



Living & Working  
**People, Jobs and Services**

## 5. Policy Framework - People, Jobs and Services

### 5.12 People, Jobs and Services

#### Background

5.12.1 The Dorset AONB is a living, working landscape, influenced by people as much now as it ever has been. People, their work and buildings contribute to the character of the landscape. Moreover, the high quality landscape of the AONB is a key economic driver (for example attracting visitor spend, supporting land based jobs) and contributes to the economic and social well being of the population. The aim of this Management Plan must be to find ways of balancing the need for a sustainable and prosperous local economy while conserving and enjoying this nationally important landscape. To do this we must understand the relationship between people and place and respond to the pressures put on this relationship over time.



The population is growing, resulting in greater pressure for new housing

5.12.2 Dorset has one of the smallest county populations, estimated at 394,581 in 2002. Seventy per cent of the population live in towns, with only 92,281 people actually living in the AONB (2001 census data). However, the population is growing rapidly, largely from people moving into the county. Dorset has the second highest proportion of retired people in the UK.

5.12.3 Lack of affordable housing (a term which encompasses low cost housing, private rental & shared / low cost ownership) in rural settlements is an issue of particular and increasing concern. The continuing growth of new housing in Dorset is a clear indicator of the attractiveness of the county as a place to live. However with around half of the

county designated as Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty, balancing development needs against environmental protection is never going to be easy. House prices are the highest outside of London and the South East (higher than some SE counties) (Dorset Data Online) which, coupled with the county's low wages, puts house purchase out of reach for many local people. It has been highlighted nationally that first time buyers in Dorset particularly have been priced out of the market. The need for new housing is considerable, as is the need for properties to let which have decreased markedly. The percentage of second homes and holiday homes is four times the national average, pushing up prices and reducing availability for local people. In 1991, 1.9% of the Dorset dwelling stock were second homes and 1.4% holiday homes, together amounting for almost 1000 dwellings. (source: 1991 census)



Only 6.6% of the working population are now employed directly in agriculture.

5.12.4 Dorset's economic growth is generally lower than that of other UK and South West counties. Most businesses are small, with 75% employing fewer than 5 people. These small companies are vulnerable to changes in the economy.

5.12.5 Unemployment rates are low by national standards (3.9% across the county in 2000) but earnings are well below average with a higher percentage of the population in low paid employment. Weekly wages in Dorset are 16% below the national average despite the relatively high cost of essentials such as housing. Employment in agriculture and other traditional industries has continued to decline with just 6.6% of the working population in the AONB deriving employment from agricultural holdings, compared to 21.2% in neighbouring Blackdown Hills AONB

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(DEFRA Agricultural census 2002). The 2001 Census shows that 26% of people aged between 16 - 74 have no qualifications. Employment issues are exacerbated in rural areas, where there is less employment growth and training facilities, and limited transport. Tourism is a major industry in Dorset, but work can be seasonal and low paid.

5.12.6 Many rural areas of Dorset rely heavily on retaining local facilities, such as village halls, shops, schools, post offices, pubs and garages, to meet their practical needs as well as maintain a sense of community spirit. The 2002 Dorset Village Facilities Survey has highlighted the continuing problem of access to services in Dorset's rural communities. Remoteness and low population densities mean that service provision is somewhat limited. For example:

- Three out of four Dorset villages have no general store.
- 38 rural Post Offices have closed since 1991, North and West Dorset having lost 30% of their Post Offices over the last decade..



38 rural post offices have closed since 1991.

- The number of parishes with petrol stations fell from 28% in 1991 to 15% in 2001.
- 8 villages have lost their only pub over the last decade.
- Over 50% of villages have village halls but funds required to achieve new Health and Safety upgrades are challenging.
- Centralisation of many services (health provision, banking, utilities, advice and information sources etc) seriously disadvantages rural communities.
- Modern technology (eg broadband internet or satisfactory mobile phone reception) is often limited to towns.

5.12.7 Despite the high levels of car ownership shown in the recent Census, people in rural areas and particularly those on low incomes, are finding it increasingly difficult to access services. Good access is a key factor in maintaining a living and working community.

5.12.8 The perceived prosperity of the area disguises pockets of deprivation. Low income levels, above average costs of housing and the buoyant economies of surrounding areas mask difficulties for many people. Successive studies show a decline in rural facilities and services and a continuing exodus of young people with an influx of wealthier "commuters", second home owners and retired people. In the rural areas of the AONB, this can lead to a loss of the sense of community, a skewed age structure and leaves vulnerable people isolated. Much of Dorset is in need of additional employment opportunities.



8 villages have lost their only pub over the last decade.

5.12.9 The Countryside Agency's Vital Villages Programme and Dorset Community Action's ongoing work assists and encourages communities to identify issues affecting them and seek solutions. The community planning process will also help to address many of these issues, giving local people a means of shaping their own future. In Dorset, this process is being led by the Dorset Strategic Partnership. Local area partnerships are also being established across the area to influence local issues. Support for social enterprises is also available through Rural Renaissance with potential to generate income to support a community's social and environmental agenda.

### Current Trends

5.12.10 House prices are rising beyond the reach of local people. Average house prices in the county are nearly ten times average wages.

