

Gillingham Historic Urban Character Area 1

Historic Town Centre

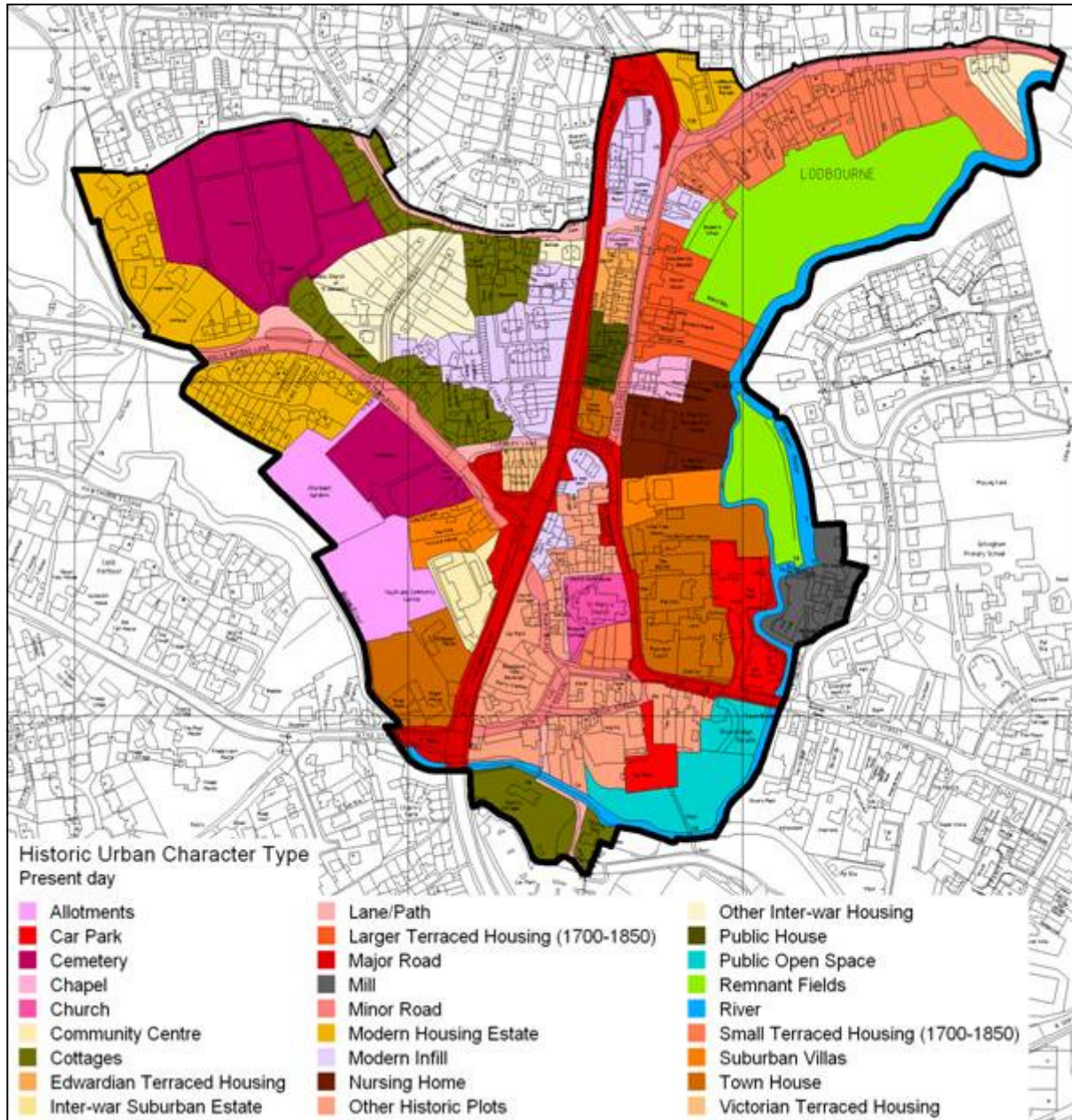


Figure 40: Map of Historic Urban Character Area 1, showing current historic urban character type.

Gillingham Historic Urban Character Area 1 Structure of Character Area

Overview

This area represents the core of the medieval and post-medieval town of Gillingham. It is defined primarily by its historic dimension.

Topography and Geology

This area lies on a low spur between the two rivers immediately north of their confluence. The geology of the character area entirely comprises Kimmeridge Clay.

