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# Alderholt and the East Dorset Local Plan Review



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On behalf of Alderholt Parish Council  
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## Executive Summary (key conclusions)

Alderholt is a comparatively large village, that is mainly a product of a major housing boom in the late c20th following the closure of the railway and installation of mains drainage. The significant increase in houses during this period has resulted in a dormitory settlement that is poorly served by roads or rail, and has no major employment or community facilities. It has far fewer facilities than Beaminster, a similar-sized town in West Dorset that has benefited from a much longer history.

The proposal put forward through the East Dorset Local Plan Review, which was to development at least 1,000 further dwellings in this location, is in complete contrast to the plan's stated strategic objectives. Alderholt appears to have been targeted on the basis that it has no Green Belt or AONB status (both designations run up to but do not cross the parish boundary). The level of housing proposed is completely disproportionate to (a) the settlement size, (b) its position in the settlement hierarchy (c) the housing needs of the local area which Alderholt serves. It is not balanced by any employment provision (which is particularly important given the unsustainable balance between local jobs and resident of employment age in the parish). The scale of growth proposed through the East Dorset Local Plan Review would bring Alderholt's population in line with many of the smaller towns across Dorset, but without the facilities those towns benefit from. Furthermore, there are obvious difficulties in creating a vibrant local centre for Alderholt, given that the existing facilities are scattered and the potential areas of growth do not readily coincide with a natural 'High Street', or attracting any significant level of employment.

There are other issues of concern relating to how the East Dorset Local Plan Review was prepared, and how the proposals have been assessed. There has been no meaningful discussion and cooperation with the adjoining local planning authority and service providers that is necessary to understand the cross-boundary consequences and infrastructure needs.

The sustainability appraisal that accompanied the first stage of the review fails to clearly identify and appropriately examine all reasonable alternative options. Furthermore, the area around Alderholt is particularly sensitive in terms of indirect impacts on European sites, but this does not appear to have been fully recognised in the plans. The provision of a SANG needs to be identified and further consideration given as to whether the recreation and other impacts of development closest to the Dorset Heaths would be offset. Mitigation measures in respect of the River Avon SAC also do not appear to have been discussed to assess whether these are deliverable.

A more proportionate level of growth for Alderholt (taking into account the wider strategic need for Dorset), would be closer to 15 dwellings per annum (i.e. in the region of 225 dwellings over a 15 year period), accompanied by investment to support employment growth and improved sustainable transport links. There are already extant planning permissions that can deliver the majority of this housing growth, although they will only bring about limited affordable housing provision and no employment.

The decision by Dorset Council to stop work on the East Dorset Local Plan Review, in order to progress the production of a Dorset Local Plan by 2023, is to be welcomed. This will provide an opportunity for the future development of Alderholt to be more carefully examined, and hopefully for the evidence compiled as part of this report to be taken into account.

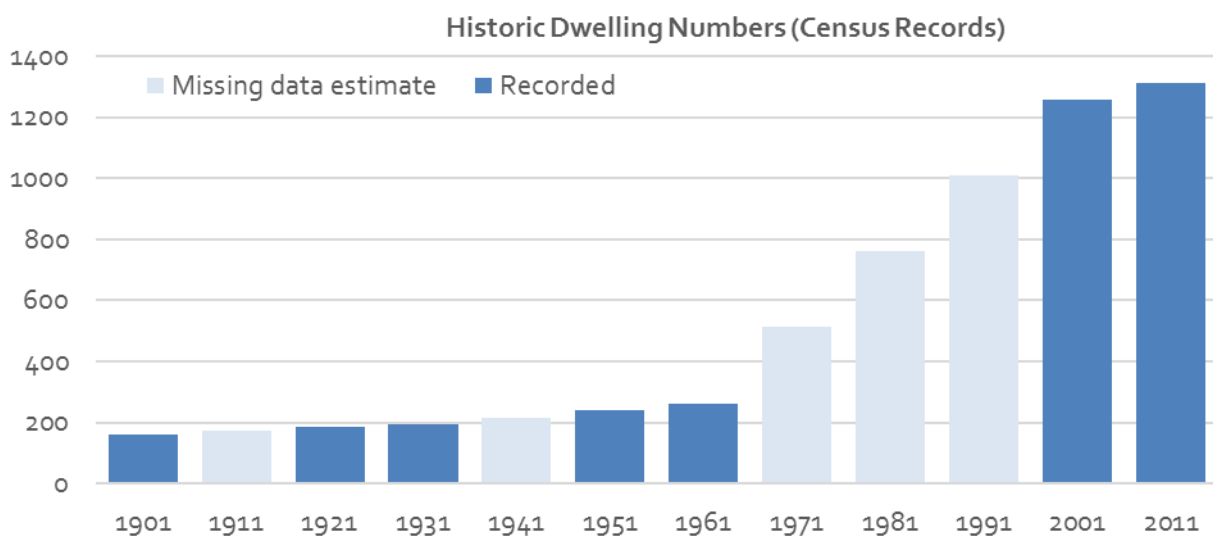
## 1. Alderholt

**1.1.** Alderholt lies within Dorset (in what was East Dorset District prior to the Local Government reorganisation in April 2019) close to the administrative boundary with Hampshire / New Forest. The nearest town is Fordingbridge, with its town centre approximately 4km away via the B3078. Verwood is approximately 7km (by road) and the conurbation and larger town of Salisbury about 20km distant.

### Brief History

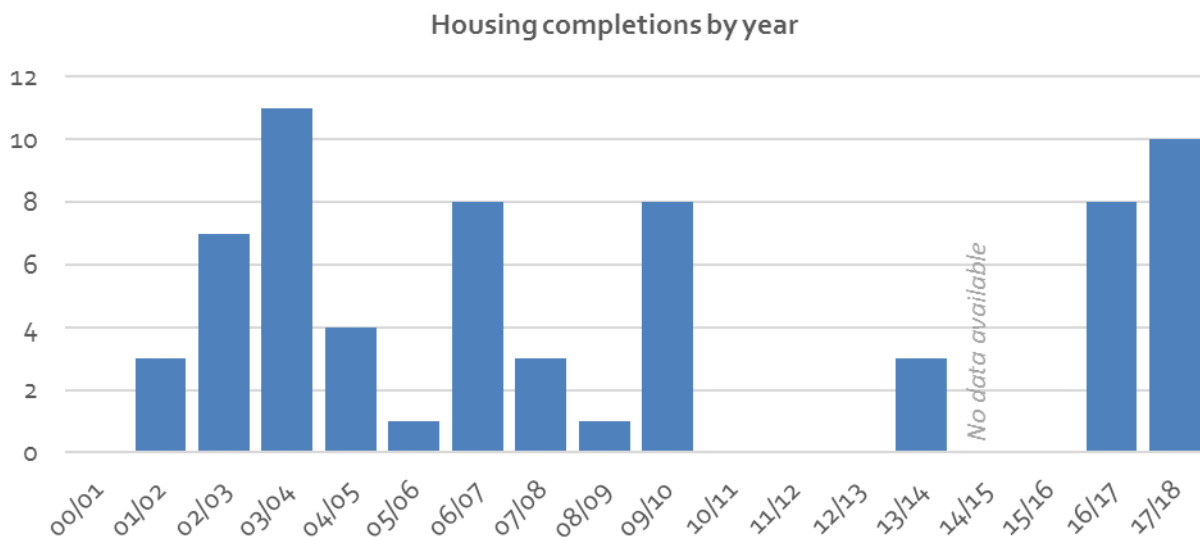
**1.2.** The main development of Alderholt as a village of any size dates back to the mid c19th when the main road connecting Cranborne with Fordingbridge was made up, and the Salisbury and District railway was built, running from Alderbury to West Moors. The station in Alderholt opened in the 1870s.

**1.3.** Census records<sup>1</sup> indicate that the population of the village was reasonably stable at around 700 persons in the first part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The limited size of the village before World War II is reflected in its lack of any Listed buildings within the village envelope. The railway closed in the mid-1960s, following which there was a period of further growth (particular with the installation of mains drainage in the 1970s).



<sup>1</sup> [http://www.visionofbritain.org.uk/unit/10447550/cube/TOT\\_POP](http://www.visionofbritain.org.uk/unit/10447550/cube/TOT_POP)

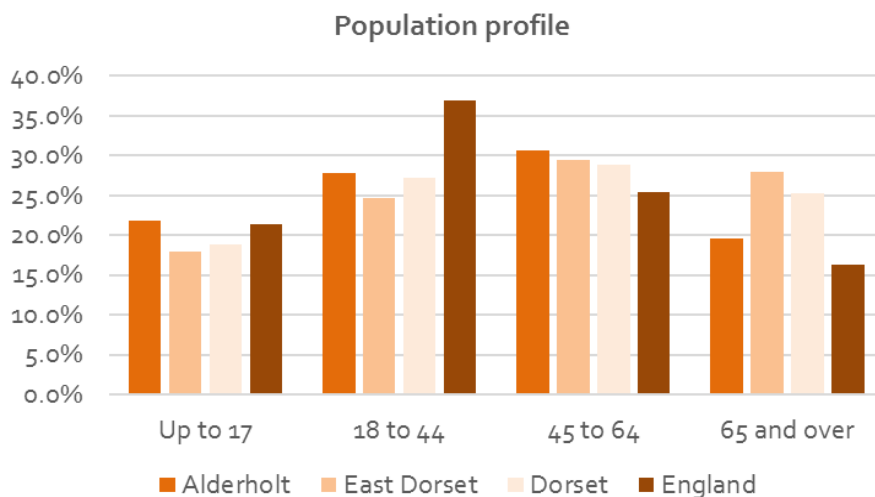
1.4. More recently, monitoring records from the beginning of this century<sup>2</sup> suggest that recently building rates have been around 3 to 4 dwellings per annum.