5.12.11 Young people are not being retained in Dorset. The proportion of 15-25 year olds has fallen by 20% since 1991.

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5.12.12 There is an ongoing decline in rural facilities as detailed above. Across the county, 38 rural post offices and 35 petrol stations have closed since 1991.

5.12.13 Increasing traffic volumes and speeds on an essentially rural road network are causing increasing safety concerns. In road traffic accidents, 13.9% of casualties are killed or seriously injured compared to 12.5% nationally.

5.12.14 A growing proportion of the population being over 65 may create increased demand for care workers and trades people but lack of affordable housing may restrict the number of key workers able to live in the area.



With limited public transport and local services, car dependency is high.

### Key Issues

5.12.15 The key issues affecting people, jobs and services in the AONB include:

- Lack of affordable housing for local/young people and key workers.
- Major decline in rural facilities such as village halls, post offices, pubs, shops and petrol stations.
- Decline in local services and poor public transport provision forces high car ownership.
- Poor information about public transport.
- Isolation, particularly for those in rural areas who do not have a car.
- Road safety is a major concern for all road users, including walkers, cyclists, and horse riders.
- Young people are not being retained in the county.
- There is a skills shortage for local employers and no strategic employment and training strategy to address this in relation to AONB objectives.

- Poor economic growth and decline of land management-based industries.
- Development pressure is an increasing issue - high use of 'Greenfield' sites.
- Limited facilities for children and young people, particularly opportunities for play/recreation.
- Limited access to and improvement of leisure and cultural facilities, particularly for the young, old, disabled and those on low incomes.
- Poor coverage of broadband and mobile phone reception in rural areas.
- Fear of crime can be seen as an issue in some rural areas.



Many traditional industries are in decline.

### Key Opportunities

5.12.16 The key opportunities for people, jobs and services include:

- Community planning and initiatives such as Vital Villages offer ways of assisting local communities in addressing local issues and priorities and developing community spirit.
- Work with SWRDA to develop potential of AONB for knowledge based economy and quality of life.
- Developing opportunities for social benefits and co-operative / collaborative working through 'social enterprise'.
- Rural jobs generation through high quality training in rural skills such as woodland management and 'new industries' such as renewable energy .
- New technologies may improve communications, reducing the need to travel.
- Tourism and visitor initiatives designed to encourage the use of local services and facilities could help to keep them in business.

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### Current Activity

5.12.17 Current areas of activity include:

- **Community Planning.** The Dorset Strategic Partnership (DSP) is leading the development of a Community Strategy for Dorset. Local Area Partnerships are also being created across the area to develop local community plans which address local issues and inform the DSP as appropriate.
- **Schemes.** The Countryside Agency provides grants to assist with the development of Vital Villages schemes and Parish Plans.
- **Rural Renaissance.** SWRDA initiative to reinvigorate rural communities in the South West.
- **Advice and Support.** Local Authorities and Dorset Community Action provide advice and support to local communities with the above schemes. The Community Development Agency (CDA) Dorset provides support and advice to local communities on social enterprise and funding matters.
- **Market and Coastal Towns Initiative.** Initiative led by SWRDA to create vibrant, healthy and sustainable market towns.
- **Business Link Wessex.** Supports economic regeneration in towns such as Bridport and also supports business development.



A thriving village store.

### Related Policies and Strategies

5.12.18 Policies, strategies and documents relating to people, jobs and services in the AONB include:

- *'Our Countryside; The Future - A Fair Deal for Rural England'* (DEFRA, 2002) Rural White Paper
- *'The State of the Countryside 2003'* (Countryside Agency, 2003)
- *'Making Purbeck More Special'* (Purbeck Heritage Committee, 2002)
- *'Dorset Rural Facilities Survey'* (Dorset County



Interest in local produce is growing.

- *'Emerging Priorities'* (Dorset Strategic Partnership, 2003)
- *'Dorset County Structure Plan'* (Dorset County Council, 2001)
- District Local Plans (various)
- *'Dorset Local Agenda 21 Strategy'* (Dorset Local Agenda 21 Group, 2001)
- *'Dorset in the 21st Century: An agenda for Action'* (Dorset Local Agenda 21 Group, 1999)



Local stores and services are important for those without their own transport.

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### 5.12.19 Dorset AONB Policy Framework - People, Jobs and Services

#### Policy Aims

- Ensure that rural communities are able to access essential services, economic / employment opportunities and benefit from rural location are high quality environment.
- Develop a better understanding of the relationship between economic potential, social provision and environmental protection and the need for an integrated approach.
- Support local communities in planning for their own needs.

#### Policy Objectives

- PJS1. Seek high quality housing opportunities for residents, including affordable housing and lease and rent provision.
- PJS2. Ensure that crime prevention is considered in policy and decision making.
- PJS3. Support the improvement of, and access to, community facilities for all sectors of the population.
- PJS4. Support and promote measures to reduce road accidents and casualties.
- PJS5. Promote local services and choices that meet the needs of local people.
- PJS6. Support business and community enterprise, particularly in rural areas, and encourage the sustainable and best use of the Dorset AONB's wealth of natural and historic heritage assets and resources to stimulate economic activity.
- PJS7. Support the development of high quality training and employment which link to and support AONB objectives.
- PJS8. Help local communities in planning for their own future and develop influence upon wider 'strategic' planning.
- PJS9. Promote the health benefits associated with the high quality AONB environment.