Dorset Historic Towns Project

Sherborne

Historic Urban Characterisation

DORSET County Council

WEST DORSET DISTRICT COUNCIL

ENGLISH HERITAGE

Dorset Historic Towns Project

Sherborne

Historic Urban Characterisation

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Summary

This report contains the results of a consideration of the historical, archaeological, architectural and map evidence relating to the developmental history of Sherborne. It has focused on the understanding of the overall development of the town from its earliest beginnings to the present day. This work has been conducted in order to; achieve a better understanding of how the historical dimension has influenced the modern townscape; identify what historical features and structures survive within the modern town and; comprehend the contribution made by this historic dimension to the present character of Sherborne. This will enable an informed approach to the management of change and conservation of the urban environment.

Historical Background

Sherborne originated as an important Saxon ecclesiastical centre. The bishopric of Sherborne was founded in AD 705, probably on an existing British monastic estate. Aldhelm, the first Bishop of Sherborne, is thought to have built a church here. In AD 998, the Benedictine Abbey of Sherborne was founded by Bishop Wulfsige III and a series of monastic buildings were built to the north of the church. A secular settlement developed next to the church and Abbey and by the eve of the Norman conquest was a sizeable nucleated settlement, which developed into a thriving market town. Sherborne Old Castle was built around AD 1137, and formed the focus of the borough of Castleton, probably created in the 12th century. The town grew throughout the medieval period and, in the early 13th century, the planned borough of Newland was created. Sherborne became an important cloth-making town during the 15th century. The dissolution of the Abbey in 1539 had relatively little effect on the economy of the town, which prospered into the 18th century, largely because of its woollen cloth industry. The cloth trade declined and button making, glove making, haberdashery and silk manufacture became more important in the 18th and early 19th century. The town's fortunes were boosted by the arrival of the railway in the mid 19th century. There was continued but slow expansion in the late 19th and early 20th century. After the Second World War there was significant suburban expansion of the town, particularly to the west, east and northeast.

Town morphology

Sherborne has a complex plan form with two main north-south roads (Cheap Street and Acreman Street) two major east-west routes (Greenhill/Newell and Half Moon Street/Long Street) with a diagonal road (Newland) running from the north end of Cheap Street to Castleton. This street arrangement, with some modifications, dates from the medieval period, but some elements are much earlier. Cheap Street forms the central focus of the town from at least the Norman period onwards and represents the core of the original nucleated settlement. It runs along the east side of the Abbey precinct, between two medieval market areas at Greenhill and outside the Abbey Gate. Newland is the main street of the medieval planned suburb of Newland, which had its own market area. Linear settlement developed along the major approach roads (Westbury, Coldharbour, Kitt Hill) from the medieval period onwards. Within the main framework of streets is a range of minor historic streets and roads. The railway line skirts the southern edge of the town, running along the river floodplain and forms the urban edge along this side. Areas of industrial character have developed along the edge of the town next to the railway. The modern suburban development is concentrated towards the north, east and west, infilling large areas around the periphery of the town. These suburban estates have been planned with their own looped road networks and culs-de-sac, which have little in common with the historic road networks and the earlier settlement morphology.

Built character

Sherborne has many buildings with significant historical character in the area of the medieval and post-medieval town. The widespread use of local Sherborne Stone enhances the connection between the town and its landscape setting. Of particular significance is the Abbey church and associated buildings of Sherborne School, some of which occupy surviving elements of the medieval monastic precinct. Medieval monastic buildings also enhance the market place. The ruins of the early 12th century Old Castle to the east of the town were incorporated into the grounds of the current Sherborne Castle built in 1594. Important 17th and 18th century town houses include Greenhill, Cornhill, Kitt Hill and Newell House. Industrial expansion in the 19th century saw the building of finely-detailed red brick terraces around Westbury and Horsecastles. Landmark buildings of the late 19th and early 20th centuries are the Digby Hotel, Sherborne Station and Sherborne Girls School. Edwardian terraces and suburban villas also add

Figure 1: Vertical aerial photographic view of Sherborne, 2005 (© Getmapping.com, 2005).

to the character of the area to the north of The Green at Priestlands, Kings Road, Wootton Grove and Simons Road. Notable industrial buildings are the silk mills at Westbury and the Dorsetshire Brewery.