**Key Statistics – Housing and Population**

1.5. According to the 2011 Census, Alderholt (the parish) had a usual resident population of 3,171 people, living in 1,263 households (with a total dwelling stock of 1,311 homes). Its 2016 population is estimated at around 3,159 persons. It is a large village, and its population size is comparable to the small town of Beaminster in West Dorset and Lytchett Matravers in Purbeck (both of which are within a 10% variance), and also with Lyme Regis and Wool in West Dorset, and Stalbridge in North Dorset (all within a 20% variance).

1.6. Its population profile favours younger residents, with a relatively healthy proportion of children and adults under 45 years of age, compared to the Dorset average. The most likely explanation for this is the lower than average house prices (the mean house price being around £336,500 in the last 5 years<sup>3</sup>), similar to



Verwood (which also has a similarly young age profile) but much less than nearby Fordingbridge (£373,150), Ringwood (£422,750) and Cranborne (£463,000).

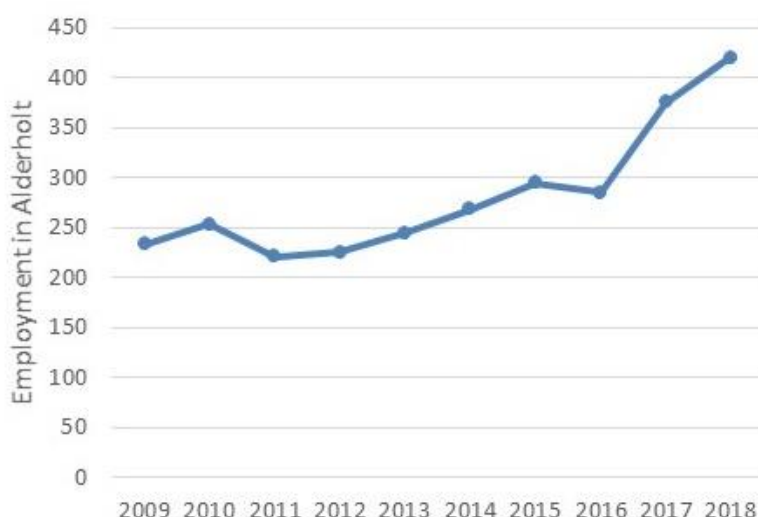
<sup>2</sup> Based on previous monitoring records published by Dorset County Council up to 2014, and monitoring records since 2015 supplied by East Dorset District Council - completions data for 2018/19 was not available at the time of writing this report.

<sup>3</sup> As recorded on the Land Registry Records January 2014- December 2018 and correlated with Zoopla averages

**1.7.** This finding also correlates with the typical household size, with a generally higher proportion of family households (with dependent children – these make up about 31% of all households compared to the Dorset average of just under 24%), and far fewer one-person households (making up just under 20% of all households, compared the Dorset average of nearly 30%). About three out of four homes (77%) have 3 or more bedrooms, and three out of five (62%) are detached properties. There are very few bedsits and one-bedroom properties (about one in 50 homes) or flats (less than 3% of all homes). This shows a housing stock that leans more towards detached family-sized homes than the Dorset average, reinforcing the picture that the homes are comparatively more affordable to families than those closer to the conurbation or in one of the more historic settlements.

### **Key Statistics – Businesses and Employment**

**1.8.** Statistics drawn from the Business Register and Employment Surveys (2009 – 2018) show on average about 270 people in employment based in or around Alderholt<sup>4</sup>. There has been a steady increase over this time (of about 20 jobs/year), with the latest figures showing a more marked rise in total employment. The main sectors being retail and, to a lesser extent, construction and education.



**1.9.** The 2011 census, which recorded a working population of 1,619 adults at that time, indicated that 223 people (14% of the working population) worked from home and a further 84 worked within 2km of home

(therefore likely to be based in the parish) – just under 1 in 5 (19%) working locally. A further 168 had no fixed commute (likely to be travelling from home to different customers). The remaining 1,312 working residents were commuting regularly, with 3 out of 5 of those commuters travelling more than 20km to work. The approximate ratio of local jobs:workers is around 1:4.3, compared to 1.21 across East Dorset and 1:1.1 across Dorset as a whole.

**1.10.** The 2019 household survey received responses from 197 households with at least 1 working adult (with a total of 356 adults in work). Of these, less than 1 in 5 (17%) worked in Alderholt, of which just under half worked from home – slightly less than the 2011 Census results. The commuting workforce is split between a wide number of different destinations, the most common being Fordingbridge (10% of the workforce), Bournemouth (9%), Ringwood (8%), Salisbury (8%) and Southampton (6%). By far the main mode of transport was the car, with more than 4 out of 5 workers (82%) driving to their workplace, with very few lift-sharing or using public transport.

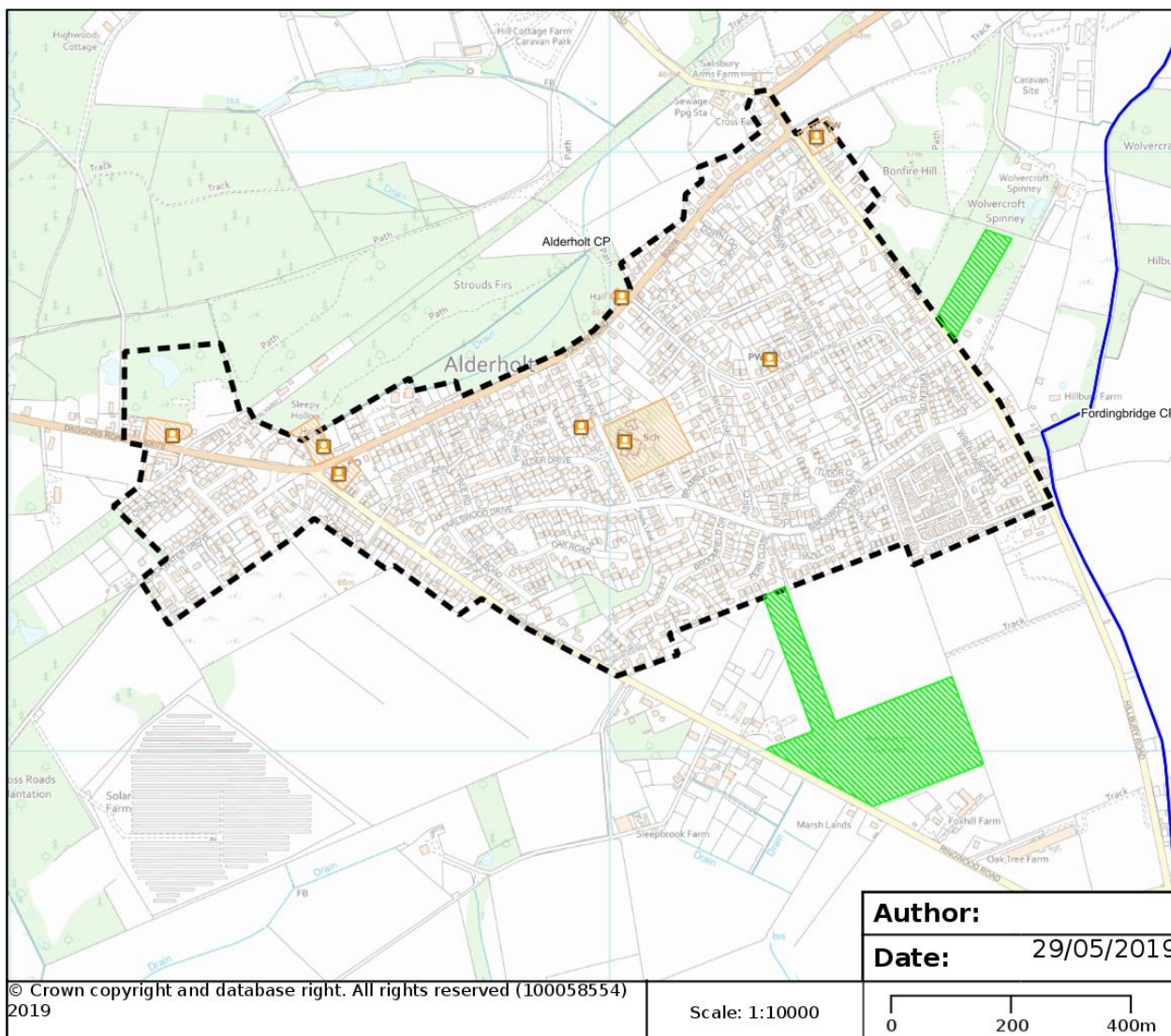
<sup>4</sup> The data is based on the ward boundary which is comparable with the parish

**1.11.** It is difficult to identify any major employers in the parish. Based on business rates the largest businesses operating locally (excluding those providing not-for-profit community facilities such as the First School) are:

- Wolvercroft World Of Plants, Fordingbridge Road
- Co-operative Stores, Ringwood Road
- The Churchill Arms, Daggons Road
- Hill Cottage Farm (Caravan Site), Sandleheath Road
- Lake Farm (Country and Fishing Holidays), Cheaters Lane

### Key Statistics – Local Facilities

**1.12.** The village has a modest range of local facilities. It has a village hall and another smaller venue (reading room), a local convenience store and post office (run by the Co-op), a first school (with pre-school), an out-reach branch of the Fordingbridge surgery, a pub and two places of worship. Most of these facilities are located on or close to the B3078 road that runs along the northern side of the village. The first school (St James) and branch surgery (of the Fordingbridge clinic) are on Park Lane, which runs south from the B3078. The main recreation ground is on land to the south of the village.



**1.13.** In terms of education, the first school feeds into the middle school in Cranborne and Queen Elizabeth Upper School in Wimborne. A household survey undertaken in 2017 suggests that about a third of school-aged children are opting into the Hampshire school system. Some of the closest services are provided by Hampshire – for example, there are no local household recycling centres, the nearest being Somerley. The 2019 household survey also showed that about 2 in 5 (40%) of families with children aged between 5 to 15 used the local school, very few said they were actively 'going elsewhere', which suggests that the local school is well used.

