

## **Part 6: Historic Urban Character Appraisal**





## 6.1 The historic urban character of Swanage

The urban character of Swanage, like any town, is a product of many factors including the topographic position, history of estate ownership and management, geographical relationship with other towns and resources and other historical events. The geographic and topographic position of Swanage, on a fairly treacherous coast isolated at the end of the Purbeck peninsula, within a broad clay vale defined by a steep chalk ridge to the north and high limestone plateau to the south, means that commu-

nications were difficult and this undoubtedly inhibited the growth of the town. It is probably no coincidence that Swanage required deliberate artificial stimulus to enable it to develop beyond a small rural settlement. Ironically, the attractions of Swanage as a resort town were in no small part due to those factors mentioned above, which originally inhibited its growth.

The historic urban character of the town reflects the major phases of development from a farming and quarrying village with surrounding hamlets to an early 19<sup>th</sup> century watering-place, later seaside resort and modern dormitory town. The present town contains two earlier

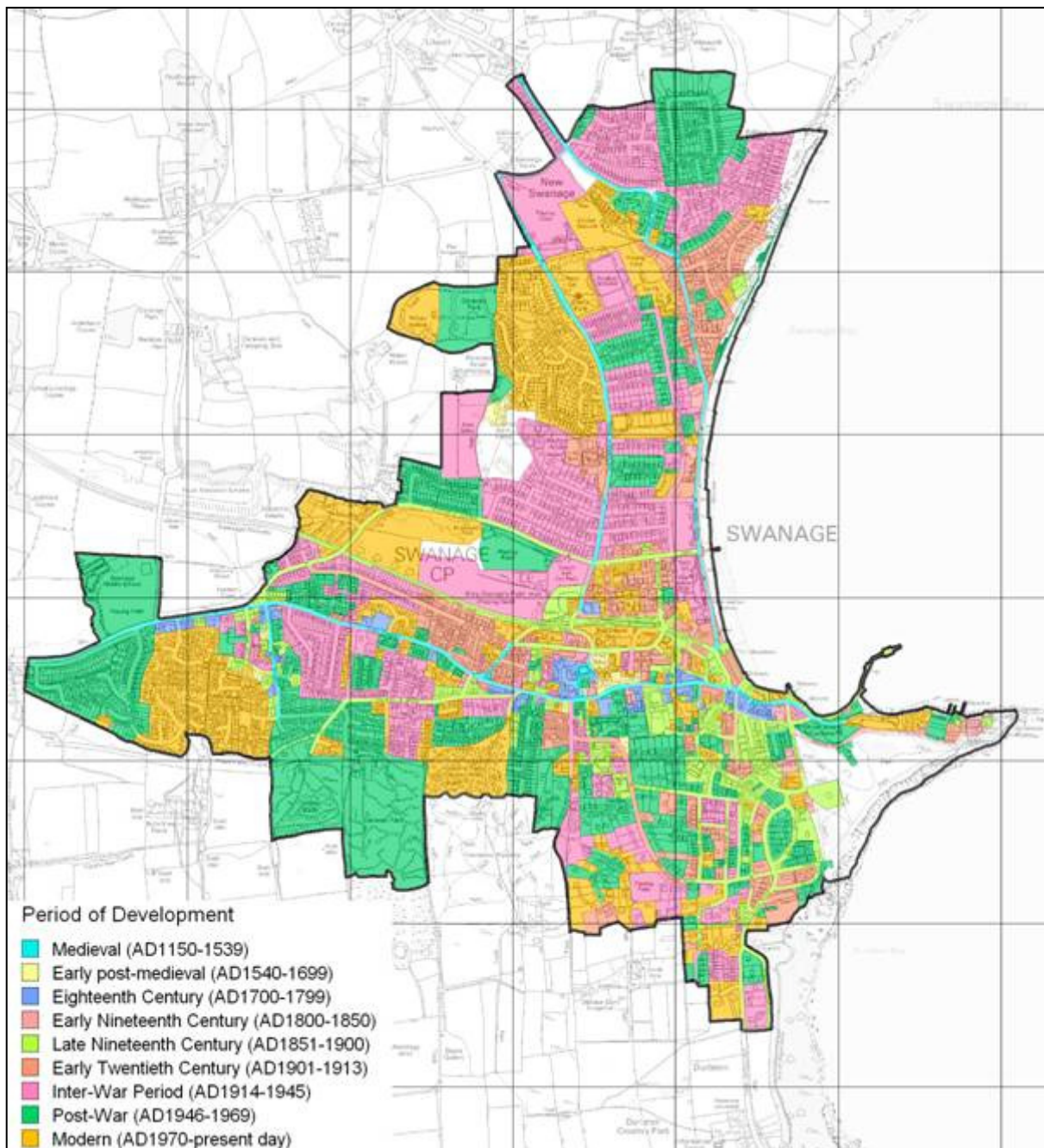


Figure 41: Map showing the major periods of development of Swanage.

