

Part 3: Town Context



3.1 The Setting of the Town

No town exists in isolation. All towns are shaped and influenced by their surrounding landscape. Topography and geology have a profound influence on the way a town develops; constraining development, shaping communication routes, and providing raw materials for building and other economic activity, amongst other things. In order to understand the character of a town, its surrounding landscape and natural context need to be understood. This section of the report briefly sets out the wider context of the town and the landscape character of its hinterland.

3.2 Topography

Lyme Regis lies on the coast at the end of the narrow steep-sided Lim Valley, which runs southeastwards from Uplyme. The town is flanked by steep hills to the east and west rising up to about 175 m above Ordnance Datum (Figure 3). The town is characterised by a number of steep slopes and very few areas of level ground. The landscape is extremely active, prone to many landslips and to coastal erosion, which has led to many changes in the form of the coastline. The present town lies on a small bay between Church Cliffs and the rocks of Broad Ledge to the east and the rocks at the Cobb to the west, beyond which lies Monmouth Beach and another small bay, Chipel Bay. The current coast has been stabilised by extensive sea defences.

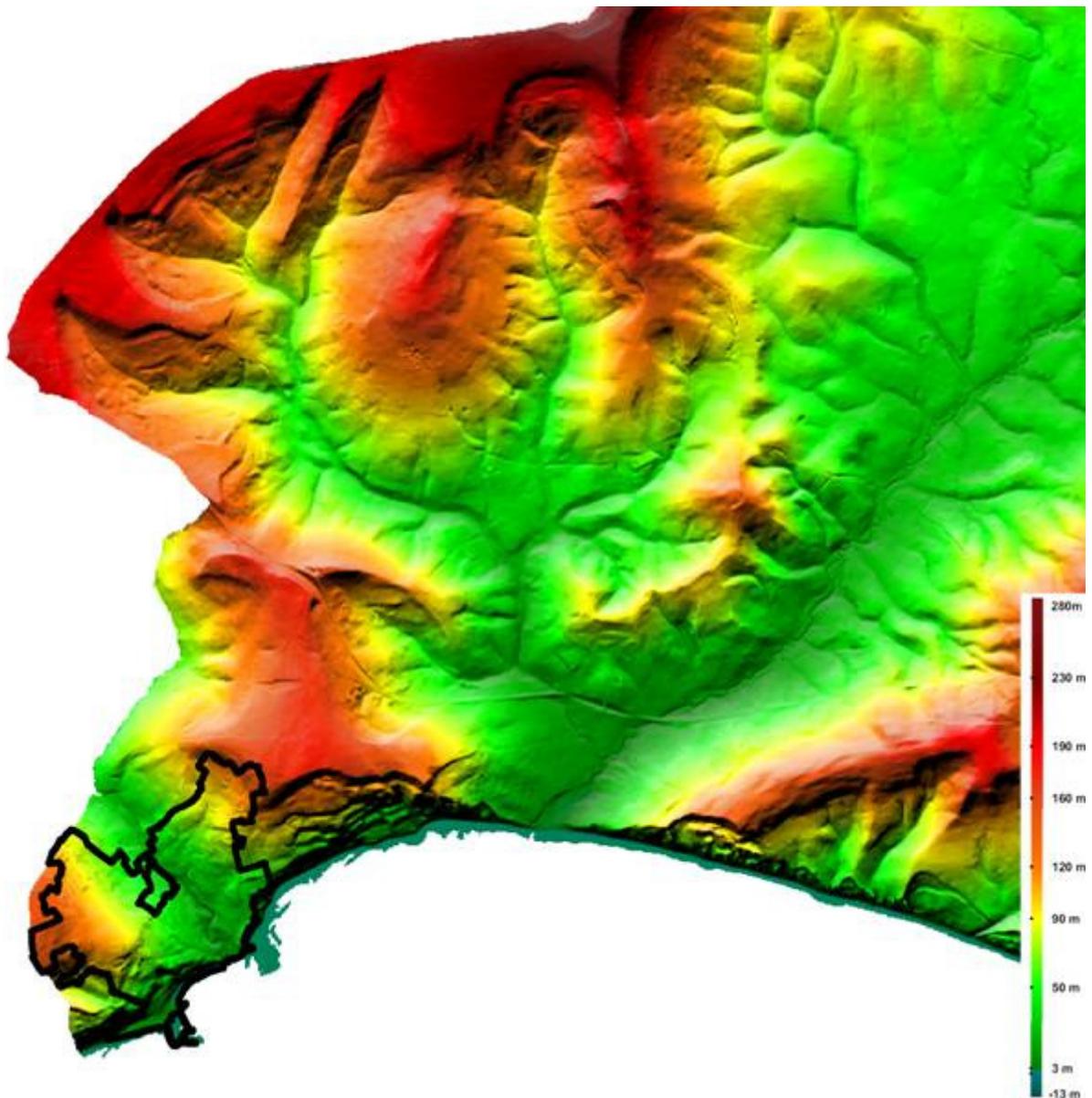


Figure 3: Lyme Regis' topographic setting.

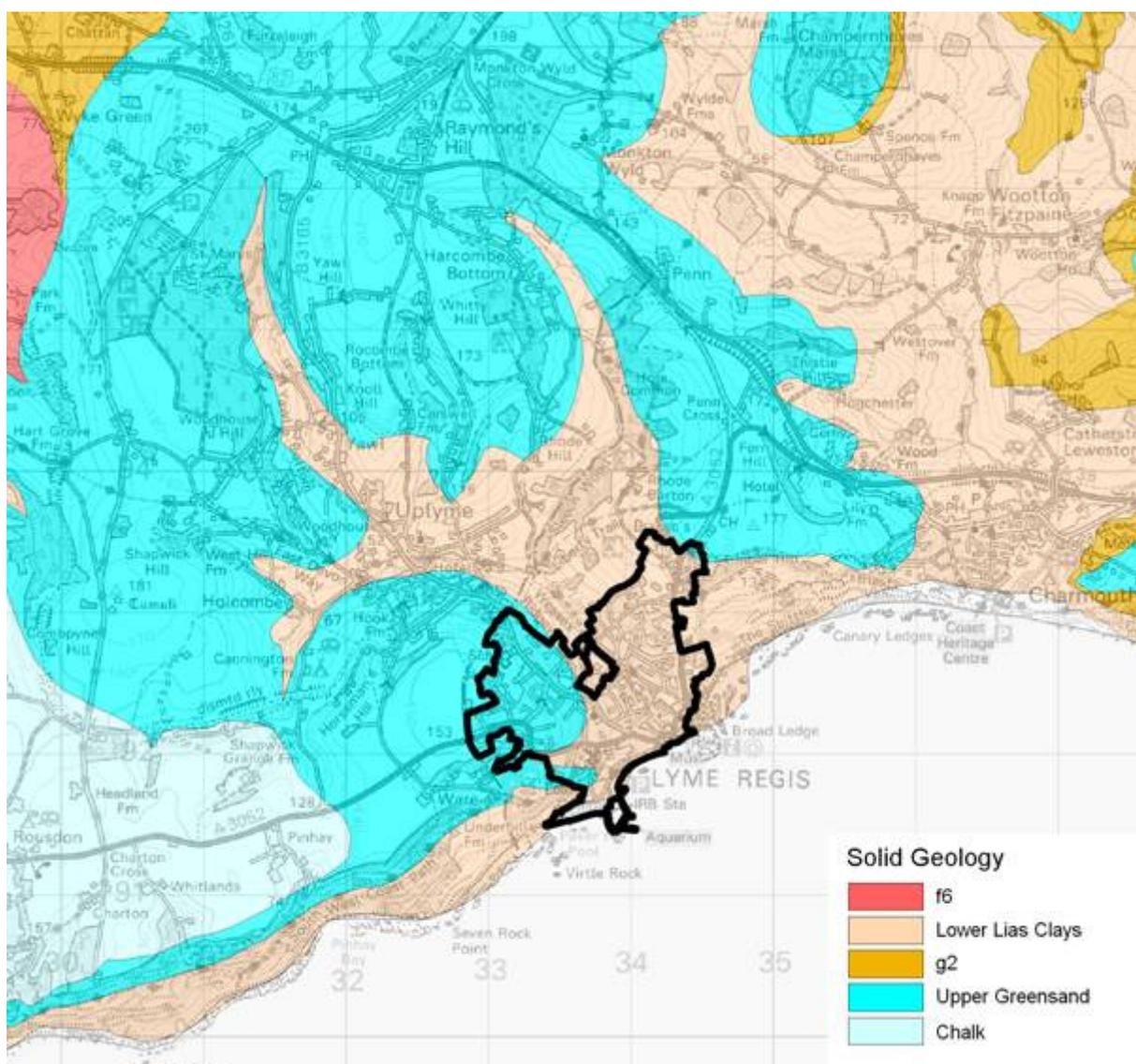


Figure 4: Geology of the Lyme Regis Area.

