being
munity Safety
. Health & Social Wellbeing
7. Transport & Access
8. Culture & Leisure

9. Environment

9 ENVIRONMENT

9.1 Character of the Area

9.1.1 The district generally has a high quality and diverse landscape character which can be divided into five national Countryside Character Areas:

- Thames Basin Heaths;
- Hampshire Downs in the extreme south west
- Berkshire and Marlborough Downs;
- Chilterns, in the extreme north east; and
- Thames Valley, to the east.

9.1.2 This character has evolved over thousands of years, yet the potential rate of change is greater now than at any other time in the landscape's history. Change is inevitable and there are many current forces on the landscape including development pressure, fundamental changes in the nature and profitability of farming as the key land use in the rural area and of the policies that support it; and changes in the social fabric of rural communities.

9.1.3 Nearly three quarters of West Berkshire is made up of the Berkshire and Marlborough Downs - a gently rolling, chalk landscape. This area is classified as part of the North Wessex Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB), a landscape of the highest national importance (see map below). Within the AONB the diversity and mix of landscapes ranges from the high large scale rolling chalk downland with its intensive arable farming; small hamlets clustered along fast chalk streams; to floodplain with lush wetland vegetation associated with the River Kennet.

Areas of AONB in West Berkshire

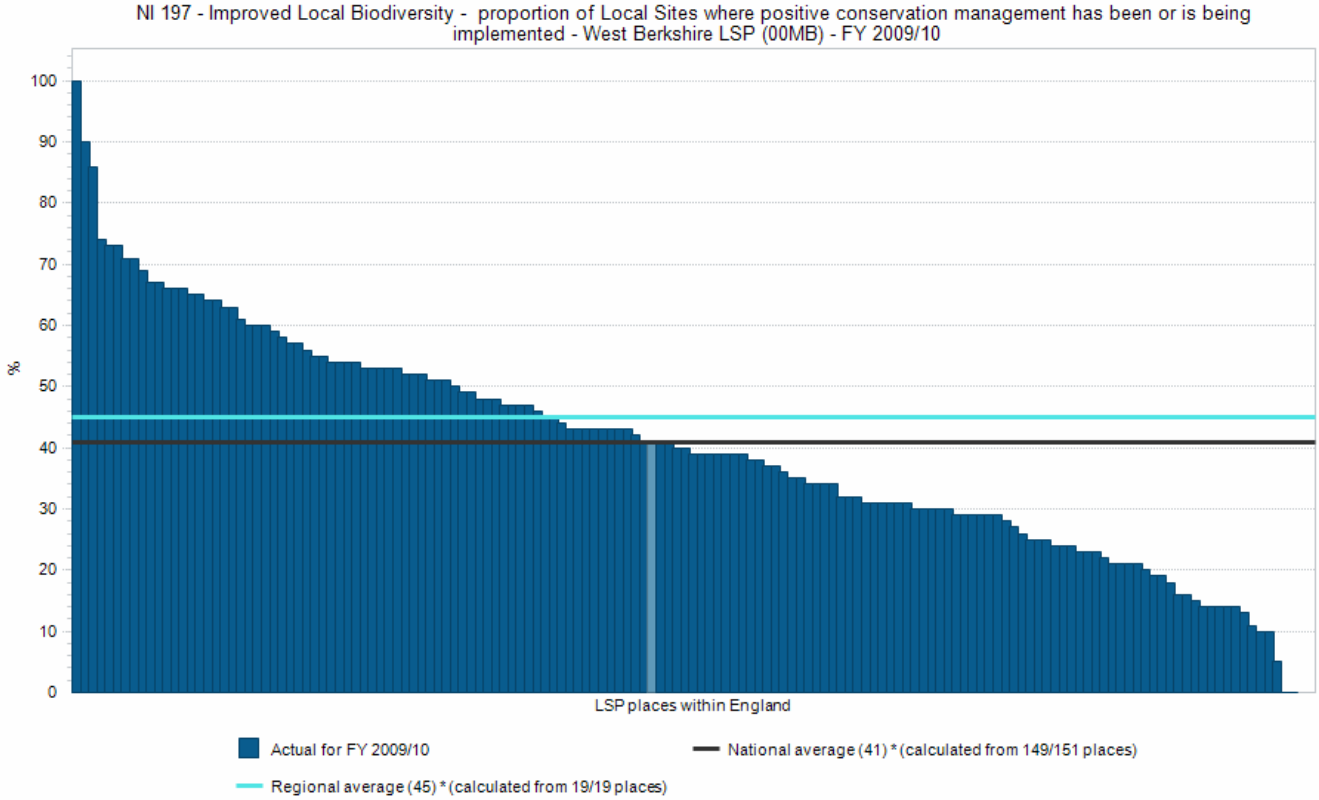
9.1.4 There are 51 Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) - covering an area of 1,349 hectares - which are of national importance for flora, fauna or geology. SSSIs are designated by English Nature for their nature conservation importance at national level. There are also three designated Special Areas of Conservation (SACs) - the River Lambourn, the Kennet and Lambourn floodplain and the Kennet Valley Alderwoods. SACs are of European importance and are given extra levels of protection in law. The Council has also identified around 500 Local Wildlife Sites (LWS), which are of local importance and essential to ensuring

