

Part 6: Historic Urban Character Appraisal



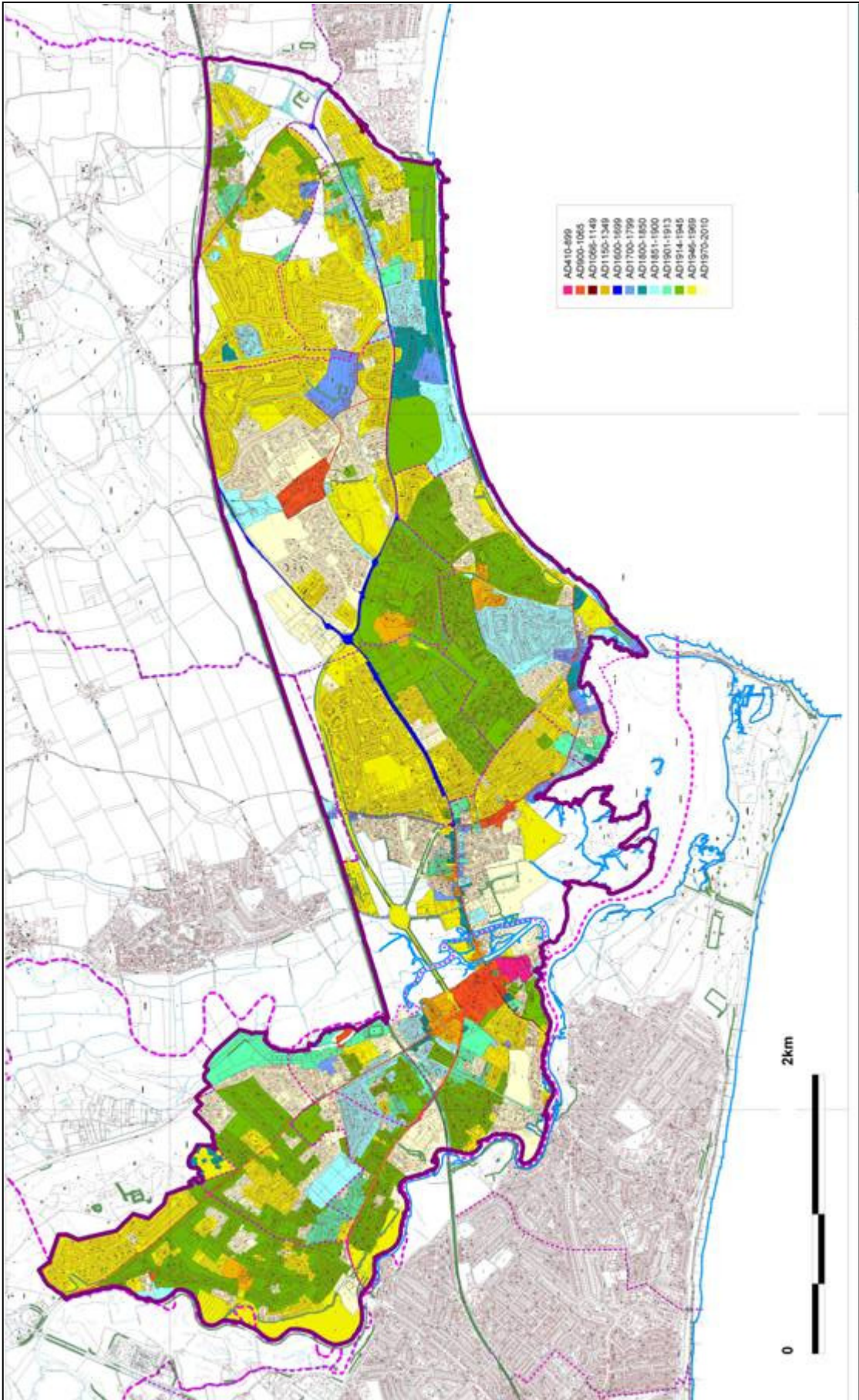


Figure 58: Map showing the major periods of development of Christchurch.

6.1 The historic urban character of Christchurch

The historic urban character of any town is a product of the various periods of development from its origins to the present day. In the case of Christchurch there are probably three main periods of urban development; The Late Saxon burh; the medieval suburbs and rural settlement centres (with some limited late 18th and 19th century expansion around them); and late 19th and 20th century suburban explosion.