**1.14.** The 2019 household survey looked into how frequently local residents used the local facilities. The local shop (Co-op) was regularly used (i.e. at least weekly or more frequently) by 4 in 5 (81%) of households. However it was also clear that the 'main' shop is anywhere but Alderholt. Alderholt featured as the first choice for a main food shop location in less than 3% of the total responses, and was only mentioned in the 'top three' by about 1 in 14 households. The survey also showed that the recreation ground is valued, as it is typically used at least weekly by about 1 in 4 households (23%). The doctor's surgery had the highest proportion of households saying that they 'generally go elsewhere (about 1 in 6 responses (17%)), which may be due to the limited opening times of the branch surgery (11:30 to 1pm) or could simply be simply patient preference. In terms of facilities or services that local residents consider to be needed, after improved bus services (which was the top priority), the next most mentioned requirement was in relation to shops / cafes / restaurants, followed by a doctor's surgery.

**1.15.** In comparison, Beaminster, a small town of similar size, was assessed as part of a joint retail study in 2018<sup>5</sup>, with the following findings noted:

- > 5 convenience units, comprising a Co-op, 2 bakers, a butchers and greengrocers
- > 15 comparison units, dominated by independent retailers and including a chemists, a general furniture stores and a DIY / home improvements store
- > 18 service outlets, spanning retail services (mainly health and beauty), finance and business (property) and more limited leisure (food and drink).
- > The last remaining bank was noted as having closed in 2012, which could impact on the centre's ongoing vitality and viability
- > Only 1 vacant unit
- > Attractive, high quality environment
- > Adequate accessibility (recognising the need for more pedestrian crossings in the centre and improved public transport)

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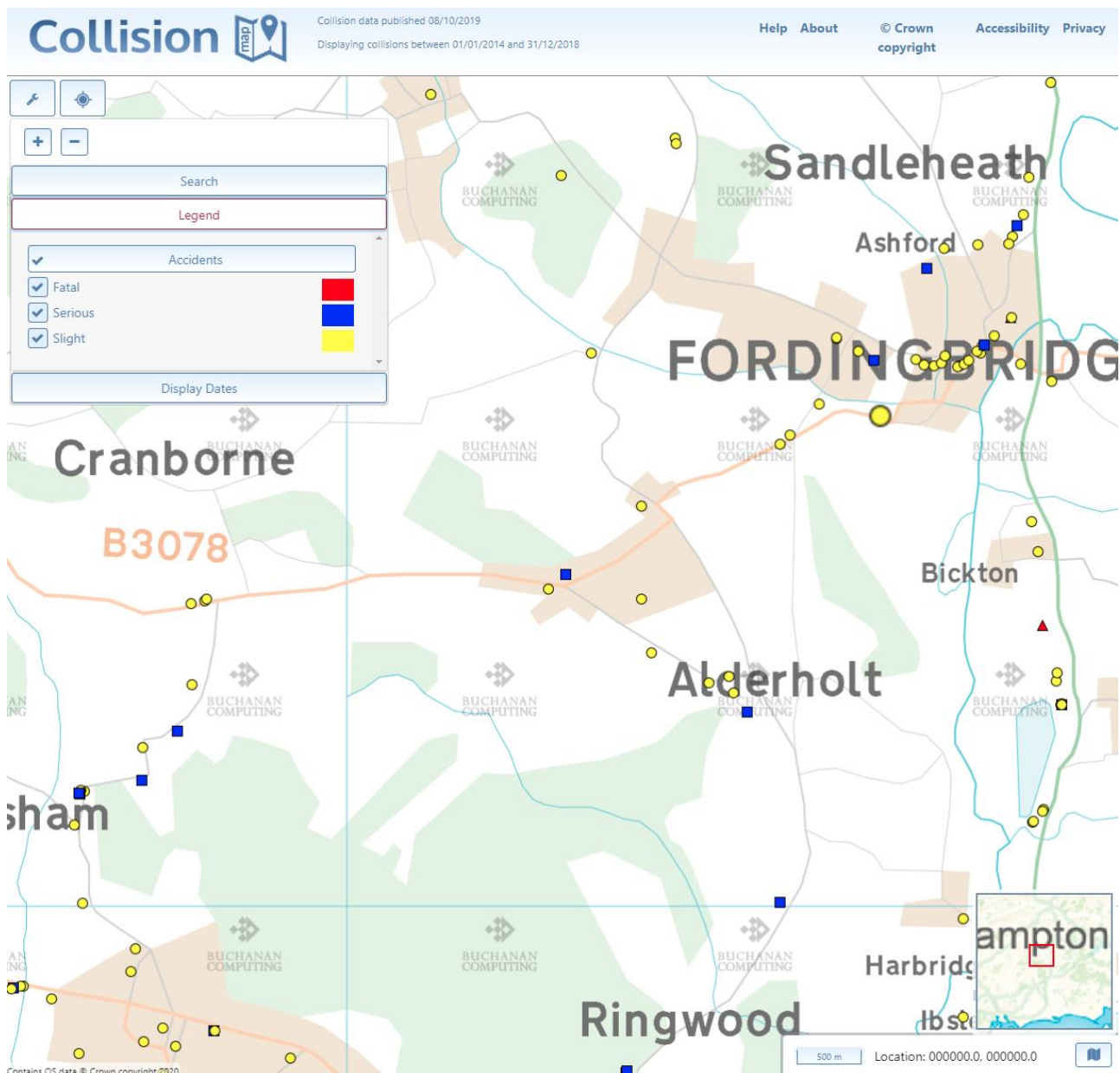
<sup>5</sup> <https://www.dorsetcouncil.gov.uk/planning-buildings-land/planning-policy/north-dorset/local-plan-review/pdfs/north-dorset-local-plan-review/evidence-base/final-report-20.03.18-v2.pdf>



## Key Statistics – Transport and Traffic

**1.16.** There are no main roads (trunk roads or A-class roads) in the parish. The only B-class road is the B3078 that runs east to west from the New Forest passing through Fordingbridge, through Alderholt and onto Cranborne, and then heading south towards Wimborne Minster. It follows a slightly longer and much more winding alternative to the parallel A31 to the south. When asked which way people travel to Salisbury or to Ringwood, it is clear that there is a dispersed pattern of travel (for example, 57% of those travelling to Salisbury go via Fordingbridge, and 43% via Rockbourne).

**1.17.** There are a number of pinch-points and bends created by the historic nature of the local roads, but according to the recorded accident level is relatively low, with one serious accident recorded on Station Road (in 2014) and several on Harbridge Drove to the south of the village. The data may well under-report the actual number of accidents (the 2019 household survey responses suggests that there should have been at least 25 incidents reported by local residents and over 100 incidents that were not reported).

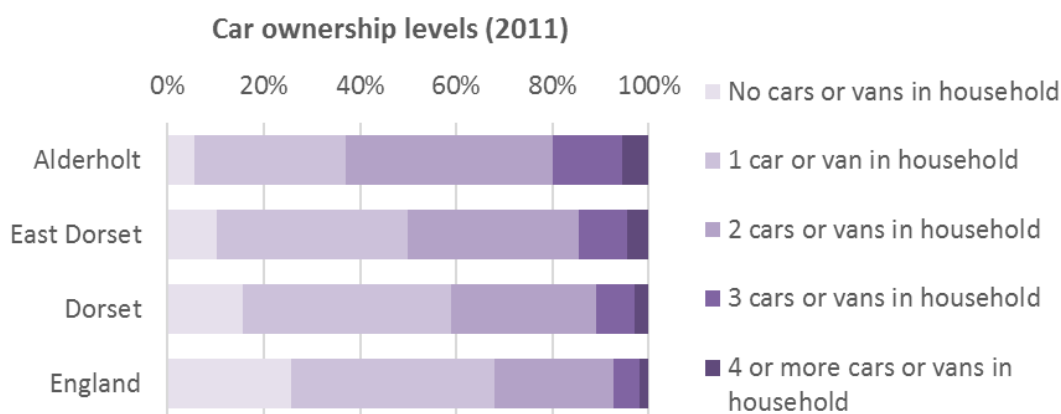


**1.18.** There are no railways in or close to the parish – Alderholt is almost as far from a railway as any other location in Dorset could be, with the closest (Salisbury, Christchurch or Bournemouth) all being about 30 minutes’ drive. The 2019 household survey identified very few residents (3) who commute by train (primarily to London) for work.

**1.19.** There are also no commercially run bus routes connecting to Alderholt. Dorset Community Transport runs the only bus service (service 97) which operates just three days a week (Tuesdays, Wednesdays and Fridays) from around 9:30am to 2:30pm travelling between Ringwood, Verwood, Cranborne, Alderholt and Fordingbridge. Funding for the 97 is only known on a year to year basis. The 2019 survey showed that only 1 in about 350 workers used the bus service to get to and from their workplace (and this was in a household where there were already 3 other people commuting by car).

**1.20.** On this basis it is fair to say that the public transport offer is extremely poor. Improvements to the local bus service was the number one top priority for local residents, by far exceeding (by a factor of at least 2) any other option.

**1.21.** Given the poor public transport, it is also no surprise that (according to the 2011 Census) nearly two in three households (63%) had 2 or more cars (compared to the Dorset average of 41% and twice the England average of 32%) and very few (less than 6%) did not have a car or van.



## 2. The East Dorset Local Plan Review: Proposed development at Alderholt

**2.1.** Section 5.4.2 of the Options Stage Local Plan Review deals specifically with Alderholt. It does not include any detailed consideration of the size or nature of Alderholt or relationship with the surrounding area (other than referencing that it is a village on the county boundary, with the main area for shops around Charing Cross, only one public school (a First school) and recreation ground. There is no mention of its size, employment or any other existing facilities (such as the community hall, pub, churches and branch surgery).

**2.2.** Draft Policy 5.28 of the Local Plan Review reads as follows:

**Housing options - Alderholt**  
 Land to the south and west of Alderholt is considered suitable for housing development to provide a minimum of 1000 dwellings.

