



Wareham

Town context

02.4

Historic background

2.4.1 Relatively little is known of Wareham's pre-Saxon history although evidence of human activity in the area dates back as far as 9000 BC (Mesolithic period). South-east Purbeck is known to have been an area of Roman activity and a Roman settlement underlies today's town.

2.4.2 Wareham's documented history stretches back to the 8th century. The town was founded as a river port due to its strong links with both the English Channel, via Poole Harbour and settlements further inland by means of both the River Piddle and River Frome. The town itself sits on raised terrain between the river valleys. The name Wareham is most likely derived from Var, the ancient name for the Frome.

2.4.3 As the town's prosperity grew, it attracted recurring Viking attacks and was even under Viking control for three years in the latter part of the 9th century. Once the town fell back into the hands of the Saxons, King Alfred of Wessex selected Wareham as one of the towns to be fortified as part of his programme of reinforcement against Viking attack. These fortified towns were known as 'burhs', and formed a network, such that no place in Wessex was more than 20 miles, or a day's march from a town. In exchange for free plots of land within the towns, settlers provided a defence force. The burhs were also encouraged to become centres of commerce and local government.

2.4.4 Even today, the manifestation of King Alfred's defensive plan, implemented between 880 and 885 remains one of Wareham's most visually striking features. Large 'walls' of earth were built up to protect the northern, eastern and western edges of the settlement. An ancient grid pattern network of lanes was established within the 'walls'.

2.4.5 Today the modern town remains substantially contained within this square form and largely laid out along the historic street pattern, although some 20th century development has occurred outside the 'walls' to the south-west and south-east. Sheltered by its Saxon 'walls', 9th and 10th century Wareham enjoyed further opportunity to thrive, relatively undisturbed, as a trading port as well as gaining importance as the location of two mints most probably sited at St. John's Hill.

2.4.6 During the Middle Ages and after the Norman Conquest, trading increased and for some time the town had as many as 285 houses. Bridges were built over the rivers Frome and Piddle for ease of access. The present bridge over the Frome, South Bridge, was built in 1927 due to an increase in traffic flow, and this is the third rebuild since the original Norman bridge. Wareham had a castle by 1113, which stood at the south-west corner of the town, but whilst trading continued in the town, by the late 11th century Corfe Castle was overtaking Wareham as the area's most significant defensive location.

2.4.7 The decline of Wareham as a port town began in the early 13th century when the river estuary started to silt up. As a consequence Poole became the preferred alternative and many traders left Wareham. By 1347 it was recorded that Wareham's port was no longer used. The following year much of the population died of the plague in what was to be the start of a gloomy epoch in the town's history. During 1418 the Almshouses were founded on East Street to care for the poor and needy. Wareham Castle had fallen into serious disrepair by 1461 and the site of the former keep is now occupied by a 19th century house. Further to the castle's decline, Wareham town was described as being in a terrible condition in circa 1540.

2.4.8 During the civil war of the 1640s, the town kept changing hands, closely escaping severe destruction in 1644 and again the year after next when Corfe Castle was blown up, but Parliament decided the 'walls' of Wareham were not to be breached.

2.4.9 The town may have been saved from destruction during the 17th century, but the following century brought the Great Fire of Wareham. On July 25th 1762, two-thirds of the town's buildings, more than 140, were razed to the ground in only three hours by an accidental fire, started in South Street. This marked the end of thatched construction in Wareham, and so the boundary of the fire's reach is still noticeable today by the locations of the thatched buildings that survive. One example is the Kings Arms, North Street.



This model from the Town Museum shows the extent of the devastation of the Great Fire of 1762.
(Reproduced with the kind permission of Wareham Town Museum)



1. Some thatched buildings survived the fire and remain to the present day.



2. A house finished in the livery of 'Rempstone Red'.

2.4.10 The town was rebuilt after the fire, so much of Wareham appears to be in the Georgian style. However, the greater majority of buildings beyond the substantially Georgian frontages onto the main streets are much more recent, mostly dating from the 20th century. Even so, the history of the town is still in evidence thanks to its Saxon 'walls' and ancient grid-form street pattern.

2.4.11 The Rempstone Estate is a significant landowner in Wareham and has many properties within the town. Estate owned buildings are identified by their red livery known as 'Rempstone Red' and can be seen throughout the town, particularly in and around the town centre.

2.4.12 There is some limited 20th century development outside the town walls to the south-west and south-east, but further expansion of the town was largely restricted by the rivers to the north and south and the marshy topography surrounding Wareham. This has resulted in the development of North Wareham on the north side of the Piddle Valley adjacent to the railway station and this therefore forms a distinct settlement almost entirely mid to late 20th century in origin.