biodiversity in West Berkshire. The combined areas of SSSI and WHS amounts to over 7,600 hectares, or about 11% of the district.

9.1.5 Many of the Wildlife Sites are ancient semi-natural woodland which have been woodland since at least AD 1600. However, there have been significant losses in the last century of some habitats, for example species rich neutral and chalk grasslands. It is to be hoped that the new Environmental Stewardship grants will reverse this trend.

9.1.6 The landscape comprising Greenham and Crookham Commons south to the Thatcham Reedbeds is an area of high biodiversity. This ecologically diverse landscape comprises a number of habitats currently forming part of the West Berkshire Living Landscape. This partnership between West Berkshire Council and Berkshire, Buckinghamshire and Oxfordshire Wildlife Trust (BBOWT) promotes a landscape scale approach to habitat management.

9.1.7 In terms of how West Berkshire scores for managing it's conservation sites (according to NI 197: proportion of Local Sites where positive conservation management has been or is being implemented) in 2009/10, it came in line with the National average, but slightly below the South East average, as the chart below illustrates.



Source: Places Analysis Tool (PAT)

9.1.8 Access to nature is important to people living in West Berkshire, with around a third of residents saying that this is one of their top priorities for making an area a good place to live. However, only around 2-3% of West Berkshire residents think that this is an issue that needs

improving in the area, indicating the value that people in the district place on their natural environment and a level of contentment that they have in access to it in West Berkshire.

9.2 Energy consumption in West Berkshire

9.2.1 The latest figures from the Department of Energy and Climate Change (DECC) show that in 2008, the average annual domestic electricity consumption in West Berkshire was 5, 695 kwh per household; 416 kwh lower than in 2007. Compared to the national average of 4, 478 kwh it would indicate that households in West Berkshire tend to use a lot more energy than other areas of the UK. This is potentially due to West Berkshire being a large rural area, made of 3 urban centres. To put it into context, figures from 2 other similar local authorities, South Oxfordshire & Vale of White Horse had average annual domestic electricity consumption of 5, 724 & 5, 242 kwh respectively; not too dissimilar than West Berkshire.

9.2.2 Levels of gas consumption in West Berkshire is relatively comparable to the national average - 17, 452 kwh per household, compared to 16, 906 kwh nationally.

9.2.3 Consumption of water is also greater in West Berkshire. Data from OFWAT shows that the average person in the UK uses 154 litres a day compared to 162 litres in West Berkshire.

9.2.4 Through the Greener sub-partnership, the West Berkshire Partnership has prioritised the reduction of per capita carbon emissions within West Berkshire. The target is to achieve a 9.4% reduction by 2011 based on 2005 Department for Energy & Climate Change figures. The latest figures for 2007 released by DECC indicates that to date West Berkshires per capita carbon emissions have been reduced by 4.4%

9.2.5 Alongside actions to reduce per capita carbon emissions, the West Berkshire Partnership has also developed a 'West Berkshire Climate Change Strategy and Action Plan'. This progresses the commitment made by signing the Nottingham Declaration on Climate Change, to develop a plan with our partners and local communities to address the causes and impacts of climate change

9.2.6 Currently under review by the Greener sub-partnership, the strategy will assist in the delivery of national targets on reducing greenhouse gas emissions. It will also seek to identify how climate change will affect West Berkshire and provide guidance on adapting lifestyles and infrastructure, protecting assets and ensuring continued delivery of key services.