Landscape Setting

Sherborne lies on the north side of the Yeo valley upon the gentle dip slope of the Jurassic Inferior Oolite beds. The grounds of Sherborne Castle estate occupy the south bank of the river. Modern development is restricted to the northern slopes and the former common pasture of Lenthay to the west.

Historic Urban Character

The Historic Urban character of Sherborne is closely bound up with its distinctive landscape setting and the quality of its historic fabric, as well as the quality of its documented history. The late Saxon and medieval town plan survives virtually complete, and the associated post-medieval streetscapes are largely intact. The location of the Abbey and historic town centre are also significant in terms of landscape setting, sitting as they do, just above the open meadows of the Yeo floodplain. The good survival of the historic town structure is complemented by the many historic buildings. The survival in the historic core of many unbroken groups of buildings, with little disruption from modern development, is a major factor which highlights the contribution made by historic elements to Sherborne's urban character. The harmonious use of local building materials helps underscore its local setting and emphasises the linkage with the surrounding landscape.

Further Research

This report has highlighted many aspects of the historical development of Sherborne and how this has shaped the modern town. It has also indicated gaps in our knowledge and areas which would repay further research.

The main areas of suggested further research include:

- Research into the layout of the middle to late Saxon cathedral and Abbey precincts and associated secular settlement.
- Research into the late Saxon and medieval development of the town, its economy, industry and secular buildings.
- Research into the pre-urban landscape; the origins and development of field systems and dispersed settlement patterns, particularly the Roman and post-Roman settlements at Pinford Lane, Sherborne old Castle and potentially Sherborne Abbey.

Part 1: Introduction

1.1 Background to the Project

The Dorset Historic Towns Survey forms part of a national programme of historic urban surveys, launched by English Heritage in 1992 (English Heritage 1992) and subsequently modified in the light of approaches developed as part of English Heritage's Historic Landscape Characterisation programme (Thomas 2005).

The 23 places selected for inclusion in the Dorset Historic Towns Survey are shown on Figure 2. For the purposes of this project, Dorset is defined by its post-1974 boundary and includes the present administrative county of Dorset and the area of the Unitary Authorities of Bournemouth and Poole.

1.2 Rationale

Town centres have always been a focus for trade, industry and housing; consequently there have been many different pressures on their development. This has led to both the creation of a potentially rich, complex, deeply-stratified urban archaeological resource through past development of the town and, on the other hand, to serious threats to the survival of this archaeological resource and to other elements of the historical townscape through modern developmental pressure. Without knowledge and understanding of the historic urban environment it is too easy for significant elements to be damaged or removed through modern redevelopment.

The potential for the historic environment to play a complex and highly significant role in economic regeneration was outlined in *Power of Place* (English Heritage, 2000) and its value is highlighted in the government's response *The Historic Environment: A Force for our Future* (DCMS 2001). The potential of the historic environment is particularly significant in towns, where a high quality historic urban environment and the resulting distinctiveness and sense of place that this brings, has been shown to be a primary asset in promoting regeneration. The effect may be direct – through heritage tourism, for example – or more subtle, promoting a strong sense of identity and pride of place, thus creating new confidence and a positive climate for investment and growth.

However, before we can build upon the potential positive effects of the historic urban environment, we must understand it. Characterisation provides a means of understanding the diverse range of factors which create distinctiveness and a sense of place. However, in order to make the characterisation of the historic urban environment relevant and meaningful, it needs to be based on a thorough assessment of the nature, quality and quantity of the historic resource of each urban centre. It is to this end that the Dorset Historic Towns Survey has been undertaken.

1.3 Aims

The aim of the project is to present a review of the existing archaeological, historical and urban morphological evidence and set out the historic character and development of Dorset's Historic towns:

- to produce a useful and flexible tool to aid in the understanding and management of the town
- to inform archaeological and historic environment research
- to inform the management and interpretation of historic urban buildings and land use.
- to provide an evidence base to feed into the Local Development Framework
- to encourage the integration of urban historic characterisation into the wider process of protecting and enhancing urban character.
- to address a number of research aims set out in the South West Archaeological Research Framework into developing understanding of urban settlement from the Roman to the post-medieval periods (Webster 2008).

1.4 Report Structure

The Historic Urban Characterisation Assessment reports all have a similar structure, divided into six major sections. These are briefly described below to enable easy navigation to the various elements.

Part 1: Introduction is a general introduction to the Dorset Historic Towns Project and to this report.