3. Wareham Quay originated from the town's past as a thriving trading port.



4. One of the fire insurance plaques located on many older buildings in the town centre.

KEY POINTS

- The documented history of the town dates from the 8th century AD;
- King Alfred established Wareham as a stronghold against the Vikings. The town's surviving 'walls' are one of its most striking features;
- The modern town is structured around the ancient grid street pattern;
- In 1762 the Great Fire destroyed two thirds of the town and thereafter the practice of thatching roofs was ended;
- The town was rebuilt in the Georgian Style (the fashion of the day) which is still found mostly along the main streets;
- Behind the main streets infill development within the 'walls' has occurred throughout the 20th century;
- Despite the presence of many recent buildings the history of the town remains evident in its ancient 'walls', street pattern and surviving historic buildings;
- The Rempstone Estate has influenced the appearance of the town.



Wareham Town context 02.5 Historic maps



OS 1901



OS 1925



OS 1936



OS 1952

2.5.1 The sequence of historic maps illustrated shows that the gradual infilling of the historic town area within the 'walls' together with subsequent overspill into some surrounding areas.

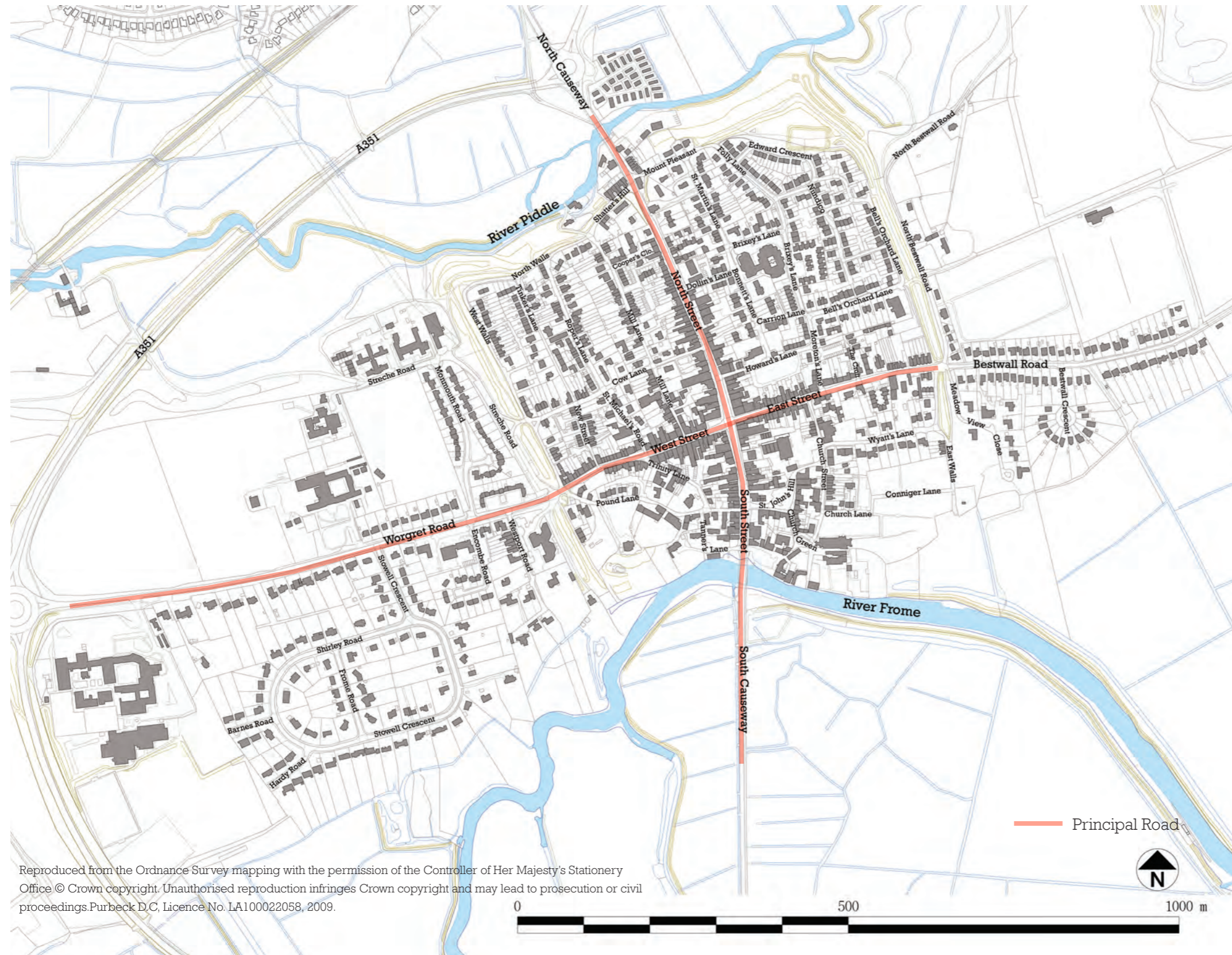
2.5.2 The 1901 map shows the majority of development at that time being located along the main north-south and east-west axes of the town with a concentration of buildings around the Quay and to the east and west of South Street. The northern part of the town had a network of ancient lanes providing access to small parcels of land within the 'walls', but only sporadic development had taken place leaving the majority of the north-east and north-west quarters still largely undeveloped.