historic cores, centred around Church Hill and at Herston, with a linear settlement strung out along the High Street and a series of parallel roads or tracks running southwards from the High Street. The earliest historic elements are sited along the lower slopes on the southern side of the vale, just above the floodplain. The area around St Mary's Church and Church Hill, including the mill, mill pond, and the site of the former town pump forms a coherent grouping of historic buildings and probably reflects the original village centre, just off the main road. Both Church Hill and Herston are readily recognisable by their concentration of Purbeck stone vernacular buildings, often with Purbeck stone roofs. Newton, the other historic hamlet has been almost completely replaced by later suburban housing leaving only Newton Manor still visible. The properties along the High Street and in the historic centres are generally rectilinear and of varying sizes, reflecting a piecemeal organic rather than planned layout.

The early 19<sup>th</sup> century watering place is restricted to a relatively small area at the east end of the High Street and seafront, recognisable by the small, but distinctive, number of Georgian buildings, including probably the first purpose-built accommodation for visitors in Swanage. These elements established the earliest expansion up the slopes towards Durlston and helped define the eastern edge of the town, leaving Peveril Point as an open green area.

The Victorian and Edwardian seaside resort comprises three elements, the seafront to the north of the early settlement, the railway and associated commercial development between it and the sea and suburban housing development. All these areas exhibit some form of regular planning. The seafront is of typical form with a shore road, sea wall and esplanade with fine Edwardian shelters and recreation grounds for entertainment behind. The railway and the associated commercial development towards the seafront lies on the floodplain and has developed roughly parallel to the High Street with primarily Edwardian shops and commercial buildings. The suburban developments are on the areas to the south, north and west. Suburban expansion to the south was primarily larger, higher status houses, largely fitted within the earlier strip field boundaries. The area to the north established a new grid pattern and expanded along the coast, again with some large villa development and a large hotel in the area known as New Swanage. The suburban expansion eastwards was of lower status and aligned with the railway. The continuing popularity of the resort after the First World War resulted in quite extensive inter-war suburban development infill-

ing and extending the limits of the town, particularly in the area to the north.

There has been extensive modern suburban housing development, particularly in the southern area of the town around Herston and on the northern fringes. Substantial redevelopment of some larger 19<sup>th</sup> century villas has also taken place, often replacing the original houses with large modern apartment buildings. This is particularly evident in the area just behind the seafront. Some large caravan parks ring the edge of the town.

The wide range and diversity of historic buildings form a significant element of the historic character of Swanage. Traditional vernacular Purbeck stone cottages and other vernacular buildings are found at Herston, around Church Hill, and along the High Street, forming a distinctive element amongst the largely brick-built 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century buildings. The most distinctive buildings in Swanage are those Victorian buildings and structures, such as the Town Hall, Purbeck House and the Wellington monument, which incorporate architectural salvage from London. Swanage is also typified by a large number of Victorian and Edwardian villas and terraces, often quite tall with large stacked bay windows and some extravagant decorative detailing, particularly on the southern slopes of the town. The streetscapes vary markedly in the different areas from the narrow undulating High Street with the buildings set on street frontage to the wide steep roads with houses set well back from the frontage on the southern slopes of the town rising up towards Durlston.

The topography has a significant impact on the character of the town with its steep slopes to the north and south which provide many good views across the town and Swanage Bay. Green spaces and trees form an important part of the urban fabric of Swanage. Peveril Point forms a large open green area on the eastern side of the town, significantly contributing to the setting of this side of the town and providing a green backdrop to many views across the town and from the seafront. The area behind Shore Road consists of a number of green recreational spaces effectively separating the seafront from the residential areas of the town. The extensive King George's Playing Fields and Kirkwood Park form a large green area close to the town centre and Day's Park provides another large green amenity space in the northern part of the town. Large trees and mature large garden planting form a major part of the area on the southern slopes of the town.