Urban Structure

The area is bisected by the Gillingham relief road, disturbing the traditional road layout which comprised three main routes from the north, west and east converging on the church, with a number smaller lanes and roads running off them. The plots along these roads are varied, with densely-packed irregular rectilinear plots on the south side of the High Street and the west side of Queen Street, with small open spaces at The Square and St Martin's Square. The east side of Queen Street has larger more open plots, now subdivided. The plots along Bay Road are rectilinear but with variable widths. Larger open plots and fields are found along the Shreen Water floodplain. West of the relief road the structure is different and comprises a mixture of large open rectilinear areas and small irregular plots along road frontages, with the rest of the area filled with housing estates with local access roads and culs-de-sac.

Present Character

Figure 40 shows the present day historic urban character types. This area has a very varied mosaic of character types. Irregular Historic Plots are focussed to the south and west of the church, with Town Houses to the east and north of the church. Small and Large Terraced Housing (1700-1850) lines part of Queen Street and Bay Road, with Cottages along the roads to the west of the relief road. Small areas of Victorian and Edwardian Terraced Housing and Suburban Villas are found on both sides of the relief road. The west side of the relief road has an Inter-war Suburban Estate and a large area of Modern Infill, Allotments and Cemetery. Smaller areas of Modern Infill occur in the east part of the area. Along the rivers are Remnant Fields, Public Open Space, Car Parks and Allotments. Other character types include Public House, Nursing Home and Mill.

Time Depth

The earliest components are the historic routes

of High Street, Queen Street and Wyke Street, which may be prehistoric or Roman in origin. The church is medieval, but may be on the site of a Saxon Minster church. The plots along Queen Street, High Street and Wyke Road may be medieval in origin, but with many later alterations. The mill may be the site of a Domesday mill. The other areas along Queen Street and Bay Road are mainly 18th and 19th century in date. The cottages are probably 17th to 19th century in origin and the cemeteries date from the late 19th century. The nursing home, car parks and modern infill date from after 1970.

Settlement Pattern and Streetscape

The core of this area has medium to high density settlement in an irregular perimeter block or ribbon layout with the majority of buildings set directly on the street frontage. A number of the streets are relatively narrow with sinuous alignments or sharper angled changes in direction. This together with the variety in property width, height and roof alignment, gives a sequence of differing views throughout the area. There are a number of gaps in the frontage, either through modern development with associated car parking or where there are town houses set in larger grounds. There are two small open areas in the street pattern at The Square and St Martin's Square. This street pattern has been affected through the construction of Le Neubourg Way and the insertion of a corridor of modern development through the western flank of the historic core.

Green spaces and trees play an important part in this area, with the churchyard providing a central green area and with significant open green spaces along the course of the Shreen Water. The cemeteries also contribute to these green spaces. There are also a number of trees along the street and in larger gardens which make a positive contribution to the historic core.



Figure 41: View of The Square looking south.

Gillingham Historic Urban Character Area 1 Built Character

Building types

The area has a large number of traditional buildings characterised by their use of local brick for walling, slate and tile roofs and survival of historic detail. They generally date from the late 18th and 19th century. Only two medieval buildings survive: the chancel and north chapel of St Mary's Church date from the 14th century, the remainder being reconstructed during the 19th and 20th centuries. The historic building at Stour Motors at the north end of Queen Street appears to be of 16th century date with a surviving roof structure of five bays. Town houses on the east side of Queen Street date from the 18th-19th centuries. They tend to be large, detached and set back from the street frontage in large plots. They include the 19th century vicarage, now called Rawson Court (Figure 42) and the 18th century Lime Tree House. The 18th century Town Mill House survives and has been incorporated into a residential complex. Cottages to the south and west of the town centre rank among the oldest surviving houses in Gillingham, dating from the 17th-18th centuries. They are now interspersed with 19th century, inter-war and modern housing. Plank House is a 17th-18th century town house west of the town centre on Wyke Road (Figure 43). Buildings tightly packed around the town's two squares date from the late 18th to early 20th centuries, including The Slade Centre, built as a department store in 1905. There are two historic stone bridges, each with two semi-circular arches; Town Bridge over the Shreen Water is dated 1800 and Wyke Road bridge over the river Stour, dated 1807. The northern end of the character area, at Lodbourne, is dominated by 19th and early 20th century terraces and suburban villas (Figure 44).

Building Materials

The earlier buildings dating from the 17th and early 18th centuries tend to be constructed in coursed rubble with ashlar and/or brick dressings. They frequently have brick chimney stacks and hipped tile or thatched roofs. The Vicarage Schoolroom has a tile roof with stone slate verges made from Coral Rag. Later 18th and 19th-early 20th century houses tend to be built in brick, occasionally with Greensand or Ham stone ashlar dressings and slate or tiled roofs. The later 19th and early 20th century houses, during the period of the Gillingham Brick and Tile Co. frequently retain moulded brick or tile detail. The church of St Mary is built mostly in ashlar with some coursed rubble walls and ashlar dressings. The roof is in slate and lead.