Part 2: Overview of Approach is a brief methodological section outlining the guiding principles and approach, together with an explanation of the main technical terms used in this report.

Part 3: Town Context is a consideration of the wider natural setting of the town. It includes a

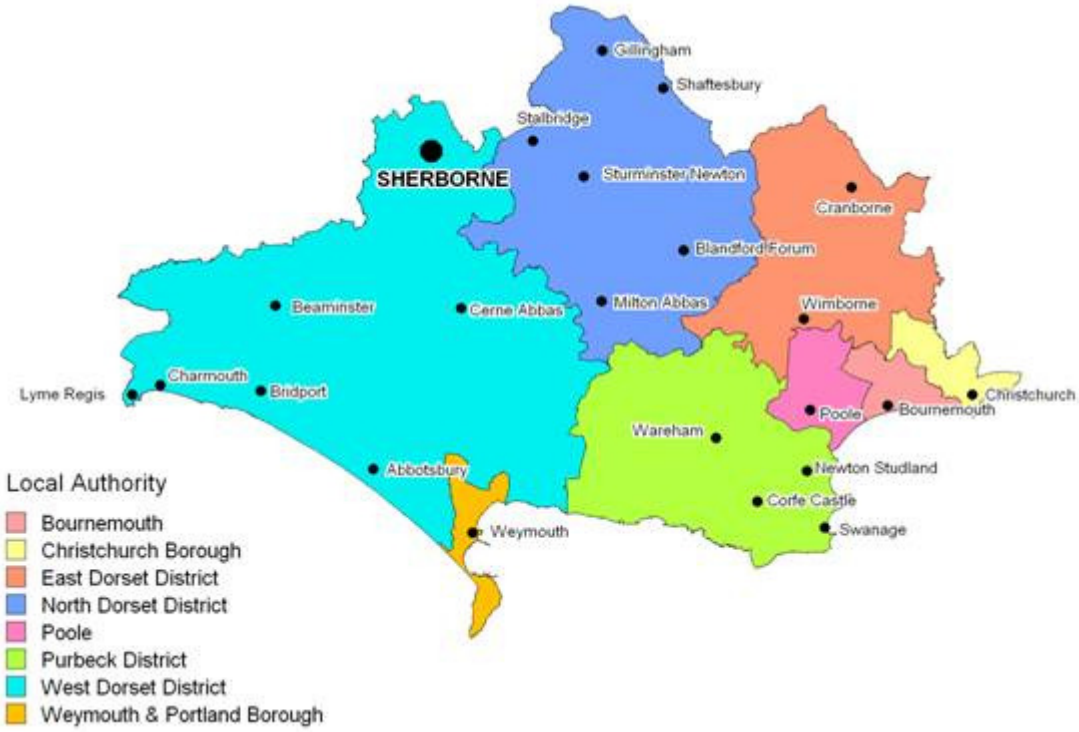

Figure 2: Map of Dorset showing the location of Sherborne and the other towns in the Dorset Historic Towns Survey.

summary account of the geology and topography and makes reference to any Landscape Character Assessments undertaken in the area. It includes a summary of the present town, its population, economic base, etc.

Part 4: Sources is an outline of the main sources of historic, cartographic, archaeological and other information used in the report, together with a summary of previous research in the town.

Part 5: Historical Analysis provides a summary account of the chronological development of the town from its origins to the present day, and is a synthesis of the available documentary, archaeological, topographic and morphological information, based largely on a review of published sources. This provides the context for the consideration of Historic Urban Character.

Part 6: Historic Urban Character Appraisal presents the details of the historic urban characterisation work, identifying the physical remains of the past in the present day townscape. It includes a summary of the overall historic urban character of the town and a description of the Historic Urban Character Areas defined as part of this work.

Part 7: Research Framework provides a short research framework outlining the major research questions which could be used to guide and inform future research into the town and how these fit into the South West Archaeological Research Framework.

1.5 Who is this document for?

The information in this report is aimed at the public bodies, organisations and groups that play a role in the planning and management of the urban and historic environments. Additionally anyone who has an interest in the historic urban environment, including community groups, developers, architects and academics, may find aspects of this work of interest and relevance.

