PPG attempts to formalise plan preparation in this regard by advising on the need to carry out an environmental appraisal of policies. It states "Such an appraisal is the process of identifying, quantifying, weighing up and reporting on the environmental and other costs and benefits of the measures which are proposed". In drafting previous local plans in the Borough, environmental considerations have always been taken into account during policy formulation albeit informally. PPG12 now attempts to formalise this process so in the future users of the Local Plan can see how these factors have been weighed up. In appraising policies an important tool is the 'policy impact matrix'. By assessing local plan policies in a matrix their impact on environmental resources can broadly be established. Where an impact is clear a positive or negative symbol will be indicated and this should go some way to establishing the 'sustainability' of the local plan and therefore how far policies and proposals go in satisfying the Local Plan's principle and strategy (see paragraph 1.16). Taking each chapter in turn, a commentary will expand the individual policy impact established in the matrix. The matrix and commentary are included as Appendix 3 to this Local Plan.

Borough Council Policy

- 1.9 Christchurch Borough Council is committed to a policy of environmental awareness and community involvement. Since 1989 the Council has adopted the policy of 'Thinking Globally – Acting Locally'. The local environment is recognised as being essential to the people who live and work in the Borough, to the economic future of the town and because of any impact, no matter how small, on the wider environment. During 1992 the Council carried out an internal environmental audit of some of its functions including transport, energy and water, stationery purchasing and education. As a result of the audit, recommendations are being made to alter the Council's own policy. Throughout 1993 a Working Group held a number of environmental awareness seminars, attempting to make all staff members more aware of environmental issues with a view to filtering through to everyday working practices. The Council has released a 'Charter for the Environment' setting out Council environmental policy and functions, with recognition that its many functions either directly affect the environment or have a regulatory effect on abuse of the environment.
- 1.10 Taking forward the Council's environmental commitment, the Christchurch Local Agenda 21 Forum has been established. The Forum and steering group bring together a wide range of interests and will address issues relating to the natural, social and economic environment. Agenda 21 places important emphasis upon community involvement, encouraging a partnership between local authorities and the community.
- 1.11 Advice from Government on how the planning system is to tackle global pollution issues is vague and this, coupled with financial constraints imposed on local government, does not give the Council an ideal base for its environmental policies. However, in implementing the policy 'Thinking Globally – Acting Locally' the Council are attempting to safeguard the Borough's environment whilst taking a realistic and sensitive view, guiding future development in a sustainable pattern. The Council will attempt to control CO² emissions through its planning policies and everyday development control decisions. Building Regulation implementation is also relevant in terms of energy conservation because it imposes standards of insulation on all new development. Development patterns can influence the number of car journeys made. However, as much of the Borough has already been developed, opportunities to influence the reduction of emissions are reduced. The strategy of consolidating the urban area of Christchurch and controlling its growth will continue to have a positive impact on the reduction of vehicle borne pollution and on the goal of achieving a sustainable development pattern. Transport emissions are more easily controlled by promoting improved public transport, and by encouraging environmentally friendly forms of transport such as cycling. Policies in this plan will address these issues as the Council is committed to have regard to the reduction of CO² emissions in its decision making.

The Bournemouth, Dorset and Poole Structure Plan

- 1.12 This local plan has been prepared within the framework of the Bournemouth, Dorset and Poole Structure Plan, which was adopted in July 2000. This Structure Plan replaces the two previous Structure Plans for South-East Dorset and the remainder of the county and sets out strategic policy for the period up to 2011. In order to help resolve the issue of

resource allocation and potential conflicts, the County Council has decided that the concept of sustainable development should be the guiding principle of the Structure Plan.

Regional Planning Guidance

- 1.13 Christchurch Borough Council falls within the south-west region, and is on the boundary with the south-east region. Regional Planning Guidance for the South-West has been prepared by the Secretary of State for the Environment. Regional Planning Guidance Note (RPG) 10 was issued in July 1994 and covers the period up to the year 2011. It is stated that this guidance will primarily provide the framework for updating structure plans in the region but will also be relevant in the preparation and review of local plans. Therefore, where appropriate, references will be made to the regional planning guidance in this Local Plan. Regional Planning Guidance (RPG) for the South-West is currently being reviewed, rolling forward the guidance to the year 2016.