Development of land in this area will include, but is not limited to, the following sites:

- land south east of the village adjoining Hillbury Rd
- land at north of Ringwood Road
- land at Cromwell Cottage
- land south of Ringwood Road
- land adjacent to Blackwater Grove
- land at Pug's Fields and Crossroads
- Pug's Plantation
- The Oaks Daggons Road
- rear of Pittswood, Daggons Road

Development of the site is likely to be subject to the following criteria:

- Creation of high quality residential development, of a density and design appropriate to a more rural location;
- Up to 50% affordable housing in line with Policy 4.17;
- Contributions toward heathland mitigation in accordance with policy 4.2;
- Development of a flood mitigation strategy as appropriate;
- Contributions toward and physical provision of transport infrastructure in line with policy 3.12;
- Contributions to, or provision of additional retail, health and community facilities;
- Contributions to education provision; and
- Contributions to open space in accordance with policy 4.30.

**2.3.** There is little detail on the quantum of infrastructure and facilities that a development of this size will need. The supporting text includes references to the following:

- > the impact on education provision has yet to be fully assessed but will be an important consideration
- > transport modelling work has yet to be completed
- > initial discussions with the Clinical Commissioning Group have indicated interest in creating a full time surgery in the village based on this level of housing growth
- > whilst the focus for future retail development in the district are around the town and district centres, smaller scale provision may be considered
- > in addition to SANG provision new development will need to provide open space provision in accordance with the standards set out in the Local Plan and based on the level of provision locally

**2.4.** No reference is made to the need for community venues, indoor sports provision, wider healthcare and social services needs etc... Furthermore, no reference is made to the need to mitigate the impacts of increase sewage within the River Avon catchment (which Alderholt falls within as sewage from Alderholt flows into the sewage treatment works in Fordingbridge).

### 3. The Local Plan Review: Background and Strategy

#### *Housing and Employment Needs*

**3.1.** The housing need identified in the Local Plan Review is based on the new (2018) Government methodology (with a 40% cap applied to the uplift for affordability), giving a target of 442 dwellings per annum across East Dorset. This is about 15% higher than the previously assessed housing need (385 dwellings per annum)<sup>6</sup>. The review acknowledges that an update to the Strategic Housing Market Assessment is planned and should be published shortly.

**3.2.** The last employment land review conducted<sup>7</sup> was undertaken more than 10 years previously to inform the Core Strategy preparation. Only Stage 1 of the review was completed (a stocktake of the existing situation, including an initial assessment of the 'fitness for purpose' of existing allocated employment sites) and therefore there was no consequential review of the scale and nature of likely demand. The subsequent Dorset-wide workspace strategy<sup>8</sup> in 2016 does not specify requirements for East Dorset but looks instead more strategically at the eastern and western parts of Dorset (aligning with the housing market areas, with Eastern Dorset including the conurbation and adjoining districts). The study concluded that, even allowing for growth and flexibility, there is a sufficient quantity of employment land of the right type, in the right location and suitably available to meet the needs of the market over the study period to 2033. **Eastern Dorset: Requirement = 223ha (inc 20% Flexibility) vs Existing Supply = 276ha.** Existing employment sites were identified at

- Ferndown (the Ferndown and Uddens Industrial Estates) (the ELR identified 30ha available at Blunts Farm and 8ha available East of Cobham Road),
- Wimborne (the Brook Road, Riverside and Stone Lane Industrial Estates) (the ELR identified 2ha available at Brook Road - Flight's North Area),
- Verwood (Ebblake Industrial Estate) (the ELR identified 1ha available),
- West Moors (Gundrymoor Industrial Estate),
- Sturminster Marshall (Bailie Gate) (the ELR identified 3ha available) and
- Three Legged Cross (Woolsbridge Industrial Estate (the ELR identified 13ha available) – also in easy reach of St Leonards and St Ives)

#### *Strategic Objectives*

**3.3.** The Local Plan Vision is set out in the Options report is based on 7 Strategic Objectives, which are supposed to link to the policies and site allocations which help achieve them.

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<sup>6</sup> 2015 Strategic Housing Market Assessment <https://www.dorsetcouncil.gov.uk/planning-buildings-land/planning-policy/joint-planning-policy-work/pdfs/shma/2015/east-dorset-summary-report.pdf>

<sup>7</sup> Christchurch and East Dorset Local Plan Review (undated but estimated as 2007) <https://www.dorsetforyou.gov.uk/planning-buildings-land/planning-policy/east-dorset/local-development-framework/evidence-base-studies/christchurch-and-east-dorset-employment-land-review.aspx>

<sup>8</sup> Bournemouth, Dorset and Poole Workspace Strategy and Study (2016) <https://www.dorsetforyou.gov.uk/planning-buildings-land/planning-policy/joint-planning-policy-work/bournemouth-dorset-and-poole-workspace-strategy-and-study.aspx>

Table 1. Strategic Objectives

	Strategic Objective	How...
1	To manage and safeguard the natural environment of East Dorset	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Retain and protect the Green Belt except for strategic release of land to provide new housing</li> <li>– Protect the Cranborne Chase and West Wiltshire Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty</li> <li>– Avoid Impact on or close to designated sites</li> <li>– Provide new greenspace and biodiversity enhancements</li> </ul>
2	To maintain and improve the character of the towns and villages, and to create vibrant local centres	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Develop clear hierarchy of centres with town and district centres in Wimborne, Ferndown, Verwood, West Moors and West Parley</li> <li>– Protect heritage assets</li> <li>– Create a sense of place with landscape features and open spaces</li> </ul>
3	To adapt to the challenges of Climate Change	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Support more sustainable patterns of development in accessible locations,</li> <li>– Incorporate carbon reduction, water, and energy efficiency measures</li> <li>– Avoid areas at risk of flooding</li> </ul>
4	To enable the mixed economy of East Dorset to grow, and to develop new employment sectors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Provide a range of employment sites on key sites across the area to meeting the needs of the local and sub-regional economy</li> <li>– Support agriculture and horticulture and rural farm diversification in appropriate locations near key rural settlements</li> <li>– Protect key environmental features which attract tourism, including the AONB and the Dorset Heaths</li> </ul>
5	To deliver a suitable, affordable and sustainable range of housing to provide for local needs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Provide sufficient housing to address local needs, whilst maintaining the character of local communities. New housing growth will be allowed in more rural settlements to sustain local communities and services.</li> </ul>
6	To reduce the need for people to travel and to have more travel choices	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Locate development in the most accessible locations, focused on prime transport corridors and town centres, either close to existing facilities, or where good transport links exist to such facilities.</li> <li>– Develop new green infrastructure including footpaths, cycleways and bridleways to allow people to enjoy recreation without the need to travel by car.</li> </ul>
7	To help our communities to thrive and help people support each other	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– The focus for commercial, retail and community facilities will be in the main town centres of Wimborne, Ferndown and Verwood, with district centres and villages playing a supporting role</li> <li>– New facilities and services will be developed alongside the new neighbourhoods</li> </ul>

3.4. The Local Plan Review includes the identification of the settlement hierarchy in draft Policy 3.2. This lists 6 separate tiers, from main settlements through to hamlets. It is the main

settlements of Wimborne Minster, Ferndown and West Parley, Verwood and Corfe Mullet that are intended to be the “major focus” for all types of development at the top of the spatial hierarchy. District and Suburban Centres are then listed as appropriate for development (including employment at West Moors). Rural Service Centres are the fourth tier and are intended to be “the main providers for the rural areas where plan led residential development and infill within the settlement boundary will be allowed of a scale that reinforces their role as providers of community, leisure and retail facilities to support the village and adjacent communities”. Alderholt is listed within this category alongside Cranborne, Sixpenny Handley, Sturminster Marshall and Three Legged Cross. More limited growth “that supports the role of the settlement as a provider of services to its home community” is proposed for the remaining villages.

**3.5.** The strategy for the rural settlements is a change from the previous plan, and is explained in paragraph 5.4.1.2 as follows: “The rural settlements of East Dorset have historically been subject to very restrictive planning policies, and consequently very little development over the past 30 years. Whilst the overall strategy of the plan remains to focus development at the main towns in East Dorset, there is a growing recognition that rural villages need some new growth and development in order to at least sustain rural services and shops, and to provide a suitable range of housing to meet local needs.”

*Table 2. Settlement Hierarchy*

	<b>Hierarchy</b>	<b>Named settlements</b>	<b>Strategy...</b>
1	Main settlement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Wimborne Minster,</li> <li>– Ferndown and West Parley,</li> <li>– Verwood,</li> <li>– Corfe Mullen</li> </ul>	To provide the major focus for community, cultural, leisure, retail, utility, employment and residential development.
2	District Centres	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– West Moors</li> </ul>	To provide for smaller scale community, cultural, leisure, retail, employment and residential development
3	Suburban Centres	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Colehill,</li> <li>– St Leonards and St Ives</li> </ul>	To provide for some residential development along with community, leisure and retail facilities to meet day to day needs within the existing urban areas.
4	Rural Service Centres	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Alderholt,</li> <li>– Cranborne,</li> <li>– Sixpenny Handley,</li> <li>– Sturminster Marshall,</li> <li>– Three Legged Cross</li> </ul>	Main providers for the rural areas of a scale that reinforces their role as providers of community, leisure and retail facilities to support the village and adjacent communities.
5	Villages	Edmondsham, Furzehill, Gaunts Common, Gussage All Saints, Gussage St Michael, Hinton Martell, Holt etc	Development will be allowed that supports the role of the settlement as a provider of services to its home community
6	Hamlets	All other settlements	Only development that is functionally required to be in the rural area

## Proposals for Growth

**3.6.** Draft Policy 3.4 of the Local Plan Options is based on providing 8,854 new homes over the 20 year period from 2013 (442 dwellings per annum), with 2,396 of these provided through existing allocated sites, and a further 2,527 of these on newly identified sites. The previous allocations were at Corfe Mullen, Wimborne/Colehill, Ferndown/West Parley and Verwood. The majority (1,405) of the new site allocations are proposed to be at the rural service centres, of which the main provision would be at Alderholt (at least 1,000).