2.5.3 The OS maps of 1925 and 1936 illustrate progressive development taking place during the inter-war period within the confines of the town 'walls'. This comprised ad-hoc infilling of open plots along the routes of the historic road network. This incremental infilling has created a pleasing patchwork of houses of various styles and types. In addition, the first substantial modern 'estate' style developments appear in the north-east quarter of the town.

2.5.4 Almost all of the infilling has occurred in the northern half of the town, the southern part being a long-established built up area of Wareham where little re-development has occurred in recent times. The infilling of small plots is a process that continues to the present day with mid to late 20th century houses and contemporary development being located amongst the older and more established houses found within the north-east and north-west quarters of the town.

2.5.5 By 1952 further infilling within the town walls had occurred, creating an increasingly dense network of residential streets. Development also started to extend beyond the traditional confines of the town 'wall', notably as ribbon development along Worgret Road and Bestwall Road to the west and east respectively.

(Historic OS maps reproduced with the kind permission of the Dorset History Centre, Dorchester)



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2.5.6 A comparison between the contemporary map of Wareham and the 1952 Ordnance Survey map shows a continuation of small scale development within the 'walls', resulting in an incremental concentration of development in the latter half of the 20th century. Consequently, this area contains many relatively recent buildings, particularly in the north-east quarter. While the street layout and townscape remains interesting, many buildings themselves are not of historic or architectural interest.

2.5.7 It is also interesting to note that an early development of council houses in the north-east quarter of the town has been redeveloped wholesale in the 1990s as a higher density estate. It will be seen from the character studies that a relatively large estate development within the town 'walls' is not characteristic of this part of the town with its traditional variety of building types, styles and materials.

2.5.8 Development outside the 'walls' continued south of Worgret Road around what is now the Stowell Crescent area. In addition, smaller scale estate type developments also took place at Westport at Monmouth Road and Encombe Road. These developments occurred during the 1960s.

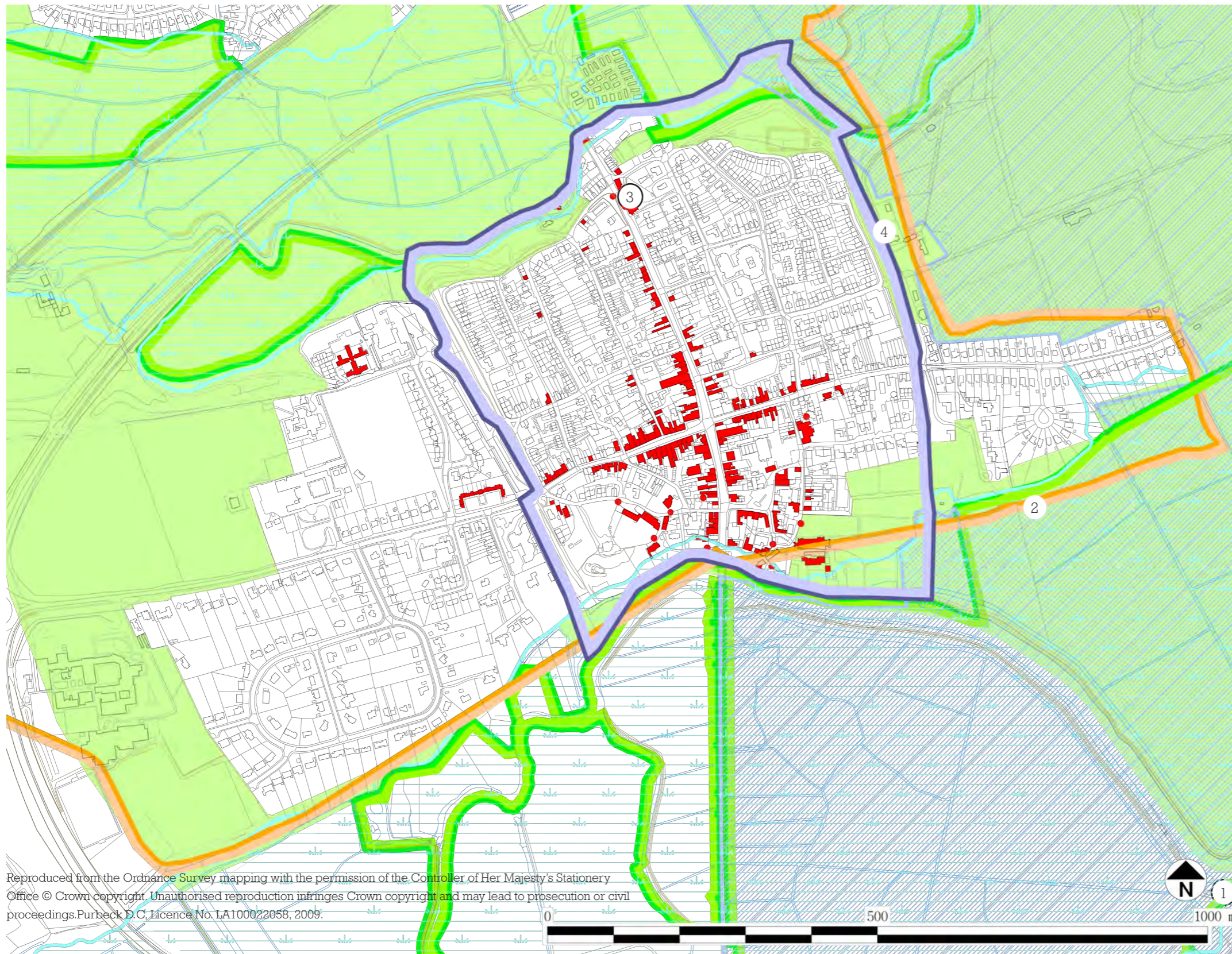
2.5.9 From an analysis of this sequence of maps it can be seen that Wareham grew significantly both within and outside the 'walls', during the 20th century, particularly during the mid to late half of this period. This process has continued to the present day, primarily through the redevelopment of small plots inside the 'walls'.

