

# Sturminster Newton Historic Urban Character Area 1 The Minster

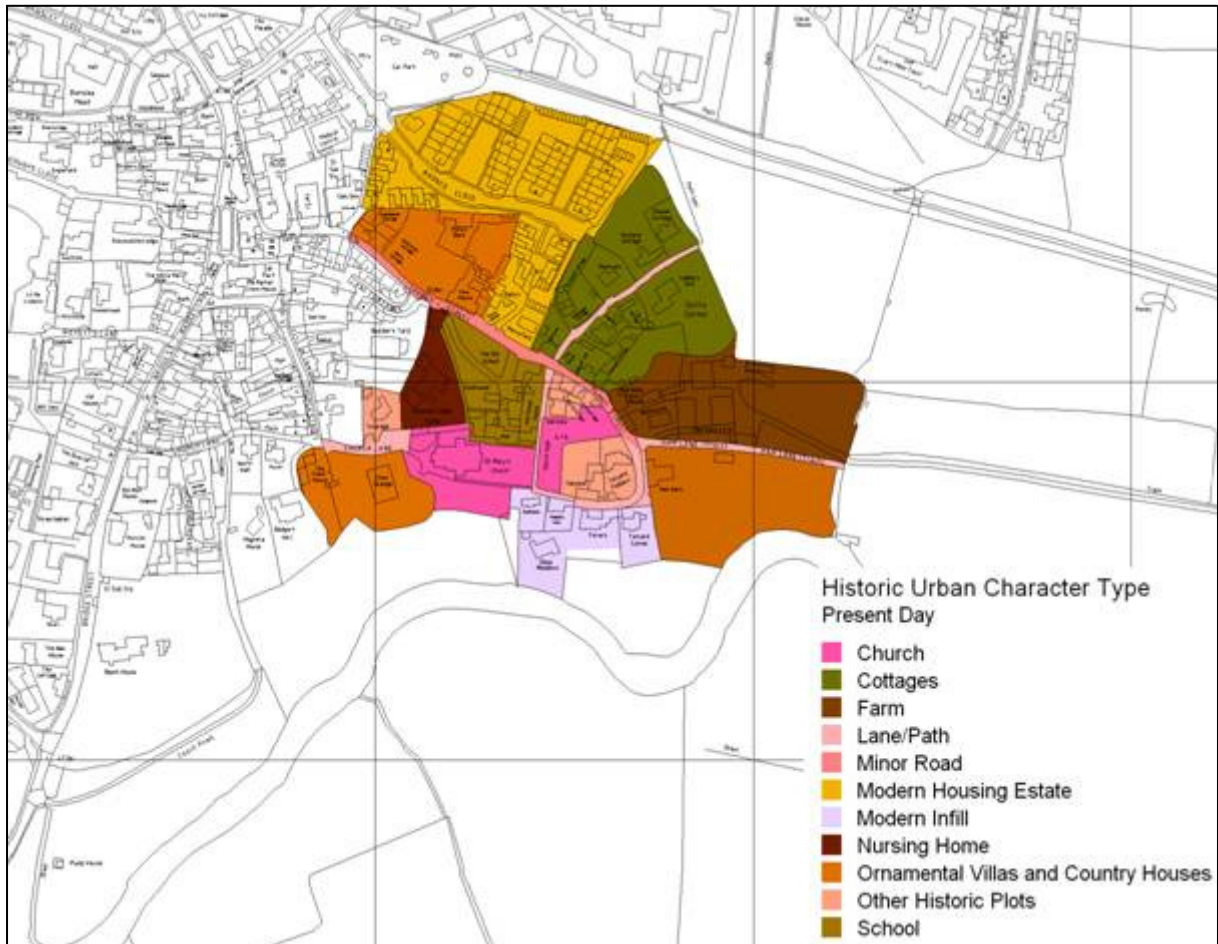


Figure 48: Map of Historic Urban Character Area 1, showing current historic urban character type.



Figure 49: View of the west front of St Mary's Church.