The steepness of the topography has had a major influence on the communication routes in and out of Lyme Regis. The mobility of the landscape has meant that earlier coastal routes have been destroyed by landslips and coastal erosion and the main routes now lie some way inland, bypassing the town.

3.3 Geology

Lyme Regis is on Lower Jurassic Liassic marine clays between two spurs of Cretaceous Upper Greensand, which form Timber Hill and Ware Hill (Figure 4). The higher western slopes of the study area are Upper Greensand as is the northeastern corner of the study area on Dragon's Hill. There is a small area of Clay-with-Flints over Chalk on the western margins of the study area.

The Lim valley and the town lie in a syncline of

Lower Lias clays overlying Blue Lias limestones and shales. The small bay between Church Cliffs and the Cobb corresponds to the area where the Liassic clays occur almost at sea level. The uppermost level of the Blue Lias within the town is at about the height of Marine Parade and the Lias rocks rise up on both sides to form the cliffs east and west of the town (West 2008). The clays are very prone to marine erosion and also to landslipping.

3.4 Landscape Character

Lyme Regis lies within the Dorset Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB), recognised as a nationally important landscape. This area has been the subject of several landscape character assessments, which help place the town into its wider surroundings.

In the national assessment of countryside char-

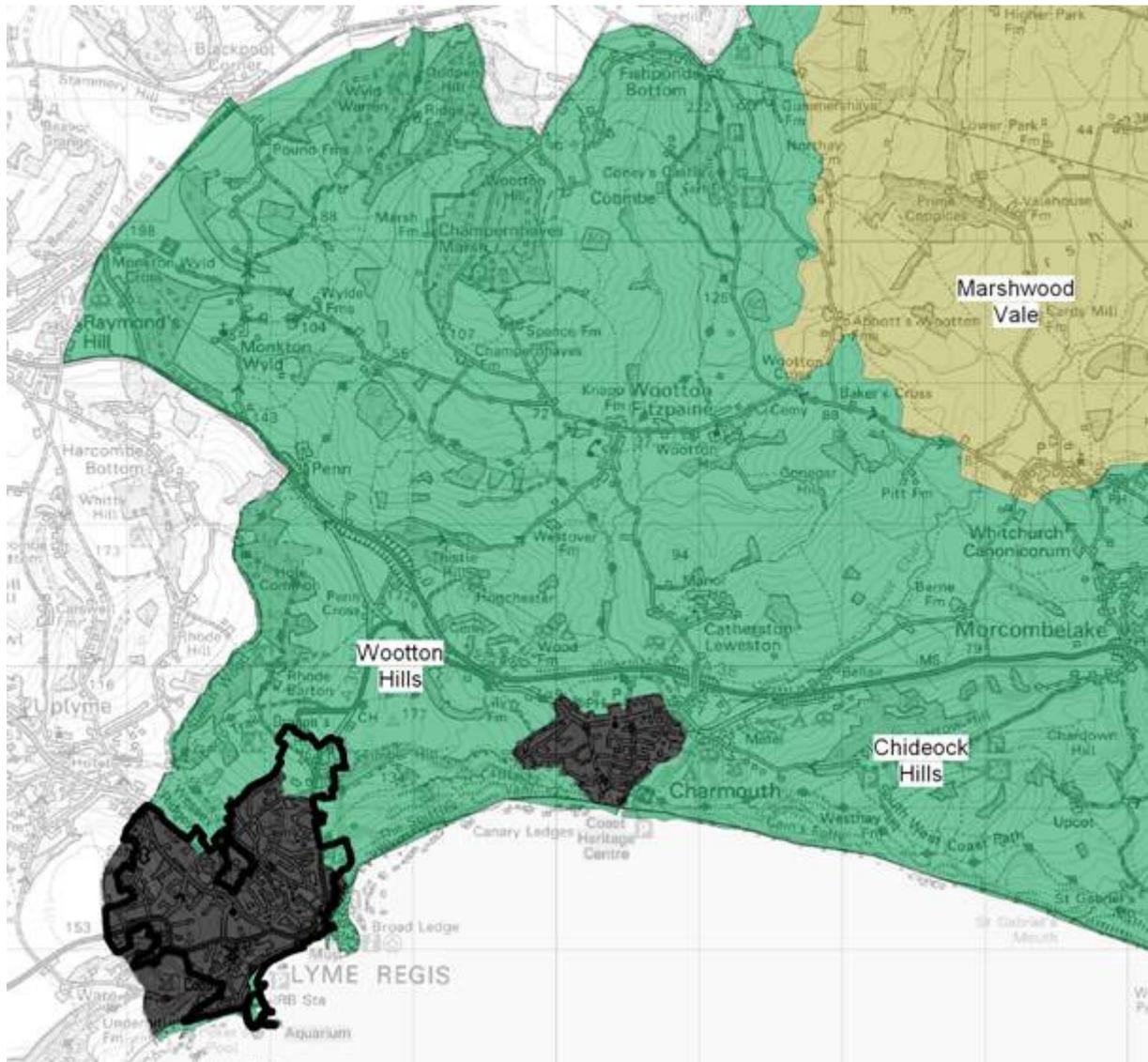


Figure 5: Lyme Regis in its landscape character setting (Dorset AONB Landscape Characterisation).

acter, Lyme Regis lies in the southeast corner of National Character Area 147 Blackdowns (Countryside Agency 1999).

The key characteristics of National Character Area 147 are listed as:

- Contrast between open, heathy windswept plateaux and ridges, and sheltered lush valleys.
- High ground with rectilinear field patterns and straight roads.
- Slopes and vales with strong patterns of small, irregular fields and sunken lanes.
- Wooded scarps and slopes.
- Beech shelterbelts and avenues on high ground.
- Hamlets and villages mainly in the valleys with buildings of chert, cob and thatch.
- Distinctive coastal landscape of unstable undercliffs, irregular headlands and valley

saltmarshes.

- Several coastal settlements but remote inland areas.