Key Buildings

Public Buildings: St Mary's Church, Cemetery Road Youth and Community Centre, Cemetery Chapel, Churchbury House, Portland Cottages.

Medieval Domestic Buildings: Stour Motors.

Post-medieval Houses: The Vicarage, Lime Tree House, Plank House, Chantry Cottage, the Cottage, Tower House, St Martin's (Gillingham Adult Education Centre)

Post-medieval Industrial and Commercial Buildings: Mill House, Phoenix Hotel, Queen's Head, The Slade Centre.



Figure 42: View of the Vicarage (Rawson Court), Queen Street.



Figure 43: Plank House (right) and River Gate (left), Wyke Road.



Figure 44: Elm View Terrace, Bay Road, Lodbourne.

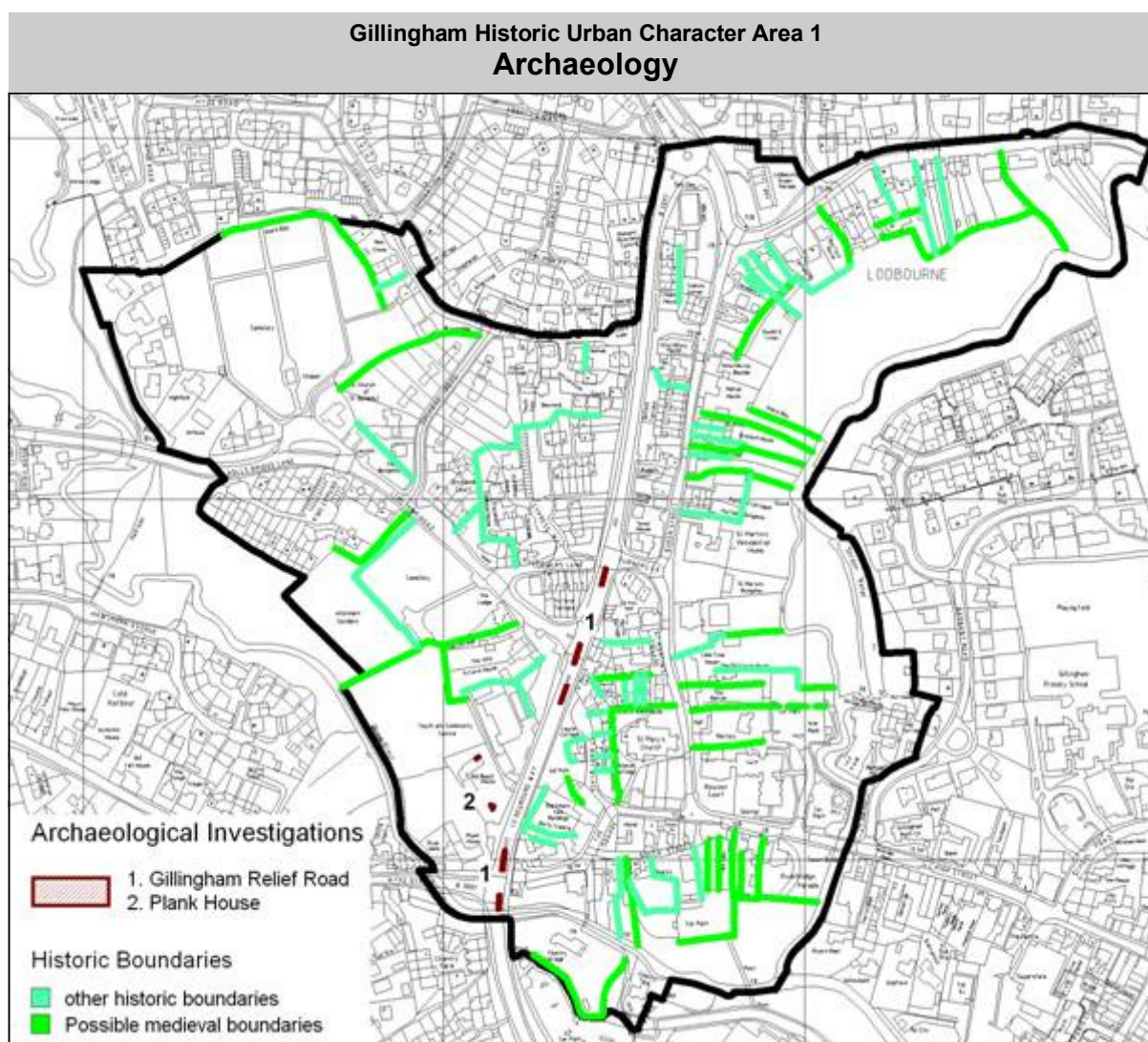


Figure 45: Archaeological Investigations and findspots in Historic Urban Character Area 1.