9.3 Household Waste

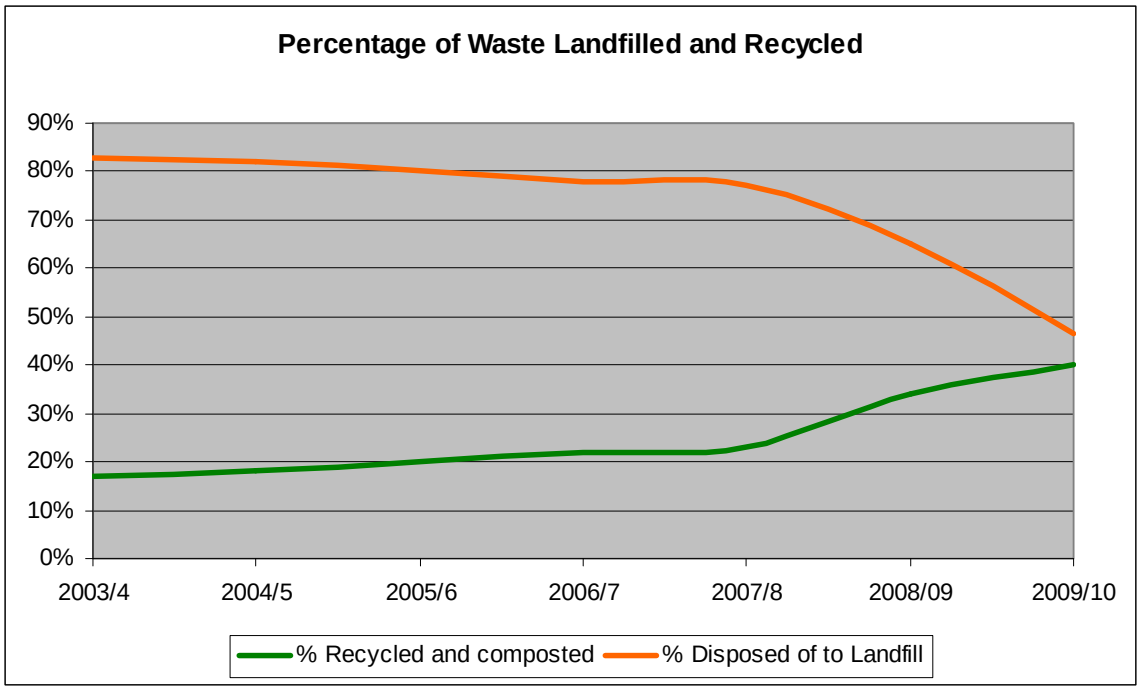
9.3.1 West Berkshire Council is responsible for collecting and disposing of about 80,000 tonnes of municipal waste per year. The last few years have seen a steady fall in the total municipal waste managed within the district. Household refuse is collected weekly and there is a fortnightly kerbside service collecting, paper, glass, cans, cardboard, plastics bottles, textiles and green waste. These services are provided free of charge to the resident. A chargeable bulky household waste collection service is provided along with a, clinical waste collection and a free of charge service for the removal of graffiti and unwanted vehicles.

9.3.2 Overall, total amount of household waste increased from 2003/04 to 2007/08, although we saw a decrease for the years 2007/8 and 2008/09 to 81,140.12 tonnes. Waste levels for 2009/10 continue to fall with 80,639 tonnes of municipal waste handled. Improvements in recycling and composting continue along with a significant reduction in the amount of waste that is being sent to landfill.

	2003/4	2004/5	2005/6	2006/7	2007/8	2008/09	2009/10
Total Household Waste	77,520 tonnes	88,800 tonnes	80,873 tonnes	83,349 tonnes	81,843 tonnes	81,140 tonnes	78,269 tonnes
Total Other Waste	1305 tonnes	1685 tonnes	1850 tonnes	3033 tonnes	-	-	2370 tonnes
% Composted	4%	5%	5%	6%	6%	12%	17.26%
% Recycled	13%	13%	14%	16%	17%	22%	22.94%
% Recycled and composted	17%	18%	20%	22%	23%	34%	40.20%
% Disposed of to Landfill	83%	82%	80%	78%	77%	65%	46.61%

Source: Waste Management October 2010, West Berkshire Council

9.3.3 Over 40% of West Berkshire's household waste was recycled and composted during 2009/2010, an 18% increase on the previous year, which shows West Berkshire is also performing well against the national average of approximately 39%. Over the past 2 years recycling levels in the district have nearly doubled. The chart below illustrates this trend.