The Late Saxon period of development still defines the character of the centre of Christchurch. This character is revealed through the topographical position of the historic core, particularly the Priory, which sits on a prominent knoll and still dominates townscapes on a borough-wide basis. The historic character of central Christchurch has also been protected through the fact that it is surrounded by floodable land, historically used as common summer pasture. This has provided the town with a natural 'green belt' and foil to overdevelopment in the immediate environs of the historic core. Christchurch Harbour and Stanpit Marsh are also vitally important in establishing and maintaining the maritime character of Christchurch. The result is that Christchurch still retains some sense of its origins as a small borough town. Extensive research excavations within the historic core have greatly enhanced the depth of knowledge concerning Late Saxon Christchurch, adding to its perceived historic character.

The medieval period of development is reflected in the surviving buildings and gardens associated with the Castle and Priory Precinct, as well as the frontages of buildings on High Street and Castle Street which still fit within the medieval plot widths. During the medieval period houses fronting on the High Street were arranged within burgage plots, some of which survived into the late 20th century. During the late medieval and early post-medieval periods timber framed houses lined High Street and Castle Street, elements of which can be discerned today. A Monday Market is now held on the site of the medieval Monday market. Medieval suburbs at Bargates and Bridge Street also retain significant historic character. The Bridge Street area is particularly well preserved, although the houses date from the 18th and early 19th centuries. The Town Bridge itself is a medieval structure and even Waterloo Bridge was rebuilt in the medieval style during the 19th century. The historic character of the Bargates suburb has suffered in comparison

during the late 20th century. The core of the suburb was decimated through the construction of the Christchurch by-pass in 1958 and Saxon shopping centre in Bargates during the 1970s. Nevertheless, excavations associated with these developments revealed archaeological evidence to take the history of the town back to the 6th and 7th centuries AD. Bargates also retains significant 19th century character to the north of the ring road.

Later 18th and 19th century expansion has left a legacy of institutional buildings such as the Christchurch Barracks, Coastguard Station, Workhouse and Hospital, all on the fringes of the medieval town. The settlements of Mudeford, Stanpit, Purewell, Staple Cross (Burton) and Chewton also expanded at this time and reflect the colourful history of the region in smuggling activities. These areas retain a significant proportion of late 18th and early 19th century buildings along their street frontages. This period also saw the establishment of large ornamental villas and country houses, a trend started by Gustavus Brander in the late 18th century when he constructed Priory House from the ruins of the Priory's claustral buildings. This area still retains a romantic and open character deriving from this period. Other significant buildings from the ensuing period add greatly to the historic character of the Christchurch region; notably Highcliffe Castle, Sandhills, Gundimore, The Anchorage and many more. Associated Lodges and parkland are also important historic features in the Bure and Highcliffe areas.

Up until the 19th century the hinterlands of Christchurch comprised dispersed hamlets set within some enclosed fields but also dominated by large areas of unenclosed common and woodland on the edge of the New Forest. By the late 19th century many commons had been enclosed and suburban expansion quickly followed. This expansion was partly fuelled by the rising popularity of the region as a coastal resort, and partly by the advent of the railway. These suburban housing estates each have their own character, partly a reflection of their period and style and partly a reflection of the pre-existing landscape. The late 19th and early 20th century estates at Portfield and Jumpers Common comprise red brick semi-detached houses and villas set close to the street frontage with large rear plots. This particular character has remained intact, apart from occasional infilling of the back plots with modern culs de sac. Inter-war housing estates at Grove Farm Stanpit field and Friars Cliff tend to comprise bungalows set centrally in large plots arranged around curving or geometric road pat-

terns. The Grove Farm area is also characterised by large trees, relics of the former woodland there. Similarly, the post-war North Highcliffe estate was set in a former woodland common and parkland and retains large numbers of important trees. 19th century country villas here frequently survive only as the names on culs de sac which occupy their former positions. Highcliffe was created its own parish in the 19th century, following the establishment of a New town here. Significant portions of common have survived development at nearby Chewton and Walkford, adding to the woodland character of the area.

Today Christchurch is a large urban area on the eastern edge of the Bournemouth and Poole conurbation. However, the slow development of the town centre, coupled with a rapid suburban expansion in the late 19th and 20th centuries, means that it has been able to retain much of its historic character. In many ways the topographical isolation that both encouraged and restricted the town's development has also helped retain its character. The suburbs to the east of the town are still separated from it by a wide flood plain; the harbour area is still dominated by the Priory Church and historic buildings still line the medieval street plan in the town centre.

6.2 Description of the Historic Urban Character Areas of Christchurch

A total of 25 Historic Urban Character Areas have been defined for Christchurch (Figure 59). The boundaries are based on areas of homogenous character, or conversely on areas of diversity as a result of changes in the urban environment, or on distinctive topographic features. Each character area is presented below with a summary of its overall character, built character and archaeological potential.