Lyme Regis was included in the West Dorset Cliffs and Undercliffs and West Dorset Farmland Landscape Types in *West Dorset 2000* (WDDC 2002), which provided a detailed record of the features and landscape elements present. This has now been superseded by a new Landscape Character Assessment of the Dorset AONB (Dorset AONB 2008) and a complementary West Dorset Landscape Character Assessment (WDDC 2008). In these latest assessments, Lyme Regis lies on the edge of the Wootton Hills Character Area, part of the Wooded Hills Landscape Type (Figure 5).

The key characteristics of the Wootton Hills area are:

- Numerous conical hills of greensand with

- deep, branching clay valleys
- Open hill tops of greensand summits, with a heathy character of bracken, heather and gorse, often with dramatic hillforts
- Patchwork of small, regular unimproved pastoral fields on valley bottoms with dense species rich hedgerows, hedgerow trees and small broadleaved woodlands
- Deep, narrow winding lanes with hedge banks and occasional beech tree canopies and avenues along ridge tops
- Large oak and ash woodlands and arable fields on valley sides
- Dramatic remote coastline of imposing summits, coastal landforms and sheltered valleys
- Intimate and enclosed landscape of close horizons
- Scattered clustered settlements of golden limestone and thatch along the valley bottoms.
- Occasional orchards

The draft Historic Landscape Character mapping shows Lyme Regis sitting within an area largely of piecemeal enclosed fields with areas of coniferous and deciduous woodland. To the northeast and south west are areas of other regular enclosed fields. To the west is a large area of former open fields.

3.5 The Present Town

The modern built-up area of Lyme Regis lies completely within the parish of Lyme Regis and covers an area of about 230 hectares. It lies about 3 km south of the A35 Trunk Road at the junction of the A3070 and A3052. There are no direct rail links. The population is 3710 (2005 mid-year estimate). The post-war population has fluctuated, with peaks of population growth in 1961 and 1991. The 2001 Census records 2080 dwellings in Lyme Regis and a further 134 have been built since 2001, giving a total of 2214. There is one primary school and one secondary school in Lyme Regis.

The retail sector comprises 68 shops/ 54,000 sq ft (2005). These are primarily small local shops with a few national chains and the catchment area for shopping is within about a 3-4 mile radius of the town.

There is one industrial estate in the town, Lyme Regis Industrial Estate (0.95ha). The most significant employers are in the distribution, hotel and restaurant sector, employing about 52% of the workforce, together with public administration, education and health (17%) and banking,

finance and insurance (11%). Manufacturing industries comprise only 3% of the workforce. The major employers are Dorset County Council and Lyme Regis Community Care Ltd.

