



Natural Beauty and Heritage
Built Environment

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5.6 Built Environment

Background

5.6.1 The Dorset AONB has an outstanding quality and quantity of buildings that reflect its history and cultural development. Buildings, other structures and the wider ensembles of villages and towns underpin the value and beauty of the AONB and are an important element in people's perceptions of the area.



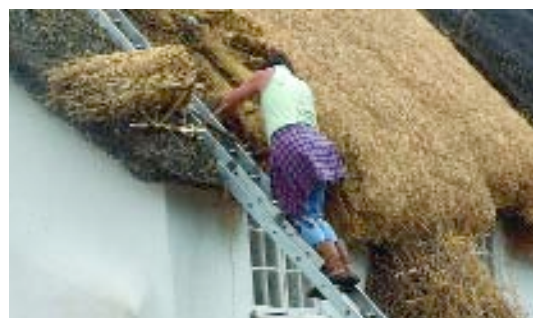
New houses at Abbotsbury built in the local style.

5.6.2 The AONB's complex geology has produced a wide range of building materials. The splendid Oolitic limestones of Portland and Purbeck are extensively used, giving the area a strong character. Lower Purbeck stone was also worked from Portesham to Poxwell and "exported" inland up the Piddle Valley. The thinner Purbeck beds were used for paving and roofing, whilst Purbeck Marble was used in early Medieval ecclesiastical work. West Dorset had a very workable Inferior Oolite, with over 130 local quarries, and a Forest Marble used for paving, roofing and boundary walls. Although not extensively used, Ham Hill Stone (quarried in Somerset) was used to express wealth and status and is more prevalent in west Dorset.

5.6.3 Other materials include the Blue Lias of Lyme Regis and the golden Corallian limestone of Abbotsbury. In the Dorset Downs, dominated by chalk, buildings tend to be made of brick and flint, often in horizontal bands with the flint "knapped" into rectangles. Most chalk is too soft to use for building, but in some areas blocks of lower chalk "clunch" are rendered and used. Other buildings are made from cob - a mixture of mud, chalk and binder material rendered for durability.

5.6.4 Thatched roofs are a potent image of the AONB. In general, Dorset is a transitional area between four or possibly five distinct thatching vernacular styles. Long straw was prevalent, combed wheat reed was used in areas where straw was especially sparse in the west of the AONB, with

water reed being confined to small areas near to supplies. Heather was also used around Wareham but this is no longer visible. Dorset thatching is generally softer and more rounded than its eastern neighbours and avoids elaborate ridge decoration, preferring a simple laced finish.



Dorset thatching is simple and rounded in style.

5.6.5 The built environment of the AONB is a major heritage asset. There are around 3,000 Listed Buildings and 100 Conservation Areas, reflecting the area's quality and importance. Significant buildings range from the many monastic remains such as Milton Abbey, Forde Abbey and the buildings at Cerne and Abbotsbury, to smaller parish churches from a variety of periods and styles. Manor houses, follies and tithe barns add to the wealth of built heritage. The AONB also contains a number of major country house estates and preserved estate villages that contribute to landscape character with many fine examples of smaller historic manor houses.

5.6.6 Dorset also has whole villages that retain their traditional character and the market towns are rich in historic buildings. They vary to reflect the periods in which they were created and the industries that they hosted. Bridport, for example, has a Saxon and early Medieval plan, with wide streets and contrasting narrow alleys and ropewalks. There is a great deal of Georgian housing in the town and it has a fascinating industrial history, including rope and net making.

5.6.7 Whilst the designation of Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas has helped to preserve many of our finest built environments, there have been many areas where character has been eroded by modern developments. In recent years, communities have become more involved in the future of their built landscapes through village appraisals and design statements.

5.6.8 There is a great appreciation of the AONB's built heritage. It is part of our 'quality of life' and an asset for residents, visitors and for education. The Prince of Wales's Poundbury development, on the edge of the AONB, has stimulated great debate and raised awareness of the importance of new housing design.

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Thatching the ridge of a roof.

Current Trends

5.6.9 Despite the interest expressed by local people in the built environment, it remains low on the national political agenda. Funding is a major issue with very limited resources available for the management and repair of Listed Buildings. The Heritage Lottery Fund is one of the few sources of funds but not all schemes meet the criteria. Local authorities no longer have the resources for repair funds linked to enabling powers. As a result, many of our heritage assets are at risk.

5.6.10 There is a high demand for 'character properties' but repairs do not always conform to appropriate standards.

5.6.11 While the interest in character buildings may offer a lifeline to some, others are at increasing risk due to lack of use and changing circumstances. Many parish churches, for example, no longer sustain viable congregations and are at risk of closure.

5.6.12 Current government targets aim for 60% of all development to be on 'Brownfield' land to reduce pressure on 'Greenfield' sites. In Dorset, between 1994 and 2002, around 67% of all development was on 'Brownfield' sites helping to conserve the quality of the Dorset AONB.

Key Issues

5.6.13 The key issues affecting the built environment of the AONB include:

- Difficulty in maintaining an up to date 'Buildings at Risk' register to influence future use and management.
- Sourcing traditional materials for new build and repair that are appropriate to local character is often difficult or impossible.
- With limited resources for advice and enforcement, local authority staff struggle to prevent poor and inappropriate work. Repairs do not always conform to appropriate standards.