**3.7.** Draft Policies 3.6 and 4.31 deal with the provision of employment land. The policies identify the employment sites to be retained and how a further 46ha additional employment land will be provided. The additional sites comprise:

- > the addition of Blunts Farm near to the Ferndown and Uddens Industrial Estates, Ferndown – a 30ha allocation which is intended to provide a ‘strategic higher quality site’ to attract ‘higher order’ uses
- > additional 13ha allocation at the Woolsbridge Industrial Estate, sited between Three Legged Cross and St Leonards and St Ives
- > additional 3ha allocation at Bailie Gate, Sturminster Marshall

**3.8.** In paragraph 4.6.6 of the Options report, it is noted that “Rural areas only provide limited employment opportunities and shopping facilities. There is a requirement for key rural centres such as Sturminster Marshall, Sixpenny Handley, Cranborne and Alderholt to maintain and possibly expand existing employment, shops and facilities to reduce the need to travel. Nevertheless it is unrealistic to believe that sufficient facilities can be provided in these small settlements to avoid trips to other centres in the area. However, the rise of the Internet now enables rural communities to access goods and services by different means.”

**3.9.** Taking into account the proposals for growth and settlement hierarchy and constraints, the following table provides a useful overview for comparison purposes. It includes data on the number of dwellings (based on the 2011 census records for the relevant parish), allocations (as set out in the 2014 and options review) and what level of growth this suggests (not accounting for infill development opportunities). It also records key constraints (Green Belt and AONB) and employment opportunities within easy reach. For ease of reference Wimborne and Colehill are treated together as a single settlement, as are Ferndown and West Parley.

*Table 3. Local Plan Growth options comparison*

Settlement	Tier	2011 parish household	2014 Core Strategy	2017 LPR Options	% growth comparison	GB	AO NB	Employment
Ferndown / West Parley	1	11,141	660 (+100) <sup>A</sup>	580	11.7%	Y		1 major site + 30ha growth
Verwood	1	6,743	295	85	5.6%	Y		1 major site
Wimborne and Colehill	1	14,751	1,260	0	8.5%	Y		3 smaller sites
Corfe Mullen	1	10,140	250	235 (-112) <sup>B</sup>	8.1%	Y		n/a
West Moors	2	4,290	0	170	4.5%	Y		1 smaller site
St Leonards and St Ives	3	3,472	0 (+210) <sup>C</sup>	0	6.0%	Y		1 major site (at TLC)
Alderholt	4	1,366	0	1,000	73.2%			n/a
Sturminster Marshall	4	822	0	250	30.4%	Y		1 smaller site + 3ha growth

Three Legged Cross	4	(in Verwood)	0	0	0.0%	Y		1 major site + 13ha growth
Sixpenny Handley	4	378	0	120	31.7%		Y	n/a
Cranborne	4	332	0	35	10.5%		Y	n/a

<sup>A</sup> Earlier LP allocation at Green Worlds, Ringwood Road

<sup>B</sup> reduction as school not relocating

<sup>C</sup> on the St Leonards Hospital site ref 3/14/0871/FUL

**3.10.** What this data clear shows is the disproportionate level of growth proposed for Alderholt compared to its position in the settlement hierarchy, the resulting massive expansion of the population (a 73% increase, far higher than any other settlement), and the lack of any consideration of employment balance.

## 4. New Forest Local Plan

**4.1.** The review of the New Forest Local Plan was well underway at the time the East Dorset Plan was out for consultation, with beginning its examination and hearings in June 2019. The Inspectors have identified that Main Modifications are necessary in order for the Local Plan 2016-2026 Part 1 to be found 'sound', and the consultation on these closes on 31 January 2020.

**4.2.** Fordingbridge is a town and in the top tier of the spatial hierarchy of settlements with some 2,896 dwellings (2011). It lies approximately 2km east of Alderholt and is closer than Verwood or the conurbation. The new Local Plan, if approved, proposes a further 1,015 dwellings (which would increase the town by about a third).

*Table 4. Fordingbridge growth options*

Policy SS16	Land north of Station Road, Ashford, west of Fordingbridge	Residential development of at least 140 homes and public open space
Policy SS17	Land at Whitsbury Road, north-west of Fordingbridge	Residential development of at least 330 homes and open space (in addition to the 145 homes already permitted within the site boundary east of Whitsbury Road)
Policy SS18	Land at Burgate, north of Fordingbridge	Residential-led mixed use development comprising at least 400 homes and public open space, employment and local shopping and service facilities (subject to demand)

**4.3.** The New Forest Local Plan Review was accompanied by a Business Needs and Commercial Property Market Assessment which was published in 2017<sup>9</sup>. This concluded that there is just under 10 years of employment land supply in the New Forest District Council area and as such it would be appropriate to allow some employment land to be brought forward as mixed-use

<sup>9</sup> New Forest District Council and New Forest National Park Authority Business Needs and Commercial Property Market Assessment (2017) [http://forms.newforest.gov.uk/ufsadc/form\\_docs/Policy/Evidence%20Base/EC%20-%20Economy/01%20Submission%20Documents/EC01%20Business%20Needs%20and%20Commercial%20Property%20Market%20Assessment%20Chilmark%20Consulting%202017.pdf?ufsReturnURL=https%3A%2F%2Fforms.newforest.gov.uk%3A4443%2Fufsadc%2Fufsreturn%3Febz%3D1\\_1552396373670](http://forms.newforest.gov.uk/ufsadc/form_docs/Policy/Evidence%20Base/EC%20-%20Economy/01%20Submission%20Documents/EC01%20Business%20Needs%20and%20Commercial%20Property%20Market%20Assessment%20Chilmark%20Consulting%202017.pdf?ufsReturnURL=https%3A%2F%2Fforms.newforest.gov.uk%3A4443%2Fufsadc%2Fufsreturn%3Febz%3D1_1552396373670)



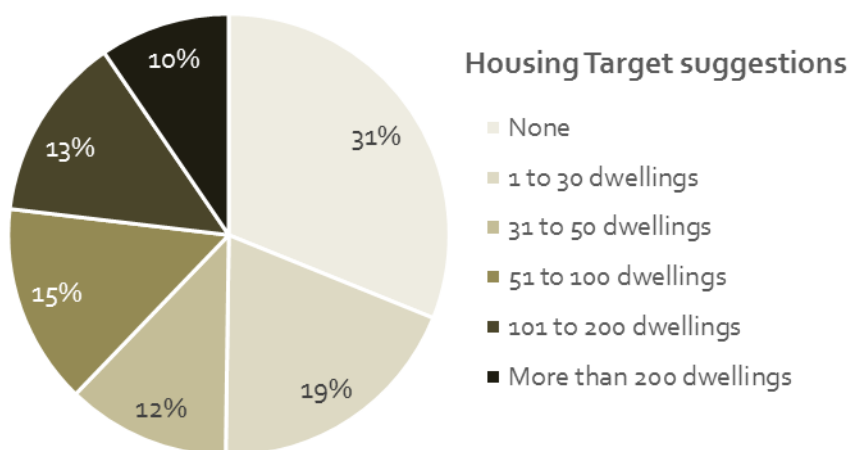
schemes. The release of the Ashford Works site in Fordingbridge for alternative uses was also suggested.

4.4. There is no mention in the Local Plan review of adjoining areas and towns and the influence these have had on any strategy. In the New Forest’s Duty to Cooperate statement the response from East Dorset District Council acknowledges that there are a number of sites around Alderholt which were being actively considered which they were discussing with the NFDC officers “as there may be links to any development you propose at Fordingbridge”. There is no specific reference to the outcomes of such discussions. This is critical for issues such as traffic and also for sewage treatment (and potential adverse impacts in relation to the River Avon Special Area of Conservation – for which the sites in Fordingbridge are required to achieve phosphate neutrality in relation to wastewater discharge and drainage run-off).

## 5. Understanding likely Housing and Employment Needs at Alderholt

### Housing Needs Statistics

5.1. Alderholt Parish Council undertook a household survey in March / April 2017. A total of 460 responses were received, representing just over one third of all households in the parish. A further household survey was undertaken in Summer 2019, achieving a similar level of response.



5.2. The 2017 survey results showed that local residents are not wholly opposed to further housing development, with responses relatively evenly split between those who felt the village should have more housing, and those that disagreed. When quizzed in terms of overall numbers, about half suggesting at least 30 dwellings over the next 15 years, but only a small proportion (10%) consider that over 200 dwellings would be appropriate. This would suggest that a target between 31 to 50 dwellings would have local support, but above that could well be strongly resisted. There was also strong support for low cost affordable housing to buy, particularly family homes (and semi-detach / detached). There was also general support for more employment workplaces in the village to accompany any housing.

5.3. When asked about what was important for Alderholt’s future (key issues / priorities) common responses in the 2017 household survey were:

- the need to retain the village feel of Alderholt in its rural setting,
- that development should be well designed and generally small scale (not large housing estates) and include enough parking for likely car ownership levels,
- the need for workplaces in the village to help reduce the level of commuting,

- the affordability of homes (for those who have grown up in the village but are struggling to get onto the housing ladder),
- the importance of better infrastructure, especially the road network into and out of the village, and public transport.

**5.4.** The 2019 household survey took the opportunity to examine local needs in more depth. Residents were asked if someone in their home, or immediate family living away, would be likely to require an affordable home in the Alderholt area in the next 10 years. From the 420 households who responded (which was about a third of all households in the parish), there was a need for 77 affordable homes identified (20 to rent, 47 to buy and 10 intermediate / shared equity). Only 4 of the households responding to the survey said that they were already on the Dorset Council affordable housing register. On this basis, whilst it would be reasonable to assume that the actual demand is likely to be significantly higher (taking into account the response rate), it is possible that some of the need apparent from the survey includes households who could potentially access housing on the open market or choose to locate outside of the area, as well as an element of double counting.