Archaeological Investigations

Two archaeological investigations have been undertaken in this character area (Figure 45; Appendix 3, Nos 1 and 2) comprising works in advance of the construction of the Gillingham relief road and an evaluation at Plank House. Six trial trenches were excavated along the route of the Gillingham Relief Road during 1989 and 1990. Five lay within this character area at the junctions with Turner's Lane, Cemetery Road and Wyke Road. In general this work demonstrated that the area of the medieval town has been disturbed and truncated by post-medieval and modern features, but at Cemetery Road, there was evidence for a substantial building aligned on the street frontage, probably of early medieval date (Heaton 1995). A single undated ditch was found during the evaluation of land adjacent to Plank House (Valentin 2000a).

Archaeological Character

The archaeological character of the area is predominately medieval and post-medieval in nature and can be expected to comprise pits, boundaries and structural features. These will be best preserved in the rear plots of properties in the central area, Chantry Ford, Queen Street, Lodbourne, Cemetery Road, Wyke Road and Town Mill. The relief road investigations have demonstrated that survival of medieval structural remains can be anticipated. Saxon remains could survive in the vicinity of the parish church and the back plots of properties fronting on to St Martin's Square and The Square.

Medieval and post-medieval industrial archaeological remains may survive at Town Mill, but probably damaged by recent development. The character of deposits in the Lodbourne Green area may be more in the way of unstratified finds associated with trading at Gillingham's annual fairs.

Historic boundaries depicted on Figure 45 are derived from the tithe map and the 1st edition Ordnance Survey maps. The potential burgage boundaries are clearly visible on the east side of

Queen Street. It is also clear that the construction of the Gillingham relief road has destroyed many historic boundaries.