- Inappropriate design, scale and materials of new buildings can degrade the character and distinctiveness of the settlements in the AONB and impact on the wider landscape.
- Permitted developments that do not require specific planning permission can individually and cumulatively impact on the character of the AONB.
- The large scale and design of modern farm buildings and associated uses can appear as industrial elements in the open countryside.
- Infrastructure associated with the built environment (signs, telecommunication masts, pylons and cables etc) is often poorly designed and located, degrading the built environment.
- The planning constraints on housing development in the AONB could contribute to the under provision of affordable housing for local people.
- Sustainability of the built environment needs to be more adequately considered.
- Lack of quality, design and style of boundary features degrades landscape character.
- The creation and management of green space and trees within the built environments of the AONB needs to be better addressed.

Key Opportunities

5.6.14 The key opportunities for the built environment in the AONB include:

- Government changes to permitted development rights, the introduction of Regional Spatial Strategies and Local Development Frameworks offer opportunities to further conserve and enhance built heritage through reducing the impact of the built environment on the landscape.
- Build on West Dorset 2000 as a source of detailed understanding of the built environment to be applied across the AONB.
- Conservation Area Appraisals, Parish Plans and Village Design Statements all offer opportunities to enhance the built environment and raise awareness and understanding of its importance.

Current Activity

5.6.15 Current activity includes:

- **Advice.** County and District Council Conservation, Development Control and Building Standards staff may provide advice prior to any Planning or Listed Building

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Application; English Heritage may advise on specialised building and conservation techniques and sources of craftsmanship.

- **Funding.** English Heritage for “outstanding” (Grade 1 and 2*) buildings, subject to relevant criteria and availability of resources; also for area-related projects with wider environmental and economic objectives; Heritage Lottery Fund; SWRDA for area-based economic and social regeneration projects; local authority grants and loans (availability varies across the AONB); administered by DEFRA, a range of agri-environment schemes are also available that offer funding for the protection and enhancement of traditional farm buildings for example.
- **Enhancement Schemes.** There have been a series of traffic management schemes on towns and villages including Bridport, Beaminster, Corfe Castle and Lulworth Cove.
- **Design Award Schemes.** North Dorset District Council run an award scheme for building design. The Civic Trust organises a biennial Awards Scheme for architectural and area enhancements in rural shire counties, as do local Civic Societies with a four yearly Dorset Architectural Heritage Award run by the Dorset Building Preservation Trust.

Related Policies and Strategies

5.6.16 Policies, strategies and documents relating to the built environment of the AONB include:

- *‘Heritage Counts – State of England’s Historic Environment 2003’* (English Heritage, 2003)
- *‘The Historic Environment: A Force for our Future’* (DCMS, 2001)
- *‘Power of Place: The Future of the Historic Environment’* (English Heritage, 2000)
- *Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990*
- *PPG15: Planning and the Historic Environment; PPG16: Planning and Archaeology*
- *‘Conservation Area Practice’* (English Heritage, 1995); *‘Conservation Area Appraisals’* (English Heritage, 1998); *‘Enabling Developments and the Conservation of Heritage Assets’* (English Heritage, 2000)
- *‘Buildings at Risk’* (English Heritage, 1998) an annual update of the register
- *Regional Planning Guidance 10 for the South West: S4 The Environment (ODPM, 2001)*
- *‘Dorset Heritage Strategy’* (County and District / Borough Councils 2003) Sections 5&6
- Conservation Area Appraisals for

West Bay and Bridport (West Dorset District Council 2002/3)

- *‘West Dorset 2000’* (West Dorset District Council, 2002)
- Studies of the South West Quadrant of Bridport (West Dorset District Council, 2002)
- Milton Abbas Conservation Statement (1970); Historic Analysis of Blandford; Village Design Statements for Winterborne Stickland and Winterborne Houghton (2002) (All North Dorset District Council)

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Policy Aims

- Conserve the architectural heritage and character of the built environment of the Dorset AONB.
- Ensure that development has regard to the landscape character, sense of place and special quality of the AONB.
- Ensure that development contributes to social and economic well being of the AONB.
- Ensure that development is sustainable and appropriate to the special character and quality of the built environment and that siting, function, design and construction of buildings are of the highest standard.

Policy Objectives

- BE1. Provide a planning policy and guidance framework for siting, function, design, and construction of development.
- BE2. Influence development for which planning permission is not required by ensuring consistent guidance.
- BE3. Support and promote measures to reduce the impact of infrastructure (signs, communications equipment etc) within the built environment.
- BE4. Development of Community, Parish and Village Plans to inform sustainable development.
- BE5. Support the development of sensitively designed and located sites for affordable housing in conjunction with the community planning process.
- BE6. Develop improved open space provision within the built environment and green links to the countryside
- BE7. Seek continued, appropriate use for historic buildings to secure their future condition in line with PPG15.
- BE8. Seek support, including funding, for restoration, conservation and enhancement of the architectural heritage of the Dorset AONB.
- BE9. Promote the use of locally distinctive building materials and styles and associated skills.