**5.5.** Dorset Council’s Housing Register (June 2019) identified just 8 households who would qualify for an affordable home, of which 7 were already living in the village. The main need was to rented housing.

Dorset Council Housing Register	Affordable / Social Rented – dwellings needed				Intermediate / affordable home ownership – dwellings needed			
	1bed	2bed	3bed	4+bed	1bed	2bed	3bed	4+bed
Currently living in Alderholt	2	1	0	3	1	0	0	0
Living elsewhere but have local connection to Alderholt	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
No local connection but requested Alderholt	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0

**5.6.** The latest household growth projections for East Dorset (from the 2014-based Government statistics) indicate a likely increase in households of 316 households per annum over the period 2019-2029. Government guidance proposes a standard method for calculating housing need targets based on these projections, taking into account affordability levels. The most recent median workplace-based affordability ratios (12.00 for 2018) would result in an affordability adjustment factor of 1.50, giving an annual requirement of 474 dwellings per annum across the ‘old’ East Dorset area. Using a simple pro-rata basis for apportioning this need across the area (based on Alderholt having just over 3.5% of the total population) would suggest a figure of 16 – 17 dwellings per annum would be a proportionate level of growth.

**5.7.** Looking wider still, at the new Dorset Council area, a similar calculation results in an annual requirement of 1,578 dwellings per annum. More recent communications from Dorset Council suggest that they are anticipating a need for around 1,800 dwellings per annum (which would equate to 15 – 16 dwellings per annum for Alderholt).

**5.8.** There are no obvious local factors that would suggest an upward adjustment is necessary above that suggested by Alderholt’s pro-rata ‘share’ of the strategic housing need.

- House price affordability is already factored into the calculation of the base-line figure, and as outlined in the introduction, house prices are if anything more affordable than in other settlements in the general vicinity. Whilst there is apparent demand for more affordable housing than shown by the housing register, further research is needed to quantify this, as it is not demonstrated through the housing register.
- There is no basis in terms of economic need for increasing housing numbers in this location, given the lack of existing local employment and poor public transport connections to job opportunities further afield.
- There is no infrastructure basis for increasing housing numbers in this location, as most of the key facilities are in the larger towns and there is no indication of any significant infrastructure investment planned in the area.
- Historically over the last 100 years the build rate has averaged around 11 dwellings per annum (with a slight dip in recent years) – so an increase to 13 – 17 dwellings per annum would provide a boost. However, to suggest a much higher rate could be sustained would on face value seem entirely unrealistic, even taking into account the post-war ‘boom’ years build rates.

**5.9.** As at end of March 2018 there was no shortage of land available for development, with planning permission for 89 dwellings at the former Alderholt Surplus Stores site on Daggons Road (3/11/0558 – for which affordable housing contributions have been waived in light of the abnormal construction costs) and 44 dwellings at Hawthorns Nursery (3/16/1446), and a further application for 21 dwellings on land at Alderholt Nurseries currently under consideration (3/19/0674) as well as continuing supply of windfall development (largely infill) within the village envelope. *Assuming a build rate of around 15 dwellings per annum as a reasonable target, the current housing land supply (145 dwellings as at April 2018) would last for the next 10 years without requiring any further release of greenfield sites.*

### **Employment Needs Statistics**

**5.10.** The Local Plan options paper is not suggesting any additional employment land in Alderholt. There is no evidence of employment land in the wider area, according to the latest Dorset Workspace Study<sup>10</sup>.

**5.11.** As noted in the key statistics, there are few major employers in the parish and a high degree of out-commuting. A more sustainable strategy would look to redress this balance, but this presupposes that the area is (a) attractive and (b) suitable for employment investment. The approximate ratio of local jobs:workers is around 1:4.3, compared to 1.21 across East Dorset and 1:1.1 across Dorset as a whole. The parish would need more than 1,000 new jobs (with no housing growth) to achieve a better balance between jobs and workers. Even to stand still (i.e. with the same level of out-commuting), there would need to be 30 permanent jobs created locally for every 100 homes built.

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<sup>10</sup> Bournemouth, Dorset and Poole Workspace Strategy and Study (2016)  
<https://www.dorsetforyou.gov.uk/planning-buildings-land/planning-policy/joint-planning-policy-work/bournemouth-dorset-and-poole-workspace-strategy-and-study.aspx>

**5.12.** The current vision set out in the Dorset Local Enterprise Partnership<sup>11</sup> identifies major strategic employment sites at Bournemouth Airport, Bournemouth Town Centre, the Port of Poole and the Dorset Enterprise Zone (near Wool in Purbeck). This means that investing in the infrastructure to unlock these and other strategic sites and ensure sustainable travel and access to them is likely to be prioritised compared to a site or sites in Alderholt.

**5.13.** The 2019 household showed that there was little prospect of significant business growth from within the parish, with only 13 of the 420 households responding potentially looking to relocate to or start up a business in the parish, the majority of which would either be sole traders or small business or 1 – 5 employees.

**5.14.** It is clear from the data that in order to ensure Alderholt becomes a more sustainable, self-contained settlement, the focus should be on employment rather than housing growth. However, there is little evidence of intended investment or employer interest in locating to the area, and therefore the viability of such development is questionable.

## **6. Suggested housing locations**

**6.1.** As described in section 2, the Local Plan proposes housing development on land to the south and west of Alderholt to provide a minimum of 1000 dwellings, including, but not limited to, the following sites:

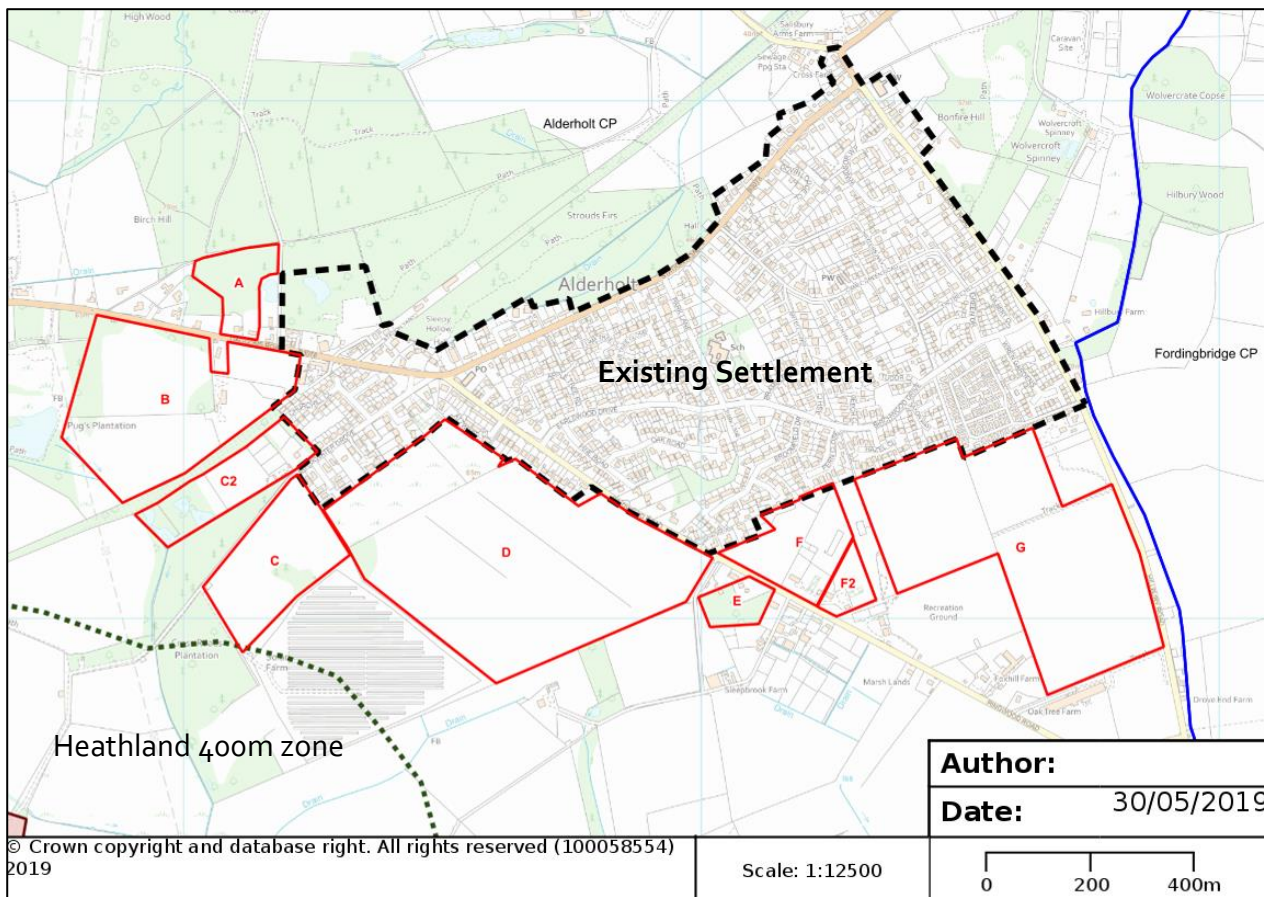
- [A] rear of Pittswood, Daggons Road and at The Oaks Daggons Road
- [B] land at Pug's Fields and Crossroads and Pug's Plantation
- [C] land adjacent to Blackwater Grove (NB an additional site C2 has been submitted)
- [D] land south of Ringwood Road
- [E] land at Cromwell Cottage
- [F] land at north of Ringwood Road (NB an additional site F2 has been submitted)
- [G] land south east of the village adjoining Hillbury Rd

**6.2.** Alternative options to the north and east side of the settlement (north-west of Station Road, adjoining Alderholt Chapel and to either side of the allotments east of Hillbury Road) have also been put forward for consideration by landowners.

