

Summary

This report contains the results of a consideration of the historical, archaeological, architectural and map evidence relating to the development of Weymouth. It has focused on the understanding of the overall development of the town from its earliest beginnings to the present day, with a view to defining how this has influenced the modern townscape, identifying what historical features and structures survive within the modern town, and comprehending what is the contribution of its historic dimension to the character of Weymouth today. This will enable an informed approach to the management of change and conservation of the urban environment to be undertaken.

Historical Background

The origins of Weymouth can be found in two medieval ports, Weymouth and Melcombe Regis, which were both created boroughs in the 13th century. Despite setbacks as a result of the Black Death in the 14th and several enemy raids in the 15th centuries they flourished and were officially united in the mid 16th century. In the Civil War they were badly damaged and failed to recover. This was followed by a period of decline until the mid 18th century when the town became one of the first seaside holiday resorts in the world. It grew extensively from the mid 18th century, also regaining its position as a port dealing with traffic to the Channel Islands. Despite set backs to the tourist trade in the 20th century the town has continued to expand, engulfing several surrounding settlements with modern development.

Town morphology

Weymouth's form reflects that of the two original towns. Weymouth is a linear settlement lying alongside the harbour, whilst Melcombe is laid out in a grid pattern. Away from the historic core the development tended initially to follow the main roads, and later modern developments have infilled large areas between the town and the outlying historic settlements.

Built character

Weymouth has a large number of historic buildings within the town. There are a number of good 17th century houses, particularly in Weymouth, mostly built of Portland Stone. Melcombe is still dominated by a large number of high quality late 18th and early 19th century buildings, particularly terraces, which line the sea front in an almost unbroken line. Many of these Georgian buildings are of brick, frequently

stuccoed, as Weymouth is surrounded by large areas of high quality brick earth which supplied many brick kilns during the eighteenth, nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

Around the harbour there are a number of old industrial buildings, some converted to other uses whilst in the outlying villages there are old agricultural buildings, as well as several important military remains. Modern housing in Weymouth is typical of its period and has no remarkable local characteristics.

Landscape Setting

Weymouth has a distinctive topographic setting, along the valley of the River Wey and at the point where the river meets the sea. The Ridgeway to the north is a distinct feature. This topographic location provides a dramatic natural background, with the countryside to the north and coastline to the east in particular being visible from many parts of the town. The landscape and topographic setting of the town is fundamental to its character. The harbour with its constant pattern of various vessels of differing types and sizes contrasts with the curving sea-front and wide bay of an archetypical seaside town.

Historic Urban Character

There are perhaps two main components that contribute to the local distinctiveness of Weymouth, the historic buildings, and the landscape setting. The historic buildings, both along the sea front and around the harbour are absolutely key to the town's distinctiveness. The town is focussed on the harbour and the sea. The original towns looked towards the harbour, with a varied waterfront reflecting the many uses that have been made of the estuary. The later, visitor-oriented town has looked towards the sea, particularly the long curving bay which was depicted in numerous paintings, prints and photographs from the late eighteenth century to the present.

Further Research

This report has highlighted many aspects of the historical development of Weymouth 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 local activity before the thir-



Figure 1 Vertical aerial photographic view of Weymouth, 2005

- teenth century when the ports appear in the documentary record, were there earlier settlements and if so where?
- The investigation of the evidence for the medieval towns, in particular the harbours and external trade.
 - Research into the medieval and post medieval military history, the town was apparently well defended but no physical remains of any such defences have ever been recorded.
 - Research into the post-medieval harbour and trade.
 - Research into the development of the town as a spa and resort.