Figure 50: View of Historic Urban Character Area 1 from the north east.

## Sturminster Newton Historic Urban Character Area 1 Structure of Character Area

### Overview

This area represents the earliest settlement component of Sturminster Newton, centred on the parish church of St Mary. It is defined by the shape of its plot boundaries and its distinctive semi-rural character compared to the historic commercial town.

### Topography and Geology

St Mary's church sits at the top of a slight bluff above the River Stour close to an ancient ford. The ground slopes away from the character area to the north, east and south, only in the west does the ground rise slightly towards the medieval town centre. This represents a slight promontory at the south eastern end of the Corallian limestone ridge upon which the town sits. The north bank of the Stour itself forms part of the southern boundary of the character area.

### Urban Structure

The area is peripheral to the town. The focal point is the church which is reached by Church Lane from the west and by Penny Street which curves round from the north west. Penny Street probably represents the boundary of the early enclosure which contained the church. There are small lanes and tracks running off Penny Street. The houses and other buildings are mainly set back from the street in large grounds. The plots are of a variety of sizes and shapes. The modern housing estate at Barnes Close has a cul-de-sac layout accessed by Barnes Close at the northern end of the area.

### Present Character

Figure 48 shows the present day historic urban character types. The Church and churchyard extension are at the southern end of the area, with small surviving areas of historic plots, former school, villas and nursing home surrounding it. To the south is modern infill on the former tannery site. To the north and west of Penny Street are villas, cottages and a farm.



Figure 51: View from churchyard down to River Stour.

The northern part is dominated by a modern housing estate.

### Time Depth

This area represents the primary historic component of the town and probably has the greatest time depth of any part of Sturminster. The site of the parish Church is likely to be the site of the 9th century minster, which appears to have been set into an enclosure similar in shape to ecclesiastical enclosures of pre-Saxon date in Cornwall and Wales. Plot boundaries and the line of Penny Street survive from this period. The Tanyard corner of this enclosure was developed in the 15th or 16th century and some important houses such as Ham Gate Farm and Vine House were built in the 17th century. The old Vicarage and the Elementary School buildings date from the 19th century. The 1970's Barnes Close housing estate and modern Nazareth Lodge also make an significant impact on the area.

### Settlement Pattern and Streetscape

This area has narrow winding streets and lanes, generally with rather informal arrangement of houses, giving a partially open and rural character, particularly in comparison to the commercial part of the historic town. This is the result of settlement taking the form of detached houses set within irregular pre-existing plots which have been modified and subdivided over the years. These buildings are set back from quiet lanes and paths, or set centrally within large self contained plots. The semi-rural character is further enhanced by the fact that the character area is surrounded by flood plains and meadows on three sides (Figures 50-1).

The Barnes Close housing estate has a linear cul-de-sac form with the houses arranged around two principal green courtyard areas, rather at odds to the remainder of the character area.



Figure 52: View down Penny St towards Ham Gate.



## Sturminster Newton Historic Urban Character Area 1

### Built Character

#### **Building types**

The area has a wide variety of building forms, ranging from medieval vernacular buildings to large Victorian villas and modern housing estates. There is also variation between large detached houses located centrally within their large plots, to detached houses set back from the street and detached and attached houses set on the street frontage. Generally the buildings range from 1 to 2.5 storeys high.

The medieval buildings include the parish church of St Mary, built in the 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> centuries but extensively modified in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and Tanyard, a 15<sup>th</sup>-16<sup>th</sup> century part timber-framed hall house (Figure 59). Ham Gate is a 17<sup>th</sup> Farmhouse and Vine House is a large house set centrally in a large plot with outbuildings. It has a 17<sup>th</sup> century wing and 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century additions. Important 19<sup>th</sup> century buildings include the old school building at Dashwood (Figure 54), the Old School buildings at the Church Hall, the headmaster's house (Figure 55), and the Old Vicarage (Figure 56).