- 1 The Burh
- 2 Quomps and Stour Flood Plain
- 3 Bargates
- 4 Portfield Housing Estate
- 5 Avon Industrial Zone
- 6 Hospital and Workhouse
- 7 Fairmile and Bosley Housing Estates
- 8 Stour Meadows
- 9 Bridge Street
- 10 Priory and Rossiter's Quays
- 11 Avon Meads
- 12 Stanpit Marsh
- 13 Purewell
- 14 Staple Cross
- 15 Roeshott and Somerford Retail Park
- 16 Stanpit
- 17 Mudeford
- 18 Somerford Estates and Former Airfield
- 19 Bure
- 20 Hoburne
- 21 Highcliffe North Housing Estate
- 22 Highcliffe Castle and Beach
- 23 Walkford
- 24 Chewton Common and Glen
- 25 Highcliffe Newtown

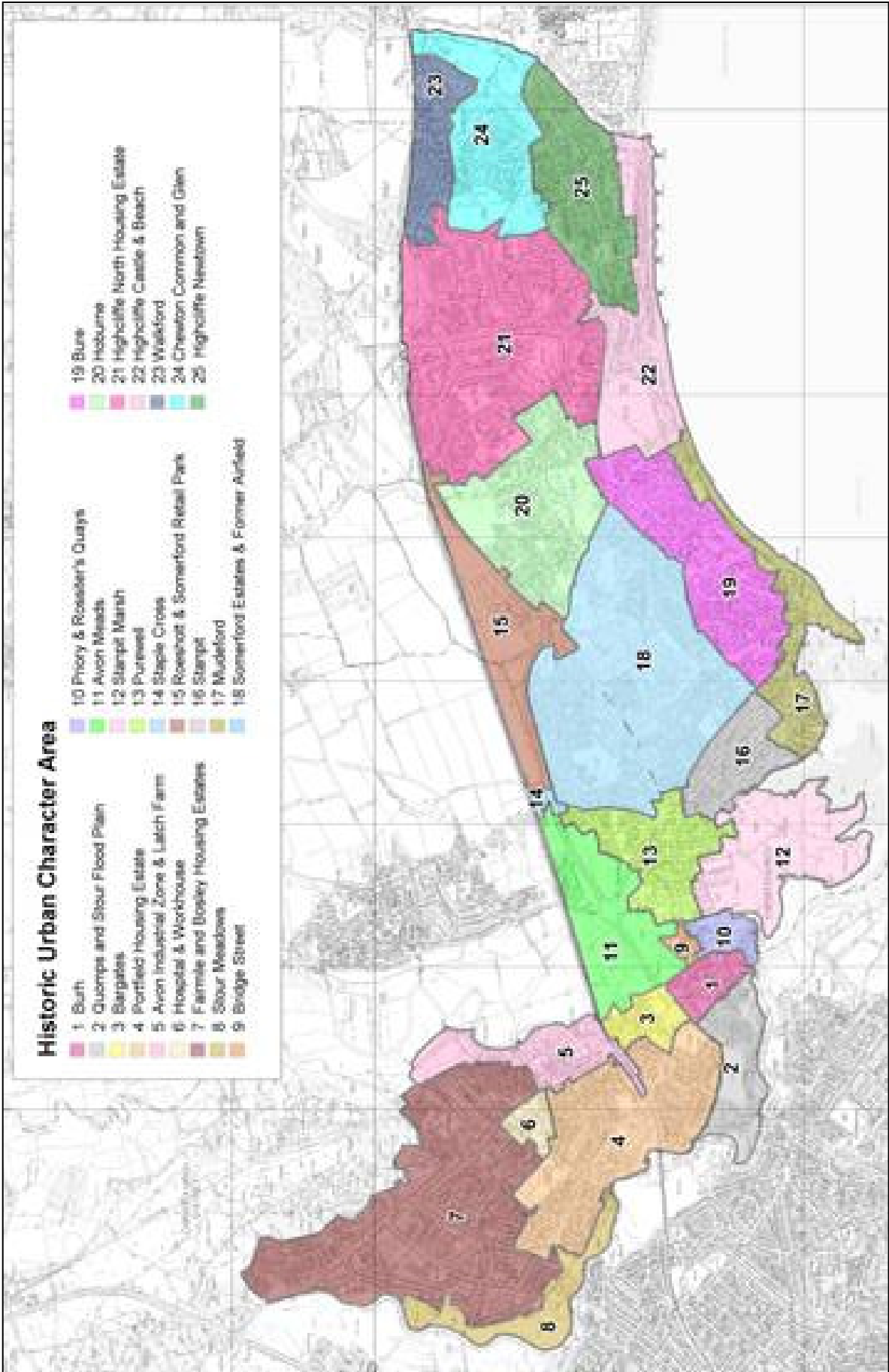


Figure 59: Christchurch Historic Urban Character Areas