Part 2: Overview of Approach

2.1 Guiding Principles

Historic Urban Characterisation is a method of defining and mapping the historic dimension of modern townscapes. The approach used by this project has been developed and adapted from Historic Landscape Characterisation studies. The guiding principles of historic urban characterisation are as follows (adapted from Clark *et al.* 2004, 6):

- Present not past: it is the present-day townscape that is the main object of study.
- Townscape as history not geography: the most important characteristic of the townscape is its time-depth; change and earlier townscapes exist in the present town.
- All aspects of the townscape, no matter how modern, are treated as part of the urban character, not just 'special' areas.
- Characterisation of the urban landscape is a matter of interpretation not record.
- Urban landscape is and always has been dynamic: management of change, not preservation is the aim.
- The process of characterisation should be transparent, with clearly articulated records of data sources and methods used.

2.2 General Approach

In order to characterise the distinctive historic dimension of the present day urban landscape, the systematic identification of the historic attributes of the contemporary townscape is undertaken using a number of cartographic, historic, archaeological and standing building sources. These sources are used to identify 'Historic Urban Character Types' which are mapped onto the modern Ordnance Survey MasterMap base. These character types are used to inform the identification of a series of town plan components for the major periods of development for each town from its origins to the present day. The character types are also used to define a series of 'Historic Urban Character Areas' within each town. The character areas form the basis of a more detailed assessment of historic urban character.

2.3 Historic Urban Character Types

The identification of the historic urban character is based on the collation and analysis of a large quantity of information, including town plan form, building form, historic map evidence, aerial photographic evidence and archaeological data. This information has been used to define specific areas of single character type within the modern town plan, based on the current settlement character, but taking into account previous uses and settlement history. These Historic Urban Character Types form the basic building blocks for analysing the historic urban character.

The methodology and terminology of these Historic Urban Character Types has been developed from that of Historic Landscape Characterisation and comprise a series of ten Broad Types each sub-divided into a number of more specific Historic Urban Character Types. The list and description of the character types is set out in **Appendix 4.** The Historic Urban Character Types used are a standardised classification across all the Dorset Historic Towns. This enables direct comparisons to be made between towns across the county and allows consistency in analysis of the historic environment of the different towns.

The Historic Urban Character Types are mapped onto the digital map base using a Geographical Information System (GIS), linked to a table containing data on the settlement attributes of the current Historic Urban Character Type, the period from which it derives, and data on all previous Historic Urban Character Types. This enables the character of the town to be displayed for all periods and allows a comprehensive picture of the development of the town through time and the time depth of the current urban character to be presented.

2.4 Town Plan Components

Town Plan Components are a series of recognisable morphological units with a definable time depth within an individual townscape. These plan components have been identified through the analysis of the town plan and building fabric, together with their historic urban character types, to form a series of larger units (on a street or block scale rather than on a plot scale) that illustrate the composition of the town within a specific chronological period. These town plan components have been used to identify and illustrate the historic development of each town, as set out in Part 5 of this report. A series of twenty seven standard types of town plan component have been identified.

2.5 Historic Urban Character Areas

The historic urban characterisation of the Dorset towns produces a large quantity of detailed data recorded within individual Historic Urban Character Types. This information is at a too fine-grained scale to enable easy understanding of the character of the town. Therefore, the information has been used to define a smaller number of larger areas of distinctive character within the town known as Historic Urban Character Areas. These can be used as a means of understanding the past and the present character of the town, simplifying the large quantity of data presented by the Historic Urban Character Types and enabling a more detailed appraisal of the historic urban character to be undertaken.

The Historic Urban Character Areas are recognisable distinctive areas which have meaningful coherence within the modern townscape. They are defined by one or more of the following attributes

- consistent historic urban character
- common historical development
- similar topographic location
- similar degree of archaeological and/or historic building preservation.

Each character area will have its own individual 'biography' that has defined its present character. Consequently, the Historic Urban Character Areas can be used as a tool to help maintain and reinforce the historic character and individuality of these areas and the town as a whole.

2.6 Extent of the Study Area

The Dorset Historic Towns Project Study Area for Sherborne is taken as the present-day urban extent as shown on the 2010 Ordnance Survey MasterMap digital mapping and is partly informed by the Defined Development Boundary set out in the West Dorset District Local Plan (adopted July 2006). This includes areas of recreational open space, school playing fields, etc. around the fringes of the settlement. Where practicable, the boundary to the Study Area is along boundary lines marked on the MasterMap base.