#### **Building Materials**

A variety of materials have been used in this area. Generally, walls are in red brick or local Marnhill stone (Todber Freestone). The Old School in Penny Street is built of Ham Hill Stone and the church is of Upper Greensand from Shaftesbury. A number of houses have painted rendered walls. The roofs tend to be red-brown plain tile, slate and some thatch. Property boundary walls are in stone rubble, brick, cob or rendered, frequently with plain tile coping.

The modern Barnes Close housing estate is in mottled brown brick with concrete tiled roof.

#### **Key Buildings**

*Public Buildings:* St Mary's Church, Old School buildings, St Mary's Church Hall.

*Medieval and post-medieval houses:* Tanyard, Ham Gate Farmhouse, Carrann Cottage.

*Post-medieval large houses:* The Old Vicarage (Stour Grange), Vine House.



Figure 53: Ham Gate Farmhouse.



Figure 54: The Old School, Dashwood, Penny Street.



Figure 55: The Old Headmaster's House, Church Walk



Figure 56: The Old Vicarage, Stour Grange.

**Sturminster Newton Historic Urban Character Area 1  
Archaeology**

**Archaeological Investigations**

The only archaeological discovery made within this character area was the unearthing of a quantity of Roman coins and other ‘fossils’ during ground works for the construction of a tennis court at The old Vicarage (Stour Grange). The exact date of this discovery is unclear but may have been around 1920. The finds were divided between the workmen, and their current location unknown, although some are certainly lost (Speed n/d).

**Archaeological Character**

The lack of archaeological investigation in this area hampers a full consideration of its archaeological character. It has already been noted that this area is likely to have the greatest time depth of any part of the town, and the discovery of Roman material close to the site of the minster church would seem to confirm that. Figure 57 shows curved boundaries depicted on 19<sup>th</sup> century maps that may represent survivals of Saxon or earlier enclosures associated with the Minster site. The earliest enclosure is probably the one into which St Mary’s church is set, lying on the south side of Penny Street and presumed to be the site of the Minster church itself. The Pennyfield enclosure on the north side of Penny Street is likely to be contemporary and associated with the Minster

and may represent an agricultural infield. Other irregular enclosures exist at Ham Gate Farm and The Old Vicarage. These butt on to the earlier oval enclosures and are likely to be slightly later in origin. These enclosures have only gradually become occupied by settlement, partly in the late medieval period but mainly in the post-medieval and modern periods.

The economy of the area was essentially agricultural in the Saxon period and the archaeological character comprises the curving enclosure boundaries possibly associated with few contemporary artefacts and possibly some residual Romano-British pottery. The arrival of the minster might suggest some functions associated with a central place such as trade, exchange, administration and associated structures. In the late Saxon period however, commercial activity may have moved west to the market area. There was a tannery to the south of the house called ‘Tanyard’ in the post-medieval period.

