

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





## 6.1 The historic urban character of Cerne Abbas

The urban character of Cerne Abbas, 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 topographic influences upon the historic character of Cerne Abbas include its position along the spring line in the upper reaches of the Cerne valley, surrounded by a number of projecting chalk promontories, which has helped to shape the location, form, economy and character of the town.

Today, Cerne Abbas is regarded as a large village, rather than a town, following its economic decline in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and the decay of its industries. This has helped preserve its medieval market town layout. This is a classic nucleated plan form with the market place at the junction of Long Street and Abbey Street. These two streets form the historic urban centre and retain their essentially late medieval layout, with well-preserved regular burgage plots along their length. A secondary urban focus of the town lies along Dorchester Road/Acreman Street on the west side of the river valley, to the north of

the magnificent Tithe Barn. The area of the Abbey, which was largely demolished soon after Dissolution, is now semi-rural in nature.

Historic buildings form a major element of the character of Cerne Abbas. There is remarkable preservation of historic buildings, Long Street has almost unbroken groups of 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century attached houses and occasional public houses and inns. There are a number of houses with fine 19<sup>th</sup> century historic shop fronts. Abbey Street has an important group of medieval jettied half-timbered houses leading to a number of surviving medieval abbey buildings. Many of the historic buildings are constructed of banded flint and chalk block or brick and many are roofed with thatch, giving a coherent feel to the streetscape. A number of former farm buildings and industrial buildings (tannery, malshouses, mill, etc) survive, mainly converted to dwellings. Many buildings retain original detail, which provides coherence to the historic character of Cerne Abbas and a great sense of time depth. There is a small number of modern housing estates, but these are largely confined to the margins of the town and generally do not impinge greatly upon the historic townscape.

There are few green spaces in the centre of Cerne Abbas, but the River Cerne corridor and the Abbey Farm area provide important green

