

Poundbury

Dorchester, Dorset, United Kingdom

Project Type:
Residential

Case No:
C031014

Year:
2001



SUMMARY

Poundbury is a planned-unit development of rental and for-sale homes and apartments, offices, light industry, and retail. At buildout, the community will extend the urban boundaries of the historic market town of Dorchester by 400 acres (161.8 hectares) and increase its population from 15,000 to 20,000.

FEATURES

- Planned as a sustainable, mixed-use, mixed-income residential community
 - Sponsorship by the Prince's Foundation, a nonprofit founded by His Royal Highness the Prince of Wales to promote the return of humane values to architecture and urban design.
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SPECIAL FEATURES

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DEVELOPER

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ARCHITECT

A variety of British architecture firms were involved in designing the buildings at Poundbury.

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GENERAL DESCRIPTION

Poundbury is a planned-unit development of rental and for-sale homes and apartments, offices, light industry, and retail. At buildout, the community will extend the urban boundaries of the historic market town of Dorchester by 400 acres (161.8 hectares) and increase its population from 15,000 to 20,000.

It is not often that one hears about a new real estate development project in which the developer is a prince, but with Poundbury that is exactly the case. Poundbury is a predominantly residential mixed-use project in Dorchester, a town just over 100 miles (160.9 kilometers) southwest of London. The county seat of Dorset, Dorchester currently has a population of approximately 15,000.

Poundbury has been designed to address many of the problems apparent in traditional suburban developments, with the hope that it can set a higher standard for other developments to follow. Cities around the United Kingdom face many of the same challenges as cities in North America: urban sprawl, dependence on automobiles, environmental degradation, and uninspiring urban design. These are all issues about which Prince Charles, the Prince of Wales and Duke of Cornwall, feels very passionately. In 1989, he published a book called *A Vision of Britain* in which he outlined his opinions on how to design urban places better to help ensure their livability and sustainability. Most of the principles outlined in the book are familiar to new urbanists in North America. Poundbury, which is being developed by the Duchy of Cornwall, represents the bricks-and-mortar realization of those principles.

PLANNING AND DEVELOPMENT PROCESS

The initial impetus for the development of Poundbury came from a decision in 1987 by the local planning authority, the West Dorset District Council, to select land to the west of Dorchester for the expansion of the town. This land belonged to the Duchy of Cornwall, and Prince Charles saw an opportunity there to encourage the development of a project that would live up to his ideals of community building, rather than being another example of typical sprawling development. The council agreed to this novel approach, and thus the idea for Poundbury was born. Although the importance of Prince Charles to the project is obvious, it is worth noting that the site for Poundbury is actually controlled by a trust, which has the authority to approve all spending plans for the development. If Poundbury makes money, it goes to the trust, not into the prince's pockets.

The first phase of development at Poundbury covers 18.5 acres (7.4 hectares). Construction of Phase I began in 1993, and the finishing touches were being added in 2000. This phase includes both rental and for-sale homes, offices, light-industrial uses, and retail facilities. At buildout, Poundbury will occupy 400 acres (161.8 hectares): 250 acres (101.1 hectares) of mixed-use buildings and 150 acres (60.7 hectares) of open space and landscaping. The development will eventually add approximately 5,000 people to Dorchester's population.

In 1988, the Duchy of Cornwall brought in Prince Charles's urban planning consultant, Leon Krier, an architect and planner well known for his belief in the principles of traditional town planning, to prepare the master plan for Poundbury. Guiding the planning process were a number of key concepts. Poundbury was to be a mixed-use development, including not just retail uses but also offices and light-industrial facilities. Privately owned and publicly assisted housing would be intermingled and designed to be indistinguishable from each other. Rather than having a rigid, geometric street pattern set the framework for the development, streets would be designed around the houses to create urban spaces with visual interest and a natural tendency to control flows of automobile traffic. The overarching vision for Poundbury was to create an integrated mixed-use development that would be an extension of urban Dorchester, rather than an incompatible suburban appendage.

DESIGN

Architecturally, the community would draw on the vernacular design of the Dorset region, including the use of local materials. By mixing uses and paying close attention to urban design, Poundbury would offer alternatives to driving and would be a more environmentally sustainable and livable community. Finally, it was important to ensure that Poundbury have an urban, rather than a suburban, character. It would have a center of its own instead of simply serving as an extension of the Dorchester suburbs. Putting these ideas into practice, however, was risky. Skeptics abounded, and many of these ideas had never been tested in the British real estate market. With its groundbreaking approach, the plan was approved and construction at Poundbury started in 1993.