**6.3.** The main environmental constraints impacting on land to the south and west of Alderholt is in relation to the nearby Dorset Heaths (part of the Natura 2000 network of sites protected through the Habitats Regulations). Although not directly impacted by development, it is generally accepted that, due to increased disturbance of breeding birds, trampling of vegetation, an increased risk of fire, predation of ground nesting birds and pollution, any development within 400m of these sites is likely to cause significant adverse impacts that cannot be readily avoided or mitigated. Between 400m to 5km, avoidance or mitigation measures should be possible to allow development to be approved.

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<sup>11</sup> A Strategic Economic Vision for Dorset, February 2016  
<https://dorsetlep.s3.amazonaws.com/Documents/DLEP%20Vision%202016%20LOWRES.pdf>



**6.4.** The sites to the west (A to D) are close to the 400m buffer zone, and given that there are public rights of way connecting from Blackwater Grove to Cranborne Common, it is difficult to envisage that the standard mitigation (of providing suitable alternative natural greenspaces) would reduce the number of residents walking their dogs on the common, particular for site C and the northern and westernmost parts of site D. Site A (north of Daggons Road) is also a site of local nature conservation interest.

**6.5.** Site F was granted outline planning consent for up to 45 dwellings at appeal in November 2017 (ref 3/16/1446/OUT). A further outline application for 25 dwellings is now under consideration for the adjoining Alderholt Nursery site (3/19/0674/OUT). The Inspector for the first application considered that, in the absence of a suitable accessible natural greenspace having been identified for delivery, a cap was appropriate on the number of dwellings in order to avoid significantly undermining the Dorset Heathlands Planning Framework SPD (particularly as it would become harder to resist similar proposals that could have a cumulative harmful effect on the Dorset Heaths).

**6.6.** The remaining areas have no other particular environmental constraints, other than the need to identify a suitable drainage strategy (given the very level nature of the site and clay-based soils that can give rise to surface water flooding), and the fact that the whole area drains into the River Avon Catchment, which is adversely impacts by phosphorus levels arising in part from sewage water disposal. A strategy has been agreed by the Wiltshire and Hampshire local planning authorities in consultation with Wessex Water and Natural England in respect of how nutrient levels will be managed and what mitigation measures are needed to achieve phosphate neutral development, such as wetland creation and less intensive grazing within the catchment area. East Dorset has not been party to these discussions and the level of proposed development at Alderholt and potential mitigation requirements has not therefore been fully considered.

**6.7.** There is more uncertainty in respect of infrastructure capacity. A key local concern is in respect of increased traffic on the local road network. The Initial Transport Study undertaken by Dorset County Council in March 2019 reviewed existing traffic data. This estimates that an additional 1000 dwellings would result in an extra 597 trips through Alderholt in the AM peak and 621 additional trips in the PM peak. The development of 840 dwellings in Fordingbridge is estimated to result in an additional 49 trips through Alderholt in the AM peak and 50 additional trips in the PM peak. The report concludes that it is not possible to know without further modelling if the current road network could physically cope with such an increase. Other traffic studies have suggested possible improvements would be required, both locally (at the Hillbury Road/ B3078 junction) and on the wider highway network outside of the parish.

## 7. The consequences of additional growth

**7.1.** It is clear from the comparison in Table 3 that the amount of growth proposed in Alderholt through the East Dorset Local Plan Review would be significantly out of kilter with its settlement status. It would appear that Alderholt has been targeted for substantial housing growth simply because it is not constrained by Green Belt or AONB designations (unlike many of the larger settlements in East Dorset) and lies just beyond the critical 400m heathland buffer zone. Yet on this basis the plan would fail to meet the its stated strategic objectives (as illustrated in Table 5).

*Table 5. Proposals for Alderholt in relation to the Plan's Strategic Objectives*

	<b>Strategic Objective</b>	<b>How this applies to the proposals at Alderholt</b>
1	To manage and safeguard the natural environment of East Dorset	Insufficient consideration has been given to the potential indirect impacts on the Dorset Heaths and River Avon, which are designated European sites that are known to be adversely impacted by residential development. It has not been demonstrated that mitigation would be possible or effective for the quantity of development sought.
2	To maintain and improve the character of the towns and villages, and to create vibrant local centres	The level of development proposed is clearly out of kilter with the proposed settlement hierarchy or its historic levels of development. The level and mix of development proposed would be unlikely to create a sense of place, and no consideration has been given as to whether it would be possible to create a vibrant local centre, particularly given the dispersed nature of the existing facilities (albeit that they tend to be spread along the B3078) and the disconnect between that area and the proposed focus for development.
3	To adapt to the challenges of Climate Change	The settlement has very poor transport connections and is not an accessible location. The level and mix of development proposed would not result in a more sustainable patterns of development, and if anything the focus should be on permanent job creation.

	<b>Strategic Objective</b>	<b>How this applies to the proposals at Alderholt</b>
4	To enable the mixed economy of East Dorset to grow, and to develop new employment sectors	There is no employment proposed as part of the plans for Alderholt, and no employment in the local area. The area already has an extremely low workplace : workforce ratio with comparatively high levels of car-based commuting, which would worsen with the addition of further housing.  The development would result in the loss of productive agricultural land (with land to the south and west of the settlement estimated to be Grade 3 based on the SW regional maps), and also potentially require further farmland taken out of agricultural use to provide mitigation in relation to the European wildlife sites.
5	To deliver a suitable, affordable and sustainable range of housing to provide for local needs	The level of development proposed is significantly in excess of local needs. Furthermore, the level of development proposed is questionable given past delivery rates (even considering the peak building rates that would have been achieved in the latter part of the c20th) and particularly given the lack of progress on the main brownfield site despite the requirement for any affordable housing having been waived.
6	To reduce the need for people to travel and to have more travel choices	The development is not in a accessible location. It is not focused on a prime transport corridor or near to a town centre. There are very limited facilities in the settlement which are poorly related to the proposed direction of growth. Alderholt is very poorly related to the rail network. There is only one bus service that is not sustainable commercially, and does not allow ready access to local employment opportunities or key facilities (such as local hospitals, further education etc).
7	To help our communities to thrive and help people support each other	There is little evidence to suggest that a proper assessment of the facilities and services needed has been undertaken to inform the proposals.

**7.2.** The 2018 Sustainability Appraisal<sup>12</sup> appears to underplay the adverse impacts and overplay the positive impacts of a number of the issues regarding development around Alderholt. For example, it rates biodiversity as having uncertain but only minor negative impacts, despite the close proximity to Dorset Heaths and nutrient issues related to the River Avon. It rates an uncertain but positive scores in relation to climate change and sustainable transport, on the basis that the area "is located in proximity to bus stops. Therefore, the residential population resulting from development of this area may be encouraged to use sustainable transport". This is clearly an unrealistic assessment of the likely modal split and journey lengths. Similarly it rates services and facilities as uncertain but positive on the basis that the development could increase access to services, when there is no evidence to suggest that this can be delivered. It also (rather bizarrely)

<sup>12</sup> East Dorset Local Plan Review Sustainability Appraisal Report and Appendices

<https://www.dorsetcouncil.gov.uk/planning-buildings-land/planning-policy/christchurch/local-development-framework/christchurch-and-east-dorset-local-plan-review.aspx>

rates economy / employment as uncertain but positive on the basis that the contributions towards transport infrastructure and additional retail, health and community facilities could increase access to a variety of employment opportunities.

## **8. Alternative Strategies**

**8.1.** In accordance with the Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes Regulations 2004 (SEA Regulations), reasonable alternatives must be assessed and reasons given for selecting any preferred policy choice and rejecting the alternatives, taking into account the objectives and geographical scope of the plan or programme.

**8.2.** Chapter 2 of the 2018 Sustainability Appraisal deals with reasons for selecting the alternatives dealt with in the Local Plan Review. However the explanation is confused and lacks transparency. Para 2.19 refers to a number of site options suggested by consultees, which were subject to a sustainability assessment in 2017, the final results being published in Appendix 3 of the SEA. It then refers to (but does not explain more about) a further sieving exercise that informed the draft policies. As far as it is possible to tell, there is no explanation regarding the reasonable alternatives considered against Policies 3.4 and 5.28 (in relation to an alternative distribution of growth) and why these were alternatives have been rejected.

**8.3.** Given that the proposed development clearly does not meet the strategic objectives of the plan, the rejection of other alternatives that similar do not fully meet these strategic objectives would be unreasonable. If limited to the East Dorset area, one obvious alternative would be the release of additional Green Belt land around the larger and more sustainable settlements (the strategy had already deemed the release of Green Belt land as necessary). Furthermore, with the decision to subsume the work into the creation of a Dorset Local Plan, there will also be further opportunities in the wider area that need to be considered, which could (for example) include a new town.

### ***Release of Green Belt land***

**8.4.** The Green Belt covers over 47% (16,840ha) of East Dorset District and is concentrated to the south of the District where it abuts the conurbation. It was first designated in 1980, as part of the adoption of the South East Dorset Structure Plan (1980). With the detailed boundaries subsequently defined through the Local Plan.

**8.5.** The extent of the Green Belt was last considered in the Christchurch and East Dorset Local Plan Part 1 – Core Strategy (adopted April 2014) which included a number of revisions to the Green Belt at that time, amounting to some 103.9ha. At that time the Council recognised that "Evidence from the Councils' SHLAA Reports (ED32,33) indicate limited potential within the existing urban areas to accommodate the level of residential development required to meet the needs within the Plan area identified within the SHMA (ED27). The only way the Councils consider that sufficient land can be made available to meet the residential and employment needs within the Plan area is for limited changes to be made to the Green Belt boundary. Large parts of East



Dorset District are not within the Green Belt, but are remote from major settlements, services and facilities and would not provide a sustainable form of development.”<sup>13</sup>

**8.6.** The changes at that time included amendments at:

- > FERNDOWN and WEST PARLEY to accommodate over 600 new homes, land for employment development plus additions to the village centre of West Parley which could include a convenience foodstore
- > VERWOOD where the release of two sites to accommodate about 300 new homes to the north of the settlement is proposed
- > WIMBORNE to accommodate over 1,200 new homes on four separate sites
- > CORFE MULLEN to accommodate about 250 new homes at the northern end of the main built area (the total capacity has since been reduced as the school is no longer relocating)

In addition land was also released for employment at Three Legged Cross and Sturminster Marshall. There were no proposals for major housing sites at West Moors or St Leonards and St Ives, nor at the lower tier settlements (as development in these locations was not considered to be sustainable).