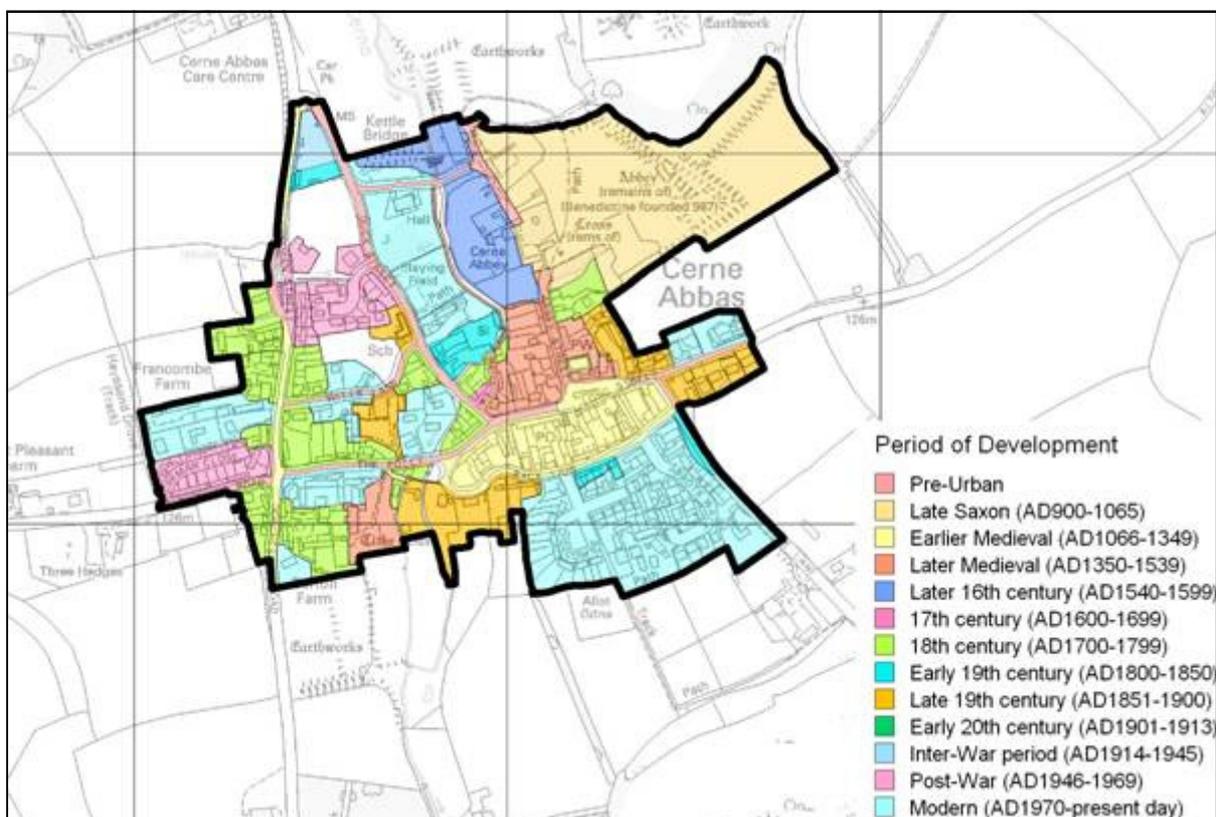


Figure 37: Map showing the major periods of development in Cerne Abbas.

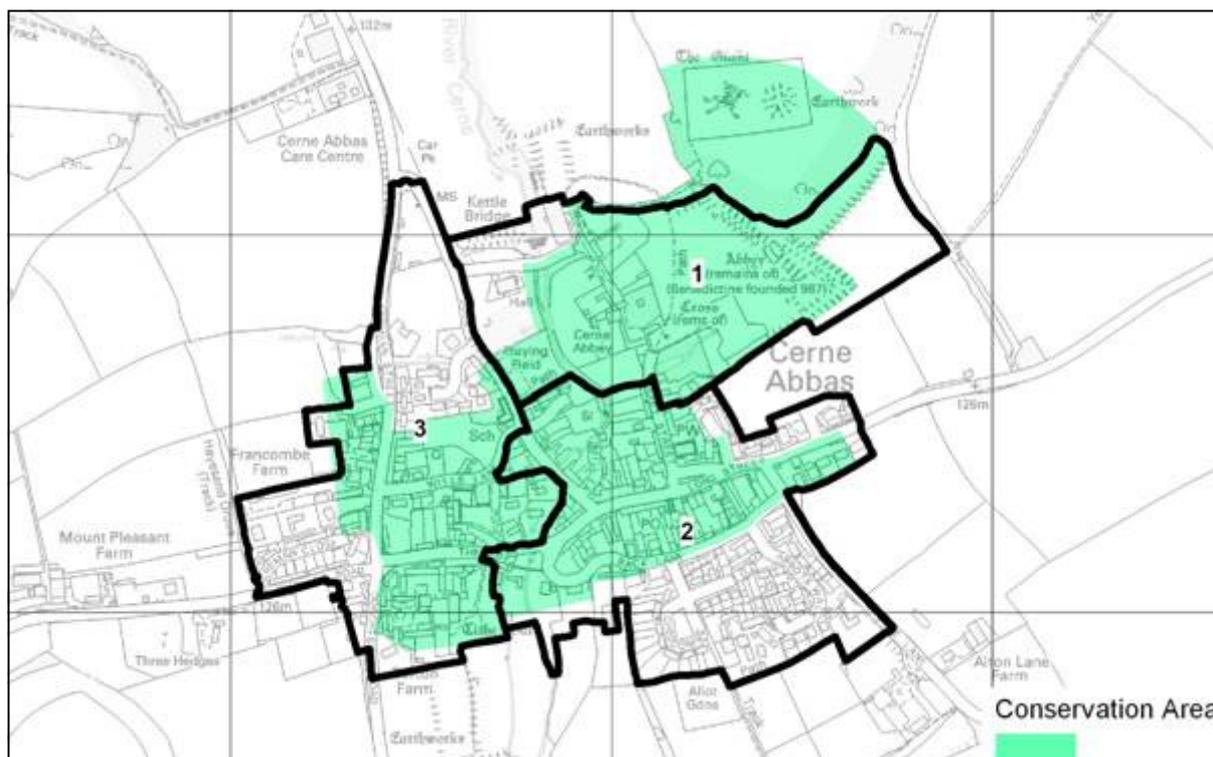


Figure 38: Cerne Abbas Historic Urban Character Areas in relationship to the Conservation Area.

corridors into the historic core and there are many mature trees around the edges of the settlement and along the river. The steep green valley sides and characteristic rounded chalk hills and spurs give fine views from of the town.

## 6.2 Historic Urban Character Areas of Cerne Abbas

Three Historic Urban Character Areas have been defined for Cerne Abbas as shown on Figure 38 and listed below. They comprise the area of the former Abbey and Abbey Farm (Character Area 1), The town centre (Area 2), and the secondary settlement on the west side of the River Cerne centred on Acreman Street (Area 3).

- 1 The Abbey
- 2 The Town
- 3 Acreman Street