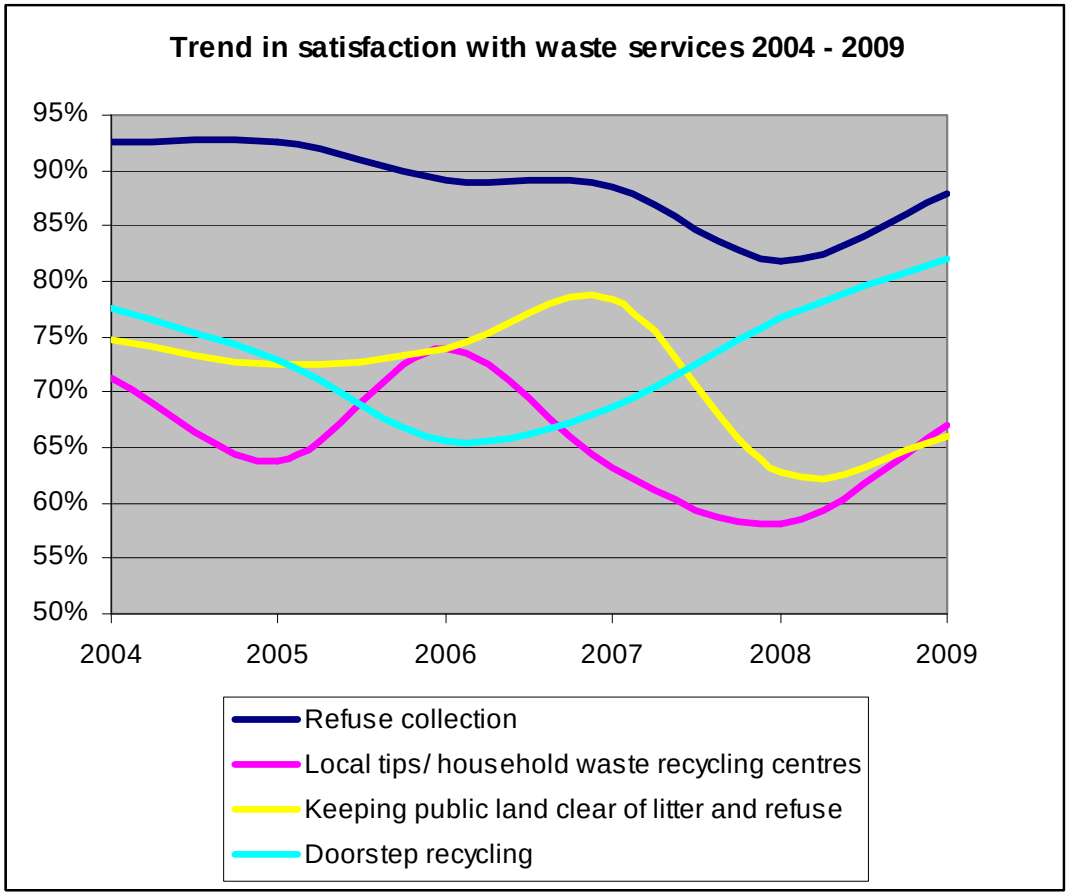
Source: Waste Management October 2010, West Berkshire Council

9.3.4 In March 2008 West Berkshire Council awarded its 25 year integrated waste management contract to Veolia Environmental Services. This will achieve a recycling rate of approximately over 49% which diverts 80% of all waste from landfill. This Contract is well on the way to delivering significant improvements.

9.3.5 A new, modern, fit for purpose household waste recycling centre opened at Newtown Road, Newbury in October 2008. This replaced the Pinchington Lane site. The Centre collects the following materials for recycling: paper, cardboard, garden waste, wood, electrical items, plastic bottles, cans, mixed glass, textiles, shoes, rubble and soil, scrap metal, used engine oil, used cooking oil, car batteries, tyres, gas bottles, household chemicals, tetrapaks, plasterboard, household batteries, books, tapes & CDs, bicycles and furniture for reuse. The site also collects asbestos, bulky items, and household waste. Satisfaction survey results do reflect the move to this new site.