KEY POINTS

- By 1901 the town was concentrated along the main streets and around the Quay, with only sporadic development elsewhere within the 'walls';
- Throughout the 20th century development has gradually infilled the areas between the 'walls' and the main streets;
- In the mid-20th century development appeared beyond the town 'walls';
- Small scale infilling continues to the present day contributing to the patchwork character of the town.



Wareham Town Context 02.6 Planning Designations



- Listed building
- Green belt
- SAM (Scheduled Ancient Monument)
- Conservation area
- AONB (Dorset Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty)
- SSSI (Sites of Special Scientific Interest)
- Floodplain
- Purbeck heritage coast

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1. The Dorset Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) extends around the southern edges of the town.



2. Green Belt surrounds Wareham to the north, south and west, restricting expansion in these areas. Numerous SSSI's are also an indication of the sensitivity of the area.



3. The town's rich past means that many buildings are listed for their historic or architectural interest and contained within the Wareham Conservation Area.



4. The town 'walls' are designated as a Scheduled Ancient Monument (SAM) in recognition of their historic importance.

2.6.1 An examination of the current planning designations that apply to Wareham and the surrounding landscape illustrate the high quality and importance of both the urban and rural environment.

2.6.2 Wareham is sandwiched between the Dorset Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) around its southern fringes and extensive Green Belt which envelops the town. In addition, internationally important nature conservation areas and Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI's) add further restrictions to the edges of the town to the north and south. The boundary of the Dorset Heritage Coast also abuts the edges of the town along its eastern fringes.

2.6.3 Wareham's ancient history also means that it has a considerable number of historic buildings many of which are listed buildings to protect their character. The majority of these buildings are situated along the main routes into Wareham and clustered around the southern part of the town, reflecting its function as the historic commercial heart of the town. The old town is also included within a Conservation Area which also extends out to the adjoining water meadows to the north, south and as far as the edge of Poole Harbour to the east. This is clearly an acknowledgement of the contribution they make to the setting of the town.

2.6.4 The Conservation Area also covers the residential 'backland' streets inside the walls. Although few listed buildings are present amongst these streets they represent a historic and architecturally rich built environment and as such are rightly protected by this designation. (The more ubiquitous modern extensions to the town are notably excluded from these areas in recognition of the less historic nature of these areas) Of particular note are the town walls which are protected as a Scheduled Ancient Monument (SAM) and which have helped shape the layout of the town we see today.

2.6.5 Taken together, the planning designations intended to protect both the natural and historic environment represent significant constraints for the future development of the town.

KEY POINTS

- A range of planning designations protects the character of the town and its setting;
- The visual and ecological quality of the surrounding landscape is reflected in areas which are designated as AONB, SSSI and Green Belt;
- The historical and architectural interest of Wareham is protected by an extensive Conservation Area and many listed building designations;
- Features of notable historic interest such as the town 'walls' are designated as Scheduled Ancient Monuments;
- Collectively these designations represent significant constraints to development in Wareham.