The data used in this section have been obtained from Dorset County Council's *The Dorset Data Book 2007* (April 2007).

Part 4: Sources



4.1 Previous research

Lyme Regis has had three major historians, George Roberts, Cyril Wanklyn and John Fowles. George Roberts writing in the early 19th century is probably Lyme's pre-eminent historian whose *History and Antiquities of the Borough of Lyme Regis and Charmouth* (1834) is a detailed account of the history, geology and topography of Lyme Regis containing much information which would otherwise be lost and includes transcripts of historic documents, personal reminiscences and other collected material, which provides a good basis from which the history of Lyme can be understood. Robert's work is supplemented by the researches of Cyril Wanklyn in *Lyme Regis. A retrospect* (1927) and *Lyme Leaflets* (1944), which contain much interesting information on the town, its inhabitants and visitors. John Fowles' *A Short History of Lyme Regis* (1982) is a good concise modern history of the town which helps put some of the earlier work into a wider context. The above mentioned texts are the main historical sources used in this report.

Other books published on Lyme include volumes on specific topics such as the Town Mill (Graham *et al.* 2005), Lyme's electricity supply (Greene 2006), 1930's Lyme (Draper 2007), Lyme's early photographers (Draper 2006b), Woodroffe School (Warr 2007), and also more general books of historic photographs (Fowles 1990, Draper 2006a). In addition there are many books on the geology and history of geology at Lyme and numerous biographies of famous people who lived and visited Lyme, which contain other interesting elements of the story of Lyme, but which have not been consulted for this report.

4.2 Historic Maps

The earliest detailed maps are of the Cobb and the Walk and date to the late 18th and early 19th century. They include a detailed plan of the Cobb on a chart by Lt Mackenzie dated 1787, and two maps dating to about 1796 and 1813, reproduced in Wanklyn (1929). The first detailed map of the whole town is the 1841 Tithe Map (together with another map dated 1841 reproduced by Wanklyn). The characterisation is largely based on the Tithe Map and the 1:2500 scale Ordnance Survey maps dating from 1887 onwards.

4.3 Documentary Evidence

The surviving Lyme Regis Borough Archives

date from the 12th to the 20th centuries. A large number of documents survive, but they have not been fully catalogued and have not been consulted in the course of writing this report. Other documentary evidence including unpublished archive material collated by Roberts and Wanklyn and a large photographic archive is held by Lyme Regis Museum.

4.4 Archaeological Evidence

There has been relatively little archaeological investigation in Lyme Regis (**Appendix 3**). This is partly as a result of the unstable geology which makes it very unwise to expose and strip large areas of ground. The archaeological investigations are mainly restricted to very limited evaluations and watching briefs at and the recording of historic structures. The major piece of archaeological work has been the multi-disciplinary investigations of the Town Mill which have revealed a mass of important information on the history and development of the mill (Graham *et al.* 2005). Small watching briefs have been carried out near the Cobb (Fowles 1985), in Langmoor and Lister Gardens (Gifford 2006), adjacent to Lyme Regis Museum (Draper and Tatler 2006), behind 45-46 Broad Street (Bellamy 2004), at 2 Sherborne Lane (Draper 2008) and at the Thatch, Uplyme Road (Draper 1998). A small evaluation was undertaken at St Andrew's Meadow (Wallis 1998). Building recording works have taken place on the Cobb and along the sea defences (Wilson *et al.* 2007), Gosling's Bridge (Gardiner 2003) and Buddle Bridge (Wingrave 1922). These have produced some interesting detailed results but are limited in the amount of information they can contribute to an overall understanding of the town.

4.5 Historic Buildings

Lyme Regis has a large stock of surviving historic buildings, the majority dating to the late 18th and early 19th century. There are a small number of known earlier houses, but more may await discovery behind the frontages of the Georgian and Early Victorian buildings. The main medieval structures are St Michael's Church, Buddle Bridge, Gosling's Bridge, and The Cobb (though it is a moot point how much medieval work survives in the latter). The 18th and 19th century buildings are of a variety of types, from large seaside villa houses, guest houses and hotels, large town houses, more modest workers and artisan's houses and a number of historic shopfronts. There are a small number of surviving industrial buildings

including the Town Mill, several buildings associated with the former cloth industry, the bonded warehouse, etc. The 20th century buildings include some early 20th century council houses, inter-war suburban housing and a range of modern houses.