The architecture and urban design of Poundbury are two of its hallmarks. The streets and buildings there recall the forms and styles of the centuries-old villages in the surrounding countryside. Close attention was paid to providing clear signage and attractive landscaping. The use of vernacular architecture and materials is evident throughout, making it less evident that Poundbury was built recently. As with new urbanist projects in North America, observers of Poundbury have tended to focus their attention on the architecture. However, Poundbury is more than an architectural statement. Instead, it represents an entirely different philosophy about how communities should be designed, built, and used so that they enhance the environment rather than detract from it.

Active steps have been taken in the design and development of Poundbury to minimize its impact on the natural

environment. For example, at buildout, one-third of the total site will be devoted to landscaped parks and play areas. All buildings feature double-glazed windows and higher levels of insulation than required by codes, thereby reducing energy use. Similarly, homes feature graywater recycling systems to conserve water. To minimize visual pollution, all utility connections at Poundbury are below grade. Homes receive cable and satellite television, but satellite dishes are not allowed on the homes.

The roads at Poundbury are narrow, and they frequently change direction as they wind between buildings, calming the traffic and favoring pedestrians over cars. On-street parking is widespread. Alleyways are paved with fine gravel and connect the roads with courtyard parking areas. Parking provision is at 2.4 spaces per dwelling unit and does not dominate the environment as one might expect. Instead, parking is dispersed in purpose-built courtyards that also feature attractive landscaping.

APPROVALS

There were numerous opportunities in the planning of Poundbury for local residents to become involved. One of the most important of these efforts was a "planning weekend" in 1989; Prince Charles was in attendance as the plans for Poundbury were presented to members of the public. They were invited to contribute their opinions of the plan, which were then incorporated into its subsequent revisions. Because public consultation is a thoroughly ingrained part of the British town-planning system, people were given several opportunities to comment on the plan as a normal part of the approval process.

It is worth noting that the ideals driving the planning of Poundbury are not being watered down in the second phase of development. Densities are being maintained, and the first homebuilder at Poundbury continues to be involved. One key to the success of this planning model has been the attitude of the local authorities. In the end, they have proven flexible in reconsidering their zoning rules and especially their highway engineering standards.

HOUSING

When the plan for Poundbury was first unveiled, and as the first homes came on the market, there was no shortage of critics of the project. Many saw Poundbury as the silly pet project of a prince lost in his idealism and out of touch with the realities of the real estate market. It clearly did not help that Phase I came on the market during a recession in the industry, and that Dorchester hardly had the most robust real estate market to begin with. What the critics failed to understand, however, was the ability of a development like Poundbury to interest planners as well as consumers.

One of the most important features of Poundbury is its character. It strives to create a sense of place—one that is connected to the traditions and context of the surrounding area. And while one cannot transfer the Poundbury development model wholesale to other locations, it does show what can be achieved if one plans a project with the local context in mind.

Poundbury was intentionally built with a variety of housing types and styles. For-sale homes have two to five bedrooms, and rental apartments also are available. Fully 20 percent of the dwelling units are reserved for social housing (i.e., housing for low-income families). A great effort was made to intermingle these units with market-rate units, however, and in terms of design the two types of housing are indistinguishable. Poundbury offers homes in detached, semidetached, rowhouse, and multifamily configurations. There also is a 29-unit apartment building reserved for seniors.

Given this mix, Poundbury has attracted a variety of residents, although there is a slight concentration of older people. To help foster community spirit and to deal with community issues, a residents' association (which includes owners as well as renters) has been established, and its regular meetings are well attended.

The residential components of Poundbury have been a commercial success. Given the small size of the Dorset housing market, units at Poundbury have been absorbed at a reasonable pace, although absorption was somewhat slower than initially expected. Buyers, some drawn by the project's association with Prince Charles, have come from all over Britain and even abroad. Prices for typical, newly built homes in Phase I range from £132,500/\$190,800 for a 1,089-square-foot (101.1-square-meter), three-bedroom rowhouse unit to £220,000/\$316,900 for a 1,330-square-foot (123.5-square-meter) detached four-bedroom home. These prices represent a premium of 5 to 10 percent over comparable homes elsewhere in the local market. Home values have appreciated substantially since they first came on the market. Buyers appreciate not just the architecture and cachet of Poundbury, but also are attracted by the quality of the homes and the community as a whole.