9.3.6 West Berkshire Council has a joint agreement with Reading Borough Council to enable residents in the Kennet and Thames area to use the Island Road Civic Amenity Site in Reading.

9.3.7 Satisfaction levels with doorstep recycling have increased significantly in recent years, from 69% in 2007 to 82% in 2009. The graph below shows the trends in satisfaction levels over the last 6 years from 2004/05.



Source: West Berkshire Council, Annual Resident Survey 2009

9.3.8 Satisfaction with refuse collection remained above 90% until 2006 and then dipped last year but has increased this year to 88%. Satisfaction with keeping land clear of litter and refuse saw a more significant decrease last year from 78% in 2007 down to 63%, but has also risen slightly this year. Satisfaction with the household recycling centre has been variable but seen a significant improvement on a 3 year decline in satisfaction, from 58% last year to 67%.

9.3.9 West Berkshire faces tough national targets to increase levels of recycling and composting and to divert a large fraction of waste away from landfill. These targets will be met through the new integrated waste management contract which implements the Council's waste strategy.

9.4 Perceptions of Cleanliness in West Berkshire

9.4.1 West Berkshire is generally considered a clean place to live. Resident's satisfaction with the Council keeping the district clear of litter and refuse (cleanliness) is high at 66%, although this represents a 10 percentage point decrease from 2007 when it was at its highest level of satisfaction at 77%. Satisfaction remains higher than the England average of 57% (2008). Satisfaction with cleanliness is lower in the urban areas of Thatcham and Newbury than in other areas of the district. (WBC Resident Survey 2009).

9.5 Air Quality

9.5.1 Air quality in West Berkshire is generally considered to be good. Since 1997 all local authorities in the UK have been carrying out a review and assessment of air quality. The review ensures that national air quality objectives are achieved. If an area does not meet these objectives, Air Quality Management Areas (AQMAs) need to be declared.

9.5.2 An outcome of the above air quality reviews in West Berkshire area since 1997 identified concerns with the levels of nitrogen dioxide (NO2) in the centre of Newbury along the A339. A detailed assessment was carried out on the 2007 data and this concluded that it was necessary to declare an Air Quality Management Area (AQMA). The AQMA for the A339 / A343 / Greenham Road junction came into force in May 2009.

9.5.3 The Air Quality Action Plan (AQAP) for the Newbury AQMA is now being developed. Additional monitoring has also identified concerns with NO2 levels in Thatcham and we are currently undertaking a detailed assessment of this area with a view to declaring an AQMA.

9.5.4 As part of our duty to report on air quality for the rest of the district Updating and Screening Assessments are conducted. Alongside proactive monitoring there are also sites that hold Environmental Permits. These permits contain emission levels and help minimise the impact that industrial processes have on the environment. Activities such as cement batching, crematoria are covered by such permits.

9.6 Contaminated Land

9.6.1 West Berkshire Council has a statutory duty to inspect the district for contaminated land. An initial assessment and prioritisation of potentially contaminated sites throughout the district has been completed and identified 1,200 sites. Out of these sites one has been formally declared as contaminated and is undergoing remediation under the responsibility of the Environment Agency.

9.7 Water Quality

9.7.1 The River Kennet is one of the main geographical features in the district. It rises in the west in Wiltshire, flows through Hungerford and Newbury before joining the River Thames at Reading. The Kennet's principal tributaries are the River Lambourn, the River Enborne and the Foundry Brook. For six miles to the west of, and through, Reading, the Kennet supports a

secondary channel, known as the Holy Brook, which formerly powered the water mills of Reading Abbey.

9.7.2 The course of the river from Reading is mirrored by the Kennet and Avon Canal making it a navigable waterway from its confluence with the Thames, upstream through Newbury and on to Bath and Bristol in the west.

9.7.3 Water quality in West Berkshire is generally considered to be good. OFWAT conduct an assessment of rivers across the country on the basis of biological and chemical quality. In 2006, 93% of river length in the district was considered as of good biological quality. This has increased slightly from 88% in 2003.