Sherborne Old Castle has been included in the study area because it holds a significant position in the development of the early town. The current Sherborne Castle has not been included as it is essentially a country estate on the edge of the town and not strictly urban in nature.

2.7 Definition of Terms

2.7.1 Characterisation Terms

Historic Urban Character Area
See section 2.5 above.

Historic Urban Character Type
See section 2.3 above.

Sensitivity to Large Scale Development
The assessment of sensitivity to large scale development has been developed from that included in the landscape character assessment undertaken by West Dorset District Council (WDDC 2008). Large scale development is taken to mean any form of development that is on a scale much larger than the existing plot pattern and building size.

Strength of Historic Character
The strength of character in each area is determined by judging the survival of historic urban elements in the modern townscape, together with its distinctiveness and recognisability. The strength of character is assessed as Strong, Medium or Weak.
Strong character is where there is widespread survival of historic boundaries and buildings reflecting considerable time depth, where modern development remains unobtrusive.
Medium character is where there is survival of historic boundaries and buildings, but modern development is more evident.
Weak character is where there may be some historic elements present, but there is little time depth evident in the visible structures, which comprise mainly modern buildings and street and boundary layouts.

Town Plan Component
See section 2.4 above.

Urban Structure
This is the framework of routes, plots and spaces and the way they relate to one another, which forms the basic plan on which all other aspects of the built environment and historic development and use are based.

Housing Density
Low Density = < 30 dwellings per hectare (dph)
Medium Density = 30-50 dph
High Density = >50 dph

2.7.2 Archaeological Terms

Archaeological Intervention
A general term for any type of formal archaeo-

logical recording.

Archaeological Potential
Archaeological potential is an assessment of the probability of discovering archaeological finds and features, the likely amount and complexity of the archaeology, and the level of survival. See Appendix 5 for more detail.

Building Recording
Building recording refers to any survey and recording of the structure of a building.

Evaluation
An archaeological evaluation is a limited programme of fieldwork to determine the presence or absence of archaeological deposits or remains within a specified area or site. It can include trial trenching, test pitting, geophysical survey, etc.

Excavation
An archaeological excavation is a programme of controlled fieldwork exposing, investigating and recording an area of below-ground archaeology.

Watching Brief
A watching brief is a formal programme of observation and investigation conducted during any operation carried out for non-archaeological reasons.

2.7.3 Historical Terms

Hundred
A hundred was an administrative subdivision of a shire based notionally on a grouping of 100 hides. They originated in the Saxon period and had their own courts and jurisdiction usually held at a meeting place close to the geographical centre of the administrative area, or at a point easily accessible from any part of the hundred.

Hide
A hide was an area of land defined for tax assessment purposes and was based on the amount of land required to support a family. The size of land unit covered by a hide varied according its productivity but is generally thought to equal approximately 120 acres. Hides originated in the Saxon period but may be based on an earlier system of land holding.

Borough
A borough was a town or part of a town upon which a degree of self governance had been conferred through the granting of a charter. Boroughs held their own courts, markets and were often subdivided in to burgage plots held by burgesses (freemen of the borough) for cash rent rather than by feudal service.

Lay Subsidy
The Lay subsidy is a term given to a tax levied on the general populace (as opposed to the clergy or military) and was calculated as a proportion of their moveable wealth. The poor were exempt. The tax was levied occasionally as the king demanded in order to raise money for military campaigns from the late 13th to the 16th century. The lay subsidy rolls are documents recording the names of each person in a village or tithing within a specific hundred and the amount of tax payable by them. The rolls are particularly useful in the context of the Historic Towns Project because during the 13th and 14th centuries, surnames tended to reflect either occupation or place of habitation. The documents thus provide information on the size of the taxable population within a town, the range of crafts within a particular town or tithing, the names of the individual tithings and boroughs within a hundred and the names of other dispersed settlements within them.

Hearth Tax Returns
The Hearth Tax was a tax introduced in 1662 and abolished in 1689. It was payable by householders on the number of hearths or fireplaces within a household. The tax amounted to 1 shilling per hearth or stove payable twice a year. The Hearth Tax Returns generally date from 1662-6 and 1669-74; periods when the tax was administered by royal bailiffs rather than private firms. They include a list of householders eligible for the tax per parish and the number of hearths in each household. The documents are used in this report to give an estimate of the population of the town during the late 17th century.