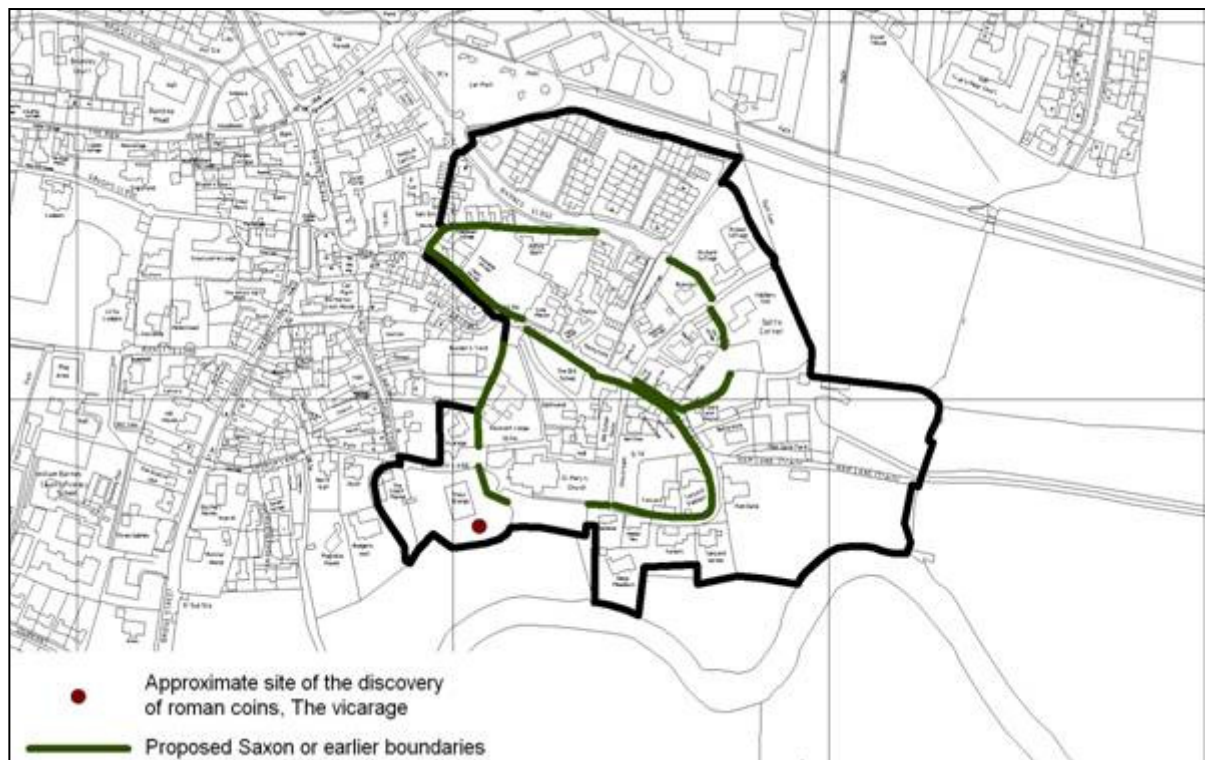


Figure 57: Archaeological Investigations and findspots in Historic Urban Character Area 1.