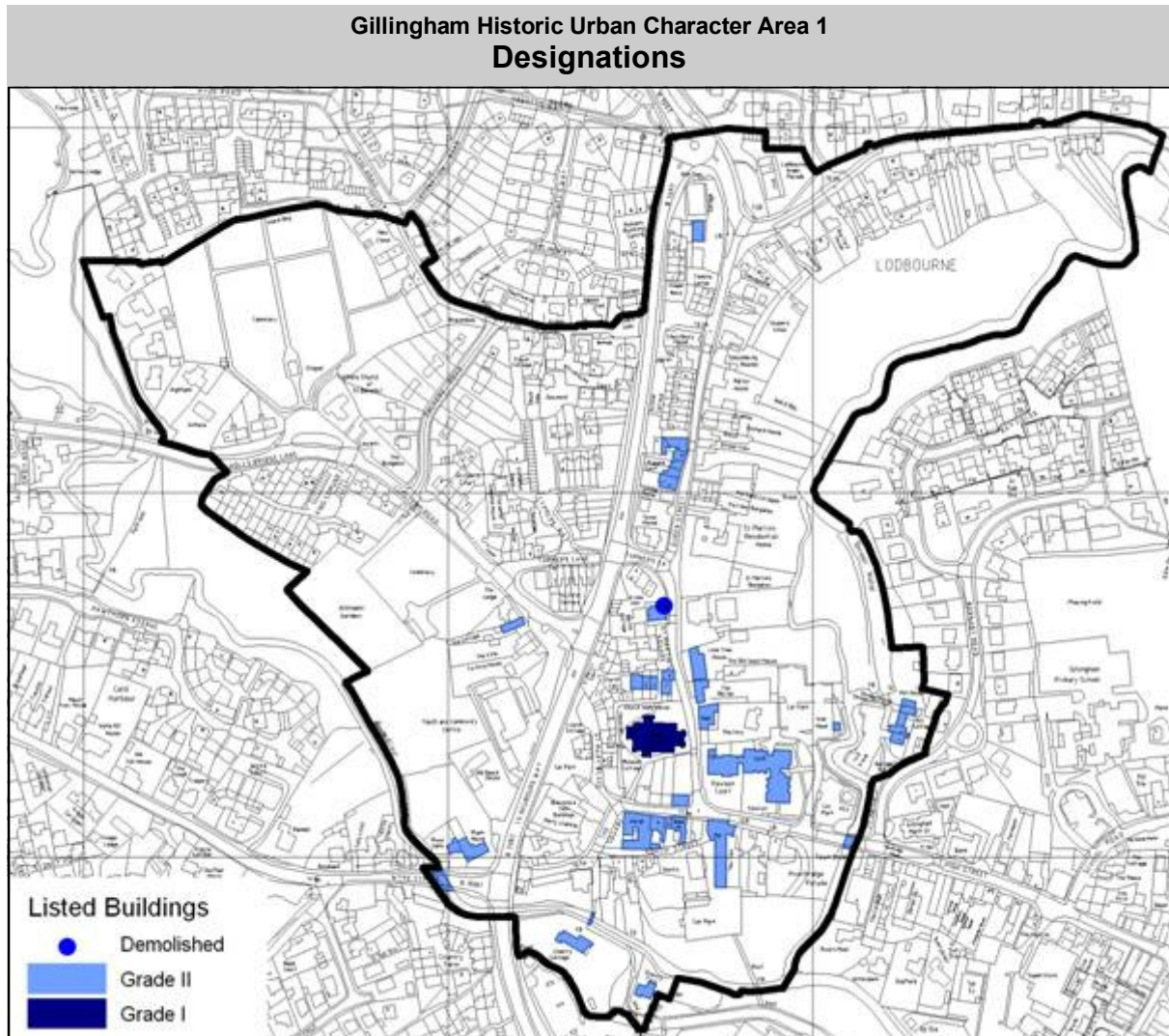


Figure 46: Listed Buildings in Historic Urban Character Area 1.

Listed Buildings

There are 29 Listed Buildings in the Character Area, one of which is Grade I (St Mary's Church). The remainder are Grade II (Figure 46). One listed building; Broadhayes Cottage, Queen Street has been demolished.

Conservation Areas

Only the southern third of this Character Area lies within the Gillingham Conservation Area, approximately south from St Martin's Square on the east side of the relief road and the

immediate vicinity of Wyke Bridge (including Plank House) on the west side of the relief road (Figure 39).

Registered Historic Parks and Gardens

There are no Registered Parks and Gardens within the Character Area.

Scheduled Monuments

There are no Scheduled Monuments within the character area.

Gillingham Historic Urban Character Area 1 Evaluation

Strength of Historic Character

The overall strength of character of this area is judged to be **strong**. The character of the medieval core is a combination of the positive contribution made by a very high number of historic buildings and the tight urban grain of a traditional market town. Nearly 60% of the buildings within the character area date from the late 19th century or earlier. This is the only part of the town to contain upstanding medieval structures. The widespread use of local materials is a unifying feature of the character area. Furthermore, there is good survival of potentially medieval plot boundaries. However, there is a caveat in that the area to the west of the medieval core has been substantially altered by the construction of a modern relief road with modern housing and commercial development in its immediate vicinity.

Sensitivity to Large Scale Development

The area has a **high** sensitivity to major change. Modern development has been largely restricted to the Gillingham relief road corridor. The remainder of the area retains a significant proportion of historic fabric which is characterised by its consistent scale and use of local materials such as brick, limestone rubble and greensand ashlar. There are also significant areas of undeveloped meadow and 19th century cemeteries around the fringes of the character area. Thus the majority of the area has a high sensitivity to major change. The relief road corridor might be improved through

large scale development if this was sympathetic to the scale and character of the historic town.

Archaeological Potential

The archaeological potential of this area is judged to be **high**. It forms the primary settlement component of Gillingham. Excavation in advance of the Gillingham relief road has demonstrated the potential for important information relating to the medieval development of the town. The relative lack of modern development in the historic core means that there is a high potential for the survival of deposits relating to the Saxon and medieval town. These have the potential to reveal details on the organisation, crafts, industries, economy and diet of the inhabitants. Furthermore, little is known of the origins of Gillingham and the potential for evidence of a Minster church adjacent to a pre-existing Roman road beneath the medieval town is of paramount importance in this respect. An outline for the development of the town plan has been suggested in this report, and yet there is very little dateable evidence to support or refute the scheme. The medieval core of the town provides the greatest archaeological potential to remedy this situation.

There is also potential for the survival of earlier structures hidden within later buildings in this area.

This area has the potential to provide information which would contribute to Research Questions 1- 5, 7-14 and 16-25 (Part 7).

Key Characteristics

- Primary settlement component of historic Gillingham
- Parish church located centrally in the town
- Possible medieval and post-medieval market and fair sites
- Possible site of medieval and Domesday Mill
- Significant numbers of historic buildings with contemporary detail
- Some surviving medieval plot boundaries
- Significant green corridors along rivers and in cemeteries