

Christchurch Council Monitoring Report 2010

This is an edited summary. The full report can be found at <http://www.dorsetforyou.com/media.jsp?mediaid=158684&filetype=pdf>

The Borough has a largely white population, although the proportion of ethnic minorities is growing, with a high proportion of people over retirement age (34%). Christchurch has the lowest proportion of working age population in Dorset (50%).

There is a high density of population, small average household size, a high proportion of detached dwellings (44.7%) and the majority of dwellings are owner - occupied. There is a high house price to income ratio, and the issue of access to affordable housing is a significant problem (*WCRA Comment: only if the Borough is viewed in isolation*).

A 2007 report of housing affordability identified Christchurch as the second least affordable authority in the SW region. A 2009 national update on housing affordability concludes that the house price to income ratio in Christchurch remains significantly high despite the fall in house prices and that this is exacerbated by the difficulties in first time buyers in securing the large deposits now required. Life expectancy is above average but there is a higher than average proportion of people with long term limiting illnesses. (*WCRA Comment: exactly what one would expect in a retirement area*)

There has been a significant improvement in the proportion of students in Christchurch schools obtaining 5 or more GCSE's at grades A* - C including Maths and English since 2008 and this is now above Dorset and national averages.

Crime levels are low in comparison with regional and national rates and there has been a fall in the rates for all types of crime since 2008/9.

Looking at the structure of employment within Christchurch, over half of employees in Christchurch work in the distribution /hotels /restaurants and public administration /education /health sector. The proportion of employees within the manufacturing sector is above county, regional and national average.

Unemployment rates peaked in January 2010 at 2.9% and have been steadily falling since. Rates are lower than county, regional and national rates. However the economic climate is still uncertain and the effects of the range of cuts in the Government's Spending Review are as yet unknown. Of particular concern is the higher than county and national average proportion of young people 16 – 18 years old not in education, employment or training (NEETS) in Christchurch.

There is a reliance on the car for journeys to work, but distances to work are less than the Dorset average. Car ownership is high, but 19.3% households have no car.

Although a small Borough, 24% of the area is covered by nature conservation designations, much of which is international as well as nationally important.

The density of completed development in Christchurch has risen over the past 5 years. The proportion of new housing built on previously developed land (known as brown field sites) was 94.1%, which well exceeds national targets. *(WCRA Comment: largely because there is virtually no undeveloped land available and much development amounted to garden grabbing)*

Although no additional gypsy and traveller pitches were completed this year, progress has been made in the preparation of a joint Dorset Gypsy & Traveller Site Allocations Plan and initial work undertaken which enabled the project to be launched in June 2010.

The Local Plan policy to retain a high proportion of ground floor retail uses in primary shopping centres has been effective, although incremental losses are occurring in the Town centre. *(WCRA Comment: the town centre needs a far bolder approach than CBC appear to be able to envisage)*

There has been a total of 4350m² of floor space for employment uses completed during 2009/10, a significant amount of which were conversions of redundant farm buildings. Implementation of the strategically important employment allocation at Bournemouth Airport has been slow to come forward for a variety of reasons, mainly issues of Central Government funding for infrastructure *(WCRA Comment: such as roads)*.

There has been good progress on the implementation of highways schemes and cycling routes since the adoption of the Local Plan. *(WCRA Comment: apart from cycle lanes, on which you will have your own opinion, this refers to schemes such as the remodelling of the Barrack Road – Stour Road intersection)*. A high priority should be given to transport policies relating to Bournemouth Airport in view of its importance as a strategic employment site.

Progress has been made in the implementation of open space policies in the Local Plan, with several new public open spaces being created since the Local Plan's adoption. The completed joint Open Space, Sport and Recreational Facilities assessment with East Dorset will inform future planning policy.

Green Belt policies would appear to be effective in protecting the countryside area, although at present there are no systems in place to monitor the effectiveness of Green Belt policy or the protection of high grade agricultural land. This is an area which could be investigated in the future.