Local Plan Process

- 1.14 The Local Plan has gone through various stages before its adoption. These are described as follows:
- (i) The Consultative Draft was published for public consultation (June 1995).
 - (ii) The results of consultation were discussed at Special Planning Committees and the plan amended in the light of comments received. A 'certificate of conformity' with the Structure Plan was requested from the County Council.
 - (iii) The plan was placed on deposit and was subject to a further consultation period (January 1997).
 - (iv) Objections to the Deposit Plan were considered by a Special Planning Committee. Amendments were made as appropriate to meet the objections and were published for public consultation.
 - (v) A Public Local Inquiry was held to discuss outstanding objections to the Local Plan. An Inspector from the Department of the Environment was appointed to hear the objections (February-June 1998).
 - (vi) The Inspector's Report was published (April 1999). A Special Planning Committee considered the Report and proposed modifications to the Local Plan.
 - (vii) The modifications to the Local Plan were published for public consultation (January 2000).
 - (viii) Objections to these modifications were considered by a Special Planning Committee. Further Proposed Modifications were made and a statement of decisions on modifications published (September 2000). A Special Planning Committee considered representations received on the Proposed Further Modifications.

- (ix) The plan was adopted as a statutory document (March 2001).
- (x) The plan initially covers the period up to 2011 and the implementation of its policies is monitored. The plan will be reviewed when necessary and this will be subject to public consultation.

Format of this Local Plan

- 1.15 This Plan is divided into chapters of various topics. There is a brief introduction to each topic and an overview of the situation in the Borough. The policy context – national/regional/strategic guidance and policies are set out. The policies are presented in capitals of bold type and are preceded by a reasoned justification. The proposals map in the back of the document shows the areas to which the policies apply.

Guiding Principle, Strategy and Objectives of the Local Plan

- 1.16 Sustainable development is most commonly defined as “development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of the future generations to meet their own needs” (Brundtland Report, Our Common Future, 1987). PPG1 – “General Policy and Principles”, states that a sustainable planning framework should:

- Provide for the nation’s needs for commercial and industrial development, food production, minerals extraction, new homes and other buildings, while respecting environmental objectives;
- Use already developed areas in the most efficient way, whilst making them more attractive places in which to live and work;
- Conserve both the cultural heritage and natural resources (including wildlife, landscape, water, soil and air quality) taking particular care to safeguard designations of national and international importance; and
- Shape new development patterns in a way which minimises the need to travel.

The guiding principle of sustainable development forms the basis of the Local Plan strategy. The Plan aims to guide future growth in a sustainable development pattern. It recognises that development will take place in the future to satisfy economic and social demands and that these demands need to be carefully assessed against the need to protect and enhance the environment. To achieve a sustainable development pattern, future growth will be concentrated within the existing built-up areas. The built-up areas will be constrained from future expansion by the South - East Dorset Green Belt.

- 1.17 The strategy of sustainable development and consolidation will be implemented by achieving the following objectives:

- (i) To translate the general policies and proposals of the Structure Plan into a detailed framework for the control of development and the use of land.

- (ii) To review and develop policies which meet the housing (including affordable housing), economic and other land use needs of the Borough especially insofar as these have an impact on the urban and rural economies.
- (iii) To use already developed areas in the most efficient way, while making them more attractive places in which to live and work.
- (iv) To secure transportation improvements relating to traffic flows, public car parking and public transport, and to encourage people to reduce their reliance on the car by the promotion and encouragement of alternative modes of transport.
- (v) To protect and enhance the character, natural beauty and wildlife (or scientific interest) of the Borough's river valleys, coast, heathlands and other natural amenities.
- (vi) To safeguard the Conservation Areas and Listed Buildings in the Borough and to secure their enhancement.
- (vii) To consolidate and enhance the functions of the area as a centre for recreation and tourism.
- (viii) To define the precise boundaries of the Green Belt, thereby maintaining an area of open land around the built-up area and protecting the separate physical identity of settlements by preventing their coalescence.

1.18 The objectives listed above will be put into action through the implementation of policies and proposals contained in this Local Plan. In some instances conflict may arise between the demands on the use of land and the strategy of sustainable development may demand that one or more of the social, economic or environmental requirements will not be satisfied. The justification and environmental appraisal for each policy and proposal will indicate possible impacts and justify why a particular policy or proposal has been included.

1.19 The main mechanism for ensuring policies and proposals are adhered to will be through the development control function of the Local Planning Authority. However, for a planning application to be submitted in order for policies and proposals to come into force, investment has to be made. Chapter 9 "Implementation" examines more fully how the plan strategy, objectives and policies and proposals will be implemented.