Part 6: Historic Urban Character Appraisal
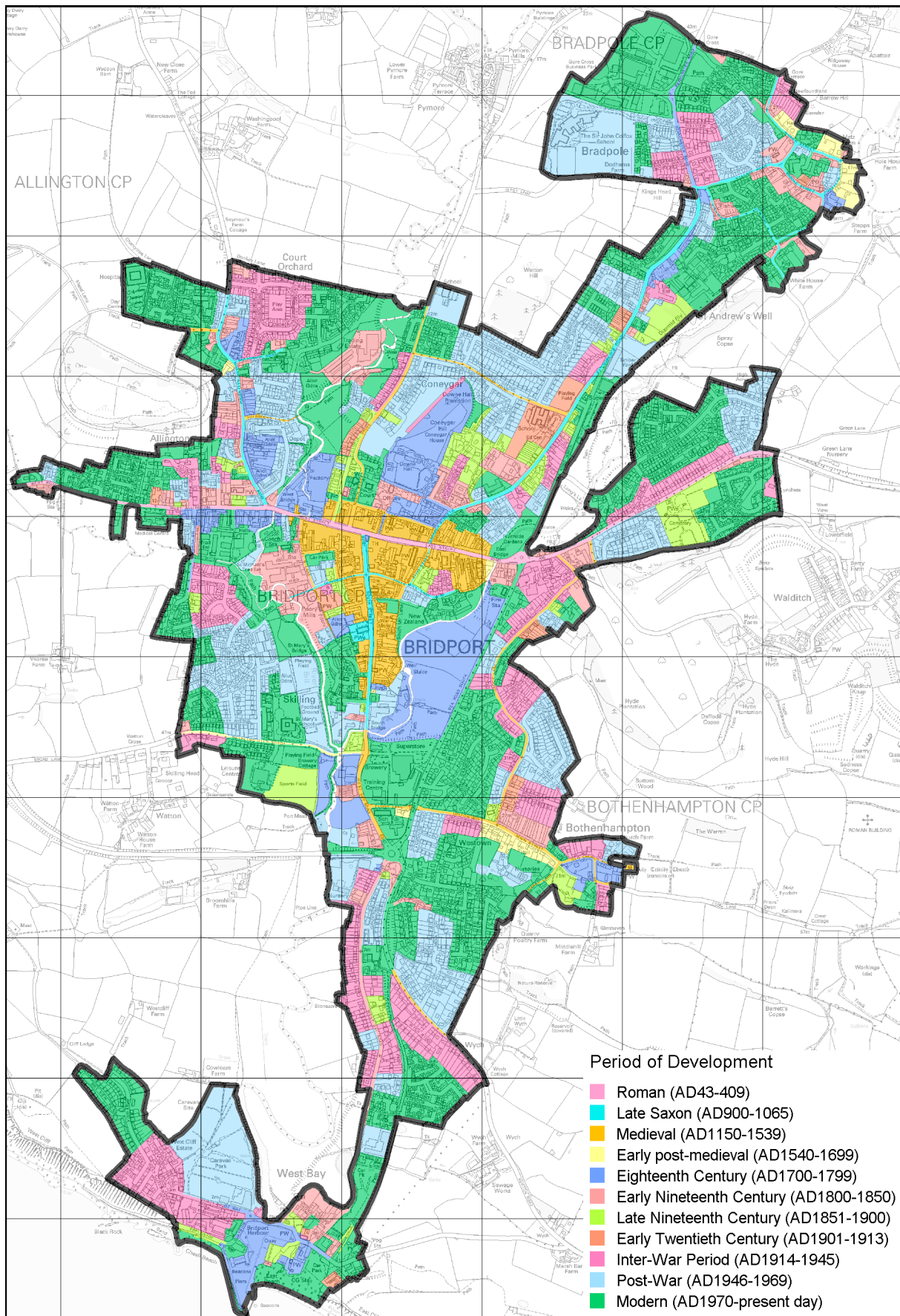
Period of Development

- Roman (AD43-409)
- Late Saxon (AD900-1065)
- Medieval (AD1150-1539)
- Early post-medieval (AD1540-1699)
- Eighteenth Century (AD1700-1799)
- Early Nineteenth Century (AD1800-1850)
- Late Nineteenth Century (AD1851-1900)
- Early Twentieth Century (AD1901-1913)
- Inter-War Period (AD1914-1945)
- Post-War (AD1946-1969)
- Modern (AD1970-present day)

Figure 40: Map showing the major periods of development in Bridport.