9.7.4 A similar pattern emerges for OFWAT's assessment of chemical quality. 86% of the lengths of rivers in West Berkshire were considered to be of good chemical quality

9.8 Flooding

9.8.1 A number of watercourses, recognised as 'main rivers' by the Environment Agency, flow through West Berkshire. The most prominent rivers are the River Kennet, River Lambourn, River Pang and the Foudry Brook. The River Thames flows on the north-eastern boundary of West Berkshire.

9.8.2 The landscape of West Berkshire can be contrasted between the higher downlands in the north-west of the district and the low-lying floodplains of the rivers (principally the Kennet and the Pang). The Kennet's floodplain, which dominates much of the south of West Berkshire, is limited on either side by steep slopes, rising to the county boundary with Hampshire to the south and up to the Berkshire Downs to the north.

9.8.3 There is a potential risk of flooding within West Berkshire, arising not only from rivers but also from surface water and groundwater flooding. Events during the summer of 2007 were a timely reminder of the impacts that flooding can have upon the local community when only 18 of 69 Town and Parish communities avoided flooding.

9.8.4 Prior to 2007 there have been other flood events, notably in 2000, 2002 and 2005, but none as severe as the event of July 2007. It is generally accepted that rainfall patterns are changing, with potential increases in rainfall volume and storm intensity'.

9.9 What this means for West Berkshire

9.9.1 West Berkshire Council remains committed to partnership work to improve understanding of the landscape of West Berkshire and its sensitivity to change. Developing an understanding of these issues and using them to develop appropriate policies for the protection and enhancement of the landscape will allow West Berkshire to remain distinctive.

9.9.2 Villages are highlighted in their role as important economic and social hubs within the rural area. An emphasis on a Cleaner and Greener West Berkshire recognises what we can do locally to address the challenges set by climate change and the impact that the local environment has on people's quality of life. Value for Money is placed at the heart of the council's improvement agenda as managing limited resources will remain a challenge for us.

9.9.3 The preparation of a Management Plan for the AONB is a statutory requirement. Prepared by the North Wessex Downs AONB Council of Partners, the Plan is driven by the primary purpose of AONB designation – conservation and enhancement of natural beauty. It places a strong emphasis on the delivery of an integrated and sustainable approach, with vibrant rural economies and communities supporting an enhanced landscape. The Management Plan's visions and objectives for the AONB provide a clear framework from which to take forward the development of pro-active approaches to sustainable rural development.

9.9.4 Implementation of the North Wessex Downs AONB Management Plan can only be achieved by working in partnership with all those who have an influence over the future of the AONB, from government departments and agencies, through regional and local government to individual communities and individual land managers.

9.9.5 The Wildlife and Countryside Act 2000 improves the protection and management of SSSIs by introducing new and enhanced powers for English Nature. There is now a statutory requirement on local authorities and other public bodies to further the conservation and enhancement of SSSIs. This is in order to prevent damage to these sites through neglect. Currently all of the West Berkshire's SSSIs are managed under the Countryside Stewardship Scheme. This Scheme funds agreed conservation tasks on site over a ten-year period. In total grant funding from this source accounts for more than £35,000 worth of income each year. The Countryside Service has an ongoing commitment to establish new sources of funding to further their conservation aims.

9.9.6 The Council has commissioned Thames Valley Environmental Records Centre (TVERC) to map all the Prime Biodiversity Habitats in West Berkshire. This will not only assist in ensuring that new development does not harm existing important habitats, but will facilitate the use of development to link previously fragmented habitats. TVERC are also undertaking a re-survey of the district's Wildlife Heritage Sites to bring these records up to date. They are also beginning to collate species records so that in future we have a better understanding of the presence and distribution of National Biodiversity Species and those species protected by law.

9.9.7 Waste minimisation and recycling are important matters that are being energetically addressed by the Council. It is likely that there will be continuing Government emphasis on this area as well as a need to minimise costs possibly through a synchronised county-wide waste collection service. Further progress on recycling and waste collection is dependent however on the development of further facilities and services and the take up

by residents and businesses in the district. It is likely that there will be continuing Government emphasis on this area. Further progress on recycling and waste collection is dependent on the development of further facilities and services as part of the Council's waste management contract.

9.9.8 Planning policy should steer vulnerable development away from areas affected by flooding in accordance with PPS25. Protection should be given through the planning process to prevent over development within areas of existing natural floodplain.

9.9.9 Emergency planning and the emergency response plan will need to take into account the risk of flooding within the district.