

## 5.4 Later Twentieth Century Gillingham (1946- Present Day)

### 5.4.1 Historical Summary

The later 20th century in Gillingham is characterised by the rapid growth of suburban housing estates. Industrial growth stagnated, although commercial and service industries have grown in its stead in order to service a burgeoning population. The size of the population had been relatively stable at just under 3,500 during the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century but began to rise in the immediate post-war period and particularly rapidly in the last 20 years, so that its population now stands at around 11,000. Gillingham is now said to be one of the fastest growing towns in Dorset.

Many of the town's traditional industries were in decline by the mid 20<sup>th</sup> century. The butter factory on Station Road closed in 1937 and the cattle market closed in the mid 20<sup>th</sup> century. Nevertheless, the town has been able to re-invent itself and attract new business. The Gillingham brickworks were in rapid decline and closed in 1969, and yet the Gillingham Pottery, Brick and Tile Company are still trading. Today they are listed primarily as property developers and have developed the former brickfields site into the Brickfields Industrial Estate and the Brickfields Business Park. Businesses on the site include metal workers, builders, garage services, fuel suppliers and car auctioneers. A further large modern industrial estate has been developed along Station Road, including the former cattle market site, and a major commercial development lies along the route of the new Gillingham by-pass. This latter development includes supermarkets, garages, as well as a library and museum.

On a civic level, a recreation ground was purchased by the Town Council in 1934, and construction of a sports centre on the site commenced in 1973. A new fire station in Peacemarsh was opened in 1973. The Grammar School became a comprehensive in 1959 and a new primary school (St Mary the Virgin) was opened in 2004 at Ham Common. Wesley Garden, in Queen Street, the burial ground for the former Wesleyan Chapel, was taken over by the Town Council in 1999 and restored following years of neglect. Gillingham Museum opened on Church Walk in 1953, now housed in a new purpose-built structure next to the library (Gillingham Town Council 2008).

The late 20<sup>th</sup> century development of suburban housing estates, has occurred largely around

the former rural centres of Peacemarsh (Figure 29), Ham Common and Wyke.

### 5.4.2 Town Layout

The greatest change in the layout of the town has occurred in the last twenty years. To some extent historic plots have been truncated and the town centre divorced from its suburbs through the construction of the by-pass, known as Le Neubourg Way (Figure 30). This road runs in a broad arc from Peacemarsh Road in the north, around the west and south sides of the town centre to join the Shaftesbury Road in the centre of Newbury. The road cuts through the centre of Station Road as well as the former earthworks of the suburb at Chantry Fields. The road is a busy through route and has preserved the historic town centre from modern traffic, but modern development lines the new road to such an extent that the broader town has lost any coherent sense of historic character.

Further major change is apparent in the extensive modern housing estates that now surround the former historic rural settlements of Peacemarsh, Wyke and Ham Common. These estates have filled in the gaps between the radial routes to create a wider suburban sprawl. Nevertheless a large number of historic buildings survive along the major routes into the town.

Modern commercial and retail pressures have led to a third major change in the layout of Gillingham. The former area of Park Farm, largely within the bounds of the former royal Gillingham Park and the historic settlements of Higher and Lower Ham Common, has recently been developed as a retail and industrial park, extending the limits of the modern town along the Shaftesbury Road. Historic buildings survive in this area, but totally subsumed and hidden behind builder's yards, roundabouts and garden centres. Similarly, new development at Middlefield House to the north of Peacemarsh has extended the limit of the urban area in this direction.

### 5.4.3 Later Twentieth century Town Plan Components

The main plan components of the twentieth century town are shown on Figure 33 and are listed below.

1. *St Mary's Parish Church*. There has been no

significant change to St Mary's Church during the late 20<sup>th</sup> century.

2. *Town Plots*. The plots on the western side of the town were truncated during the construction of Le Neubourg Way in 1990. Subsequently modern housing has filled the gaps between the historic buildings and the new road at St Ann's Court and St Mary's Court.

3. *The Square*. There was little discernable change to The Square during the late 20<sup>th</sup> century.

4. *St Martin's Square*. There was little discernable change to St Martin's Square during the late 20<sup>th</sup> century.

5. *Town Mill*. The corn mill remained in use until 1966. The 18<sup>th</sup> century mill house survives, although many of the mill buildings were demolished in the early 1990s to make way for the Barnaby Mill sheltered housing apartments (Figure 31).

6. *Newbury*. Newbury has been significantly affected by the construction of the Gillingham relief road, Le Neubourg Way, in 1990. That part of Newbury to the east of Le Neubourg Way remains on Gillingham's major through route, whilst that to the west is a relatively pedestrian shopping street. Nevertheless, there have been a significant number of modern residential and commercial developments in both parts of Newbury. One of the largest was the construction of the New Lidl supermarket at the junction of School Road and Newbury in 2002. A Somerfield supermarket has been constructed on the south side of High Street (Figure 32), with a modern housing development behind it at Paris Court. Modern housing has also been built at Hardings Lane, Victoria Road, Rufus Court and Prospect Close. The late 19<sup>th</sup> century Newbury house has been retained as part of a development of modern apartments built within its former grounds.

7. *Chantry Fields and Farm*. A small number of the Chantry Farm buildings have been preserved and included within a modern housing development called Chantry Farm. Chantry Ford and Chantry Cottages are unchanged, although the area of Chantry Fields south of them has been developed as a supermarket, Le Neubourg Way and a modern housing estate.

8. *Wyke*. The large green opposite the brewery was developed for modern housing at Clarendon Place. Modern infill has also been developed behind the brewery at Milford Court and on the east side of Pound Lane. Part of the grounds of Wyke House and South Lodge has also been developed for modern cottages.



Figure 29: View of the Barnaby Mead and Peacemash modern housing estates.



Figure 30: View west along Le Neubourg Way from the junction with Station Road.



Figure 31: View of the modern Barnaby Mill housing block with Mill House in front.



Figure 32: Somersfield Supermarket, High Street, Newbury.