6.1 The historic urban character of Bridport

The topography of Bridport has played a significant part in the evolution of the town. Historic development was constrained by the rivers to the west, east and south and by the steeper slopes and hills to the north. The early town developed on the flat ground of the promontory between the confluence of the Rivers Brit and Asker. This provided a good combination of open ground in which to lay out the town, in a fairly defensible position surrounded on two sides by rivers and their poorly drained marshy floodplains. This probably explains why the town initially developed just to the south of the main east-west route. By the medieval period, defensive advantages became secondary to commercial and economic imperatives and the area along the main east-west route was laid out, developing the distinctive T-shaped plan of the main streets of the town. It is only really by the late eighteenth century that the town starts to develop beyond its historic core, initially along the roads towards Bradpole and in Allington. There is also distinctive large villa development on the lower slopes of Coneygar Hill. The 19th and early 20th centuries see increasing suburban development around Bridport and the villages of Bradpole and Bothenhampton, but this is largely constrained along the valleys between the hills and along historic routes. However, in the later 20th century, there was a dramatic increase in housing, infilling much of the area, encroaching on the slopes of Coneygar and Watton Hills and generally ignoring the earlier grain of the historic settlement. Nevertheless, the influence of the topography has hindered development on the upper parts of the hills and along the river valley flood plains and has constrained many of the roads to their historic routes, thus preserving much of the historic shape. The undeveloped green spaces on the hills, together with the meadows along the river floodplains intrude into the built-up area of the town, providing significant green spaces and they give Bridport its distinctive character of being closely linked to the countryside, framed by the varied topography of the surrounding landscape.

The plan layout comprises the T-shaped pattern of streets in the historic core focussed on the market place and town hall. Subsequent development extended along the main East-West route beyond the historic centre and down to West Bay and also along the roads to Beaminster, Mapperton and Broadwindsor. St Mary's Church occupies a prominent position on South Street in the centre of the promontory and indicates the focus of initial Saxon settlement, though the layout of the historic core derives principally from the 12th to 14th centuries

and it largely retains its pattern of medieval burgage boundaries, partly as a result of their use for ropewalks. A similar pattern of long narrow boundaries developed along North Allington in the late eighteenth and nineteenth century for a similar reason. Development along the other roads during this period had a more typical suburban layout. The Brit valley became the main focus for industrial development with Court Mills, North Mills, St Michael's Lane and the Old Brewery built along the banks of the river.

Historic buildings form a major element of the character of Bridport. There are a large number of high quality eighteenth and nineteenth century buildings in the historic core, forming dense almost unbroken historic street frontages. The main streets are broad and straight in the town centre with narrow side streets and back lanes. The centre is dominated by the very fine Town Hall and market building. There are a series of larger Georgian town houses built on the historic street frontages and a number of large coaching inns. Away from the centre, the main streets are lined with a varied streetscape of more modest short terraces and attached cottages built to house workers in the net and rope industry. There are also examples of distinctive combined industrial and domestic premises in the back lanes. Bridport also has some distinctive industrial buildings from the hemp and flax industries. The larger grander houses of the late eighteenth and nineteenth century are outside the town centre around Coneygar Hill. On the fringes of the town are a series of Regency/early Victorian suburban villas.

There has been substantial modern development, with large suburban housing estates built around the edges of the historic town, expanding beyond the historic borough boundaries into Skilling, linking Bridport and West Bay, and around the historic villages of Bradpole and Bothenhampton.

6.2 Historic Urban Character Areas of Bridport

A total of 21 Historic Urban Character Areas have been defined for Bridport, as shown on Figure 41. They comprise the historic core of the town (Character Area 1), the harbour (Character Area 21), the historic cores of former villages (Character Areas 12, 15), areas of eighteenth and nineteenth century industrial expansion (Character Areas 2-3, 5-6, 19), areas of eighteenth and nineteenth century suburban expansion (Character Areas 7-8, 10-11, 20), later suburbs (Character Areas 13-14, 16-17) and open ground (Character Area 18).