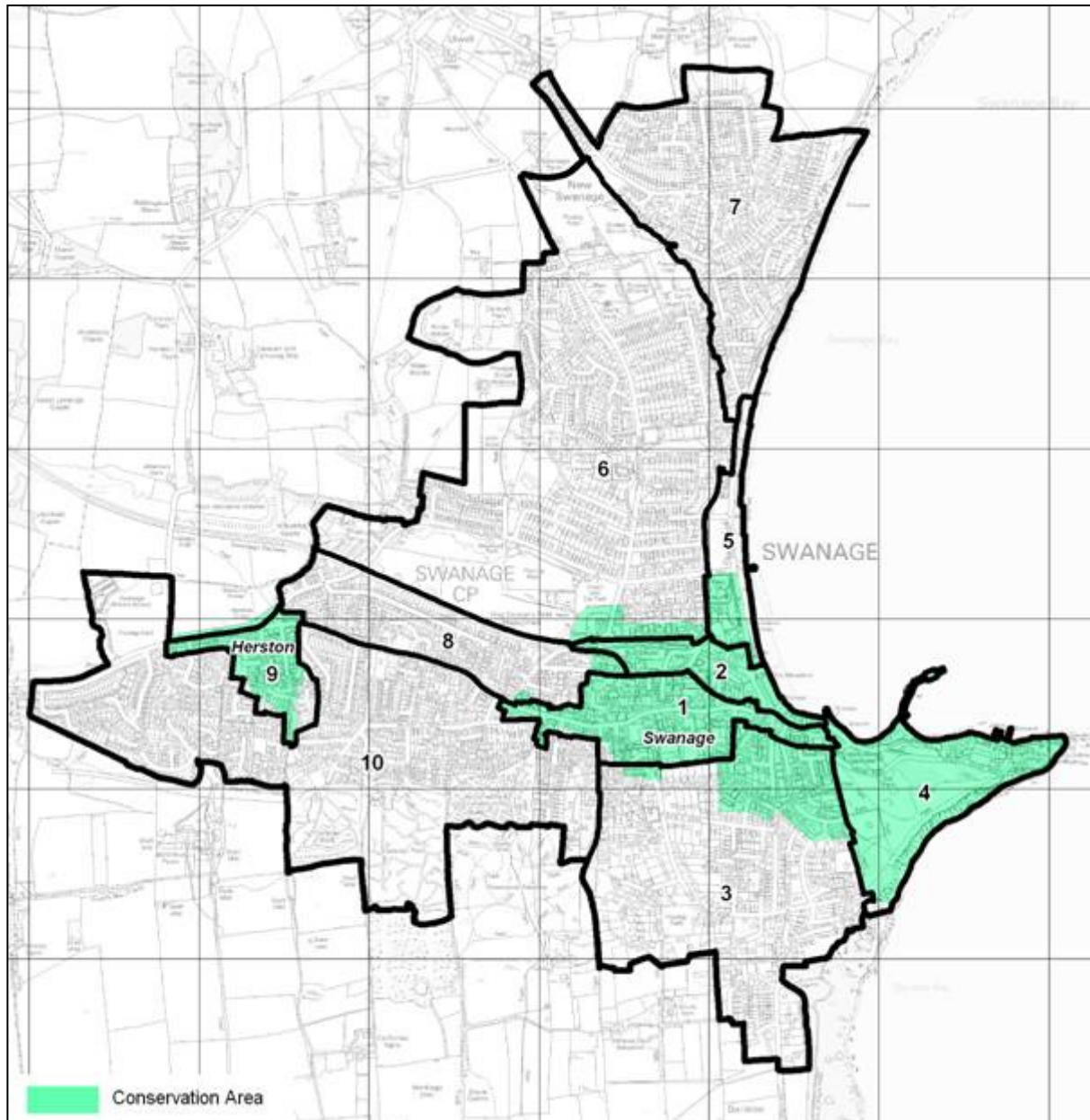


Figure 42: Swanage Historic Urban Character Areas and Conservation Areas.

## 6.2 Historic Urban Character Areas of Swanage

A total of ten Historic Urban Character Areas have been defined for Swanage as shown on Figure 42. They comprise the historic core of Swanage (Character Areas 1-2) and Herston (Area 9), the seafront and Peveril Point (Areas 4-5), areas of pre-19<sup>th</sup> century suburban growth (Area 3), and later suburbs (Areas 6-8, 10).

1. Swanage High Street
2. Station Road
3. Durlston Down
4. Peveril Point
5. Seafront
6. Northbrook

7. New Swanage
8. Newton and Kings Road West
9. Historic Herston
10. Herston and Townsend Suburbs