Since the Duchy of Cornwall was not allowed to actually build anything at Poundbury, several private homebuilders became involved to produce and sell the homes there. Land for building was tendered out at market value with the exception of the parcels designated for industry, which were negotiated individually. With the sale of land came a development agreement that compelled the builders to follow the plans for Poundbury, and when a home is sold, title is transferred directly to the buyer from the duchy. The builders, which included C.G. Fry, the Guinness Trust, and Morrish Builders, were somewhat resistant at first to this unusual arrangement. However, they all ultimately agreed. Financing for construction was obtained by the builders in the private market, and all have received acceptable returns on their investment.

Residential densities at Poundbury are approximately 16 units per acre (38.8 units per hectare), about twice as high as those found in typical housing schemes in Britain. This level of density has been achieved through a combination of narrow streets, small yards, building houses to the front property line, and through the careful arrangement of off-street parking. Despite these measures, steps also were taken to maximize the level of privacy offered to each home. These densities also help to keep “eyes on the street,” perhaps helping to account for the fact that there has not been a single serious crime at Poundbury since it was opened.

MIXED USES

Commercial spaces ranging from 450 to 28,000 square feet (41.8 to 792.8 square meters) are available at Poundbury, and these were very much a part of the original plan for the development. Different types of office space, mostly smaller offices suitable for small businesses, are also available. Workshop spaces and even light-industrial buildings are incorporated into the plan, too, and are intermingled with Poundbury’s residential uses. Early occupiers of this space include a chocolate factory, an advertising and media company, and a manufacturer of optical instruments for the medical profession. Roughly 220 people are employed at facilities like these in Poundbury.

Getting these businesses to come to Poundbury was somewhat difficult, considering that there is little in the way of industry in Dorset to begin with. Nevertheless, these firms were attracted by the facilities at Poundbury, the quality of life available, and the presence of a local work force. In particular, firms already operating in Dorset have shown an interest in Poundbury. One facility that is attracting firms is the Poundbury Enterprise Center, which is used as a home base by a variety of organizations. The building offers a series of programs designed to assist small business startups, along with videoconferencing and other business facilities.

When it was originally conceived, the master plan for Poundbury called for extensive retail facilities. The goal was to provide for most of the needs of the development’s residents without compelling them to get in their cars and drive to shops. With the passage of time, however, it became clear that Poundbury simply could not support the number of retailers that the plan envisioned. This was especially true in light of the relatively slow pace of development there. Today, shopping opportunities at the development are rather limited, which is attributable in part to an interest in avoiding competition with the traditional shopping areas in Dorchester. Currently at Poundbury, there are an independent furniture store and a café, and the duchy continues to negotiate with other potential occupiers. However, the hope is that once more of Phase II is built and occupied, the threshold number of potential customers will be reached, and that more shops will become economically viable.

One retail function that has been successful, however, is the farmers’ market, although it, too, was a bit slow to get going. The market, which began in June 1999, is held monthly at the town square at Poundbury, and farmers from the region sell their produce to consumers. The market adds amenity value to the development and also dovetails nicely with Prince Charles’s belief in supporting local and organic farmers. To add to the attraction of the village square at Poundbury, a community hall was recently opened.

REFLECTIONS ON POUNDBURY

Poundbury has generated interest around Britain; in fact, that it has become the biggest tourist attraction in all of Dorchester. As such, thousands of people come every year to tour the development and to learn about the prince’s planning principles. Recently, the British government indirectly gave Poundbury a formal stamp of approval by adding to its national planning guidelines recommendations that advocate the type of mixed-use development found there.

Prince Charles is advocating that the principles and practices used at Poundbury come into wider use around Britain. He is accomplishing this in part through a charitable organization that he created in the mid-1990s called the Prince’s Foundation. Among its other activities, the foundation has a division called the Urban Villages Forum, which is working with developers, planners, and local governments around the country to both advocate for and assist in the development of projects like Poundbury.

Poundbury is not perfect, however. Over time, several complaints—mostly minor ones—have emerged from residents. For instance, many of them have found that their rear yards are simply too small to be really usable as spaces. Some people do not like the extensive use of fine gravel around Poundbury, not least because it easily winds up on the floors of their homes. Residents wish that more retail facilities were available, although they will presumably get their wish once the development is further built out. More serious, perhaps, is the fact that while the homes at Poundbury are well built, their traditional materials require traditionally high levels of maintenance, whether it is the painting of window frames and doors or the reapplication of whitewashes to the exteriors. Furthermore, the planners at Poundbury have had to take care to ensure that commercial traffic bound for the light-industrial uses in the development does not have an adverse impact on the surrounding residential areas.

The most important thing to take away from the Poundbury experience is the vision of urban development that it espouses. In a speech in February 1999, Prince Charles said, “We are building a place—somewhere which is recognizably a neighborhood, and where, over time, it should be quite possible to live, to work, to shop, and to take leisure, all within an easy walking distance. Far from being ‘old fashioned,’ Poundbury has merely tried to revisit those timeless principles that are best able to create a real sense of community.”