1 Bridport Historic Core
2 St Michael's Lane

3   Court Mills and North Mills
4   Coneygar Hill
5   Barrack Road and Bedford Place
6   Folly Mill
7   West Allington
8   North Allington
9   Allington
10 Victoria Grove
11 St Andrew's Road
12 Historic Bradpole
13 Bradpole Suburbs
14 East Road
15 Historic Bothenhampton
16 Bothenhampton Suburbs
17 Skilling
18 River Asker Floodplain
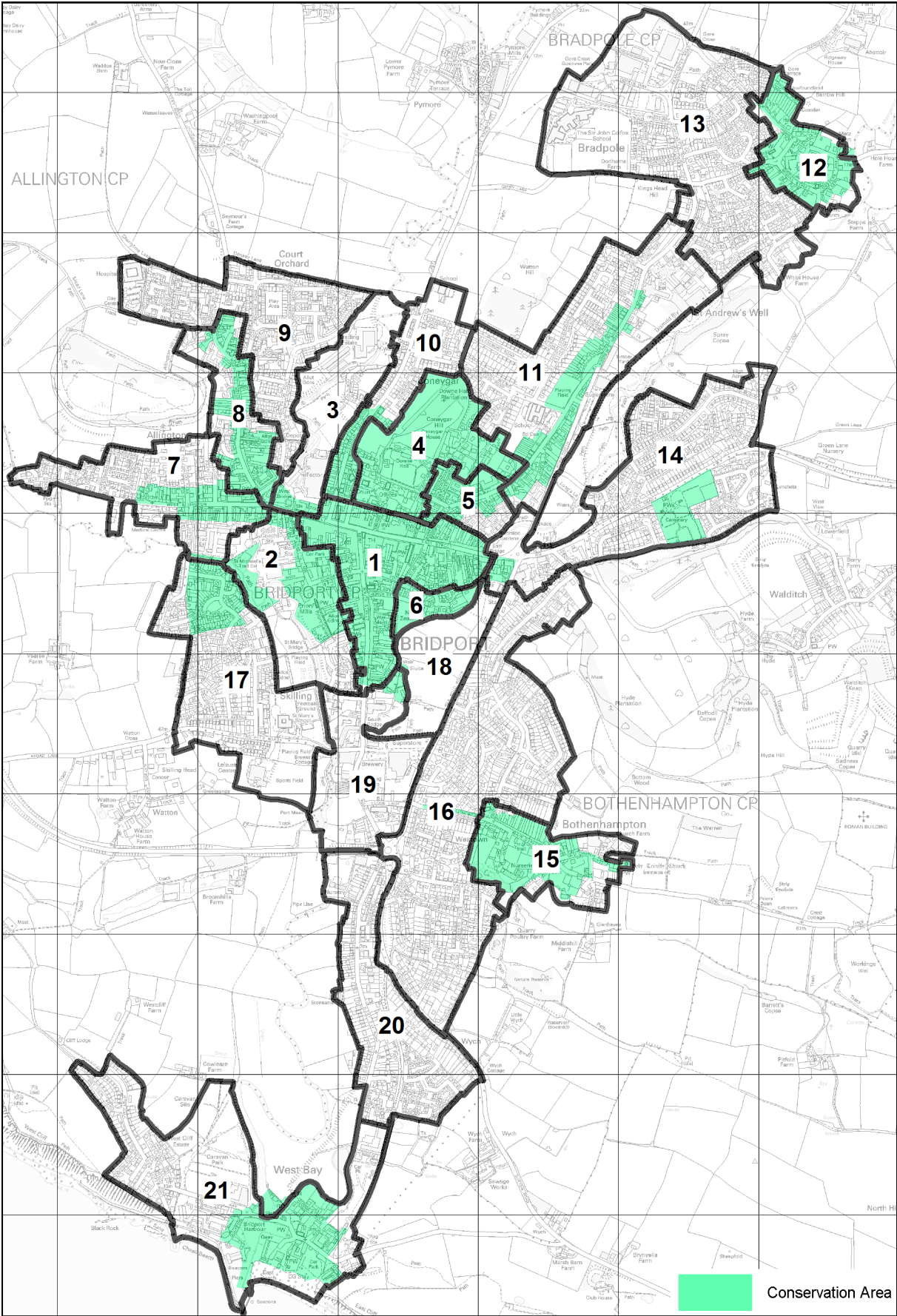19 Old Brewery and Portville
20 West Bay Road
21 West Bay

Figure 41: Bridport Historic Urban Character Areas in relationship to the Conservation Areas.