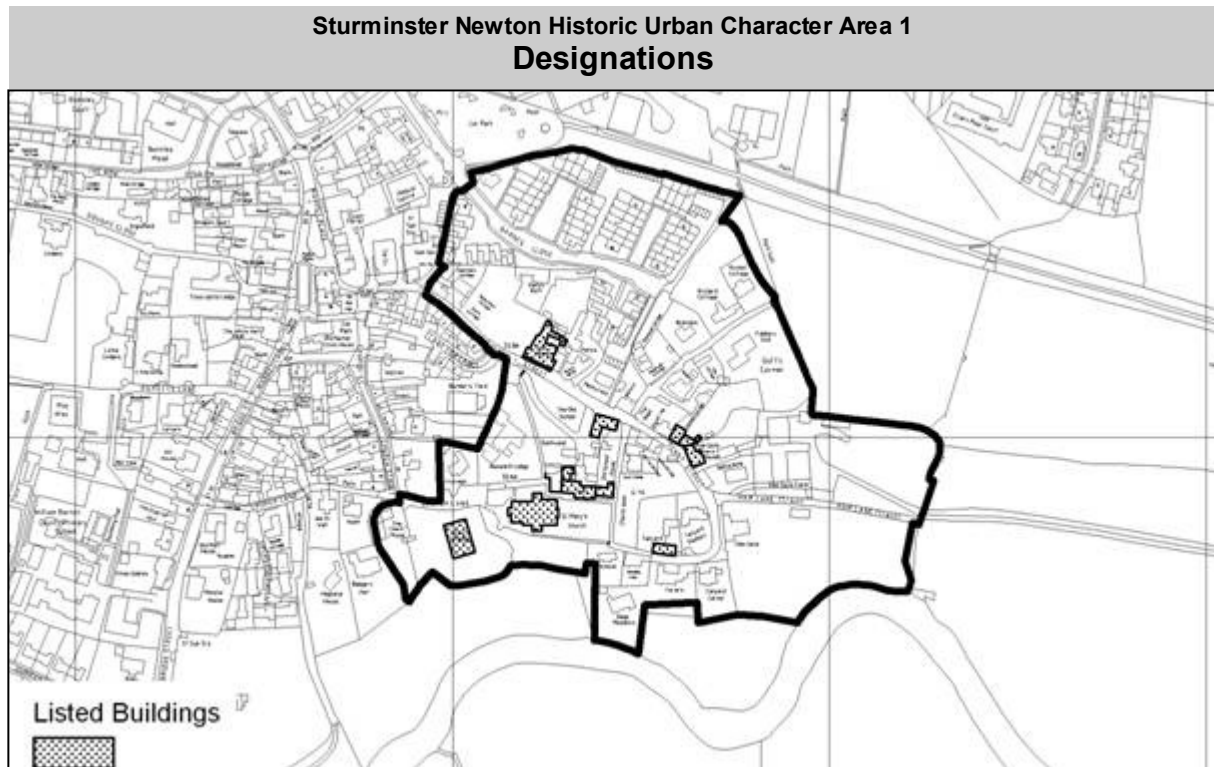


Figure 58: Listed Buildings in Historic Urban Character Area 1.

### **Listed Buildings**

There are 14 Listed Buildings in the Character Area, one of which is Grade I (St Mary's Church). The remainder are Grade II (Figure 58).

### **Conservation Areas**

Almost the whole of this Character Area lies within the Sturminster Newton Conservation Area (Figure 47). Only the back of Ham Gate farmyard and the neighbouring Ham Gate, lie outside the Conservation Area.

### **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.



Figure 59: View of Tanyard, Penny Street, looking west.

## Sturminster Newton Historic Urban Character Area 1 Evaluation

### **Strength of Historic Character**

The strength of character of this area is judged to be **strong**. It represents the oldest part of Sturminster, documented from the late 9<sup>th</sup> century but probably earlier. The character of the minster area results from a combination of the positive contribution made by a high number of historic buildings and the survival of potentially very early plot boundaries. It is this survival and its subsequent effect on settlement patterns that has generated an almost rural feel to the area.

### **Sensitivity to Large Scale Development**

The area, in general, has a **high** sensitivity to major change. The settlement pattern has developed organically over a thousand years or more and takes the form of detached houses set within large plots. Large scale development would certainly disrupt this historic pattern. However, there is one part of the area, at Barnes Close, where a modern housing estate has already disrupted the historic pattern. This specific area is less sensitive to large development, as long as the development is in keeping with the overall historic character of the area (i.e. respects historic boundaries and settlement patterns).

### **Archaeological Potential**

The archaeological potential of this area is judged to be **high**. It forms the primary settlement component of Sturminster. The open

nature of the area and the lack of large scale modern development mean that there is a high potential for important and informative remains of the Saxon and medieval minster settlement remaining intact. This potential is of vital importance in understanding the establishment and development of minster sites in Dorset. There is also significant potential in understanding the nature of post-Roman Christianity and settlement in Dorset and Western Britain as a whole. An outline for the development of the town plan has been suggested in this report. Perhaps the most controversial and unproven aspects of this outline is the suggestion of an oval church enclosure beneath the site of the Minster. Unfortunately no archaeological investigations have been conducted that may provide evidence to support or refute the assertion. The potential for such evidence remains high, possibly in the form of late roman remains associated with the coins discovered at the vicarage.

Many of the late medieval buildings and outbuildings have been modified in the post-medieval period and remain in use today. There is a high potential for detailed information on the survival of earlier structures hidden within later buildings.

This area has the potential to provide information which would contribute to Research Questions 1-7, 13-17, 19-21 (Part 7).

### **Key Characteristics**

- Former Saxon Minster
- Primary settlement component of historic Sturminster.
- Parish church located within possible oval churchyard enclosure
- Upstanding medieval buildings
- High proportion of quality historic buildings with contemporary detail
- High proportion of surviving Saxon or earlier plot boundaries