Barring a sharp turnaround in the British economy, Poundbury looks to have a bright future. The remaining phases of the mixed-use project will be developed according to demand in the market, and the duchy estimates that buildout will be completed within the next 20 to 25 years.

EXPERIENCE GAINED

The greatest challenge in developing Poundbury was to maintain the courage and vision to pursue a model of development that had been largely untested in the market and that reflected a sharp break with contemporary development practices. By insisting on the importance of this vision, Poundbury was able to achieve its coherent and progressive design.

In planning Poundbury, there was a need to balance having a principled plan of high quality, while still maintaining the necessary degree of buildability and affordability.

Moreover, the Poundbury development team needed to maintain a degree of flexibility to adapt to conditions of the real estate market. As time went on, the master plan for the development evolved to suit market conditions. The amount of retail and other commercial uses was decreased, for example, in light of the project's location and market.

Poundbury has used architecture, urban design, and a mix of uses successfully to help create a sense of place. The architecture is very much of a local character, resulting in a development that fits into the Dorset landscape.

A number of architects designed the buildings at Poundbury. Given the project's use of traditional designs and materials, a certain amount of education was required to ensure that these designers understood the properties of the materials and the building forms that were native to the region.

The Poundbury development team had to endure a great deal of public scrutiny because of the nature of the community's design and the project's famous sponsor. Despite the early criticism, the development team stuck to its principles and vision.

Poundbury has demonstrated that one can build a mixed-use community using unconventional planning principles while still creating a development that is livable, sustainable, and commercially viable.

PROJECT DATA			
LAND USE INFORMATION			
Site area of Phase I (acres/hectares): 18/7.2 Gross building area of Phase I (square feet/square meters): 250,000/23,225 Gross density of Phase I (units per acre/units per hectare): 16/38.8			
Land Use	Existing		
Office net rentable area (square feet/square meters)	30,000/2,787		
Retail gross leasable area (square feet/square meters)	10,000/929		
Residential units	280		
Hotel rooms	4		
Parking spaces	650		
RESIDENTIAL UNIT INFORMATION			
Unit Type	Unit Size, Square Feet (Square Meters)	Number Sold/Leased	Range of Initial Sales/Rental Prices
Two-bedroom apartment	500-600 (46-56)	40	£75,000-90,000/\$108,000-129,600
Two-bedroom house	600-750 (56-70)	50	£90,000-112,500/\$129,600-162,000
Three-bedroom house	800-900 (74-84)	50	£120,000-135,000/\$172,800-194,500
Four-bedroom house	1,000-1,350 (93-125)	60	£150,000-202,500/\$216,000-291,700
Five-bedroom house	1,600-2,500 (149-232)	80	£240,000-375,000/345,700-540,200
OFFICE INFORMATION			
Average tenant size: Ranges from 450-square-foot (42-square-meter) workshops to 28,000-square-foot (2,601-square-meter) factories			
RETAIL/ENTERTAINMENT INFORMATION			
Annual rents: Approximately £5-10/\$7.20-14.40 per square foot (£53-107/\$76-154 per square meter) Average length of lease: 3 to 9 years			
DEVELOPMENT COST INFORMATION			
Site acquisition cost: £500,000 per acre			
Construction Costs	Cost per Square Foot (Square Meter)		
Office	£35-50/\$50-72 (£376-537/\$541-773)		
Retail	£35/\$50 (£376/\$541)		
Residential	£45-65/\$64-93 (£483-698/\$695-1,005)		
Hotel	£50/\$72 (£537/\$773)		
Soft Costs			
Office	£2/\$2.8 (£21.50/\$31)		
Retail	£5/\$7 (£53.70/\$77.45)		
Residential	£5/\$7 (£53.70/\$77.45)		
DEVELOPMENT SCHEDULE			
Phase I	Year		
Planning started	1988		
Construction started	1993		
Sales/leasing started	1994		
Phase completed	2001		
Phase II	Year		
Planning started	1995		
Construction started	1996		
Sales/leasing started	1996		
Project completed	2010		

DIRECTIONS

From Heathrow Airport in London: Drive south on the M25 ring to M3. Take the M3 West in the direction of Southampton. At Southampton, continue west on the M27. The M27 turns into the A31, and continue west on the A31 in the direction of Dorchester. When the A31 ends, continue west on the A35 into Dorchester and follow the A35 around the town. On the western side of Dorchester, turn right and head east on the Bridport Road (B3150) to Poundbury.

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This Development Case Study is intended as a resource for subscribers in improving the quality of future projects. Data contained herein were made available by the project's development team and constitute a report on, not an endorsement of, the project by ULI-the Urban Land Institute.

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An aerial view of the Poundbury development site, including the buildings of phase I.



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Vernacular architecture and the use of local materials are the chief components of Poundbury's design.

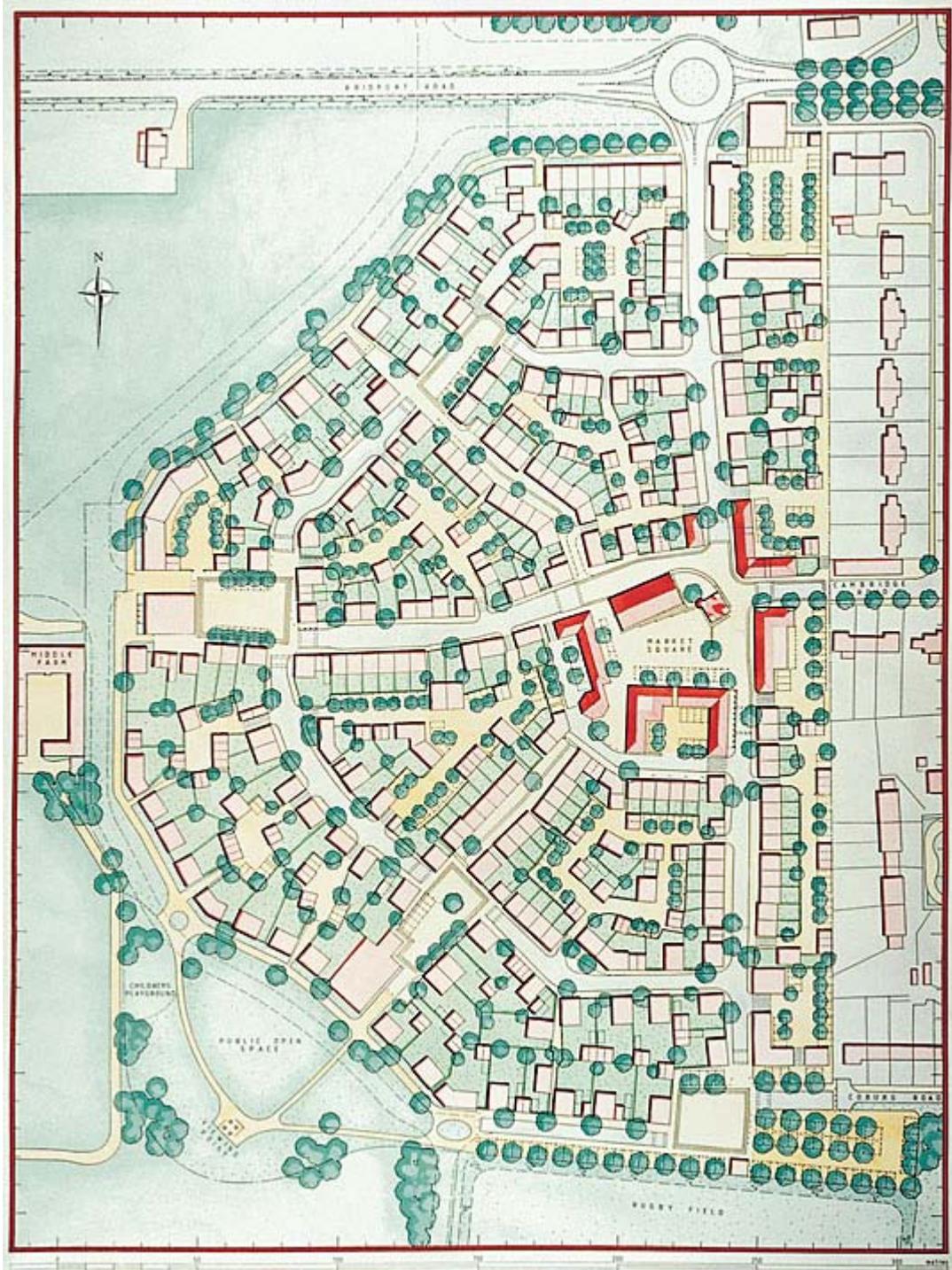


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Residential uses predominate at Poundbury. Market-rate units and assisted housing share the same streets and are indistinguishable in their design.



parking at poundbury is on the street and in carefully planned courtyards such as the one shown here.



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Site plan for phase I of Poundbury.