**8.7.** In April 2017 Christchurch and East Dorset Councils commissioned consultants LUC (Land Use Consultants) to undertake a Green Belt study<sup>14</sup> to inform the Local Plan Review. The purpose of the study was to

- > provide an independent, robust and transparent assessment of how land in the Christchurch and East Dorset Green Belt performs against the purposes of Green
- > to examine whether any land on the edge and adjoining the Green Belt boundaries should be added to the Green Belt
- > to consider whether any 'washed over' villages within the Green Belt should instead be taken out of the Green Belt; and
- > to review whether any inset settlements should be designated as Green Belt.

This initial study did not specifically consider release Green Belt land for development, but simply focused on how each area met statutory Green Belt purposes.

**8.8.** The review concludes that “Very few locations make less than a relatively strong contribution to one or more Green Belt purpose.” With further analysis it becomes apparent that about 38% of the land within the Green Belt in East Dorset actually only scored as being important in one of the national criteria for including land within the Green Belt. The most commonly cited reason was safeguarding the countryside from encroachment – with this assessment reflecting the strong countryside character (and few urbanising features) of much of the land.

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<sup>13</sup> MATTER 2: GREEN BELT (KS2) Statement by Christchurch and East Dorset Councils August 2013 <https://www.dorsetforyou.gov.uk/planning-buildings-land/planning-policy/christchurch/local-development-framework/local-plan-part-1/pre-submission/eip/pdfs/el/matter-2/the-councils-statement-matter-2.pdf>

<sup>14</sup> Green Belt Review Sept 2017 <https://www.dorsetcouncil.gov.uk/planning-buildings-land/planning-policy/east-dorset/local-development-framework/evidence-base-studies/christchurch-and-east-dorset-green-belt-assessment.aspx>

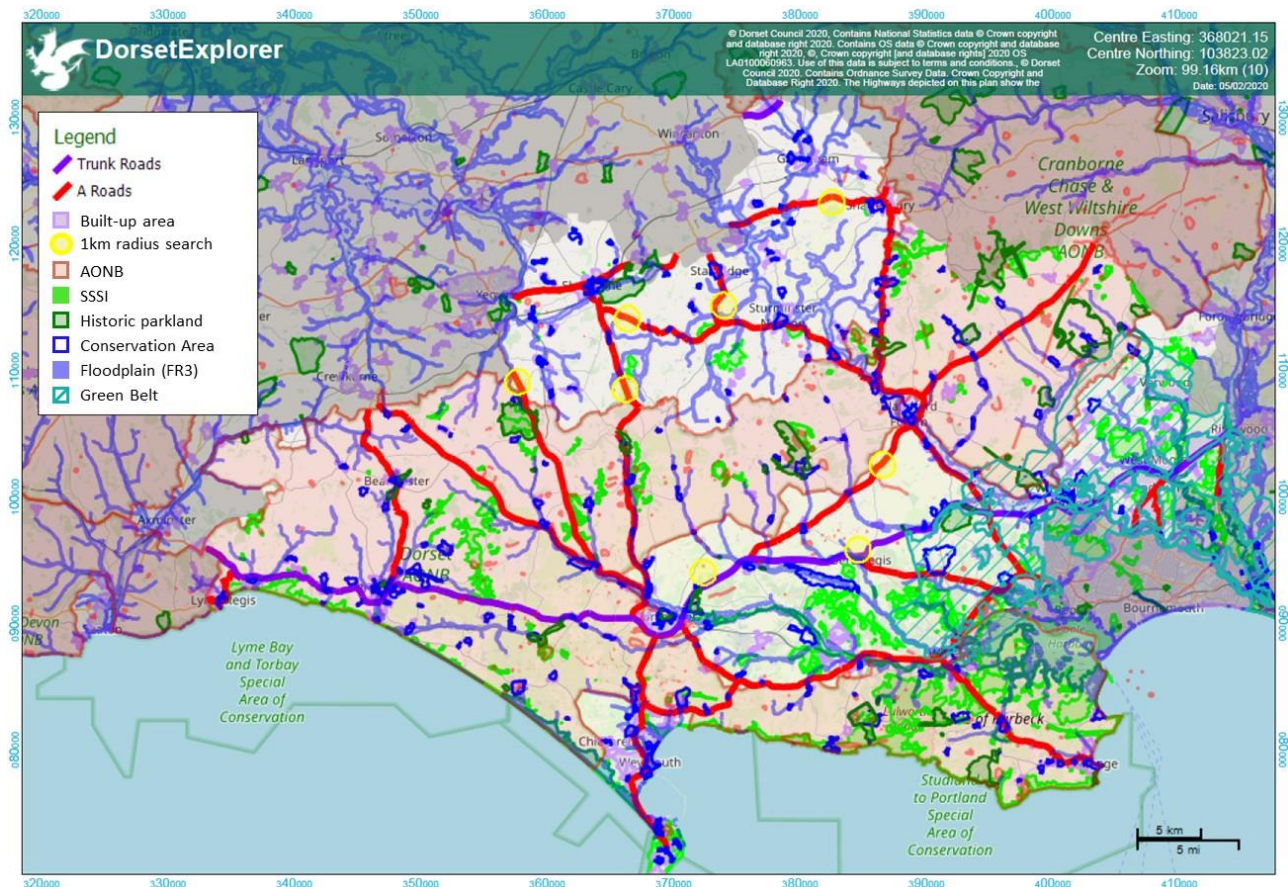
**8.9.** All of the main settlements within East Dorset are within the South East Dorset Green Belt – therefore any expansion of these will require the release of Green Belt land. The Local Plan options includes proposals for the further release of Green Belt land at:

- > FERNDOWN and WEST PARLEY area of search to the south for at least 580 new homes
- > VERWOOD modest area of search to the south for at least 85 new homes
- > CORFE MULLEN area of search to the north for at least 235 new homes
- > WEST MOORS area of search to the east for at least 170 new homes
- > STURMINSTER MARSHALL (rural service centre) area of search to the west and south-east for at least 250 new homes

**8.10.** Additional land was put forward through the SHLAA process (2017) in locations such as around Colehill, west of Corfe Mullen, south-west of Three Legged Cross and east of Verwood, but such sites appear to have been excluded on the basis of their Green Belt status (or not deemed necessary to allocate).

### *New Town Locations in the wider Dorset area*

**8.11.** Whilst it is accepted that the development of a new settlement is likely to take some years to gain momentum, and also that much of the county is constrained (particularly due to the coverage of the two AONBs and the Green Belt), there are identifiable locations that are outside of the AONB and Green Belt, not overly constrained by environmental designations, well-related to the A-road network and potentially distinct from other built-up areas that could be considered. The following map shows eight potential areas that may fit this criteria.



## 9. Key conclusions

**9.1.** Alderholt is a comparatively large village, that is mainly a product of a major housing boom in the late c20th following the closure of the railway and installation of mains drainage. The significant increase in houses during this period has resulted in a dormitory settlement that is poorly served by roads or rail, and has no major employment or community facilities. It has far fewer facilities than Beaminster, a similar-sized town in West Dorset that has benefited from a much longer history.

**9.2.** The proposal put forward through the East Dorset Local Plan Review, which was to development at least 1,000 further dwellings in this location, is in complete contrast to the plan's stated strategic objectives. Alderholt appears to have been targeted on the basis that it has no Green Belt or AONB status (both designations run up to but do not cross the parish boundary). The level of housing proposed is completely disproportionate to (a) the settlement size, (b) its position in the settlement hierarchy (c) the housing needs of the local area which Alderholt serves. It is not balanced by any employment provision (which is particularly important given the unsustainable balance between local jobs and resident of employment age in the parish). The scale of growth proposed through the East Dorset Local Plan Review would bring Alderholt's population in line with many of the smaller towns across Dorset, but without the facilities those towns benefit from. Furthermore, there are obvious difficulties in creating a vibrant local centre for Alderholt, given that the existing facilities are scattered and the potential areas of growth do not readily coincide with a natural 'High Street', or attracting any significant level of employment.

**9.3.** There are other issues of concern relating to how the East Dorset Local Plan Review was prepared, and how the proposals have been assessed. There has been no meaningful discussion and cooperation with the adjoining local planning authority and service providers that is necessary to understand the cross-boundary consequences and infrastructure needs.

**9.4.** The sustainability appraisal that accompanied the first stage of the review fails to clearly identify and appropriately examine all reasonable alternative options. Furthermore, the area around Alderholt is particularly sensitive in terms of indirect impacts on European sites, but this does not appear to have been fully recognised in the plans. The provision of a SANG needs to be identified and further consideration given as to whether the recreation and other impacts of development closest to the Dorset Heaths would be offset. Mitigation measures in respect of the River Avon SAC also do not appear to have been discussed to assess whether these are deliverable.

**9.5.** A more proportionate level of growth for Alderholt (taking into account the wider strategic need for Dorset), would be closer to 15 dwellings per annum (i.e. in the region of 225 dwellings over a 15 year period), accompanied by investment to support employment growth and improved sustainable transport links. There are already extant planning permissions that can deliver the majority of this housing growth, although they will only bring about limited affordable housing provision and no employment.

**9.6.** The decision by Dorset Council to stop work on the East Dorset Local Plan Review, in order to progress the production of a Dorset Local Plan by 2023, is to be welcomed. This will provide an opportunity for the future development of Alderholt to be more carefully examined, and hopefully for the evidence compiled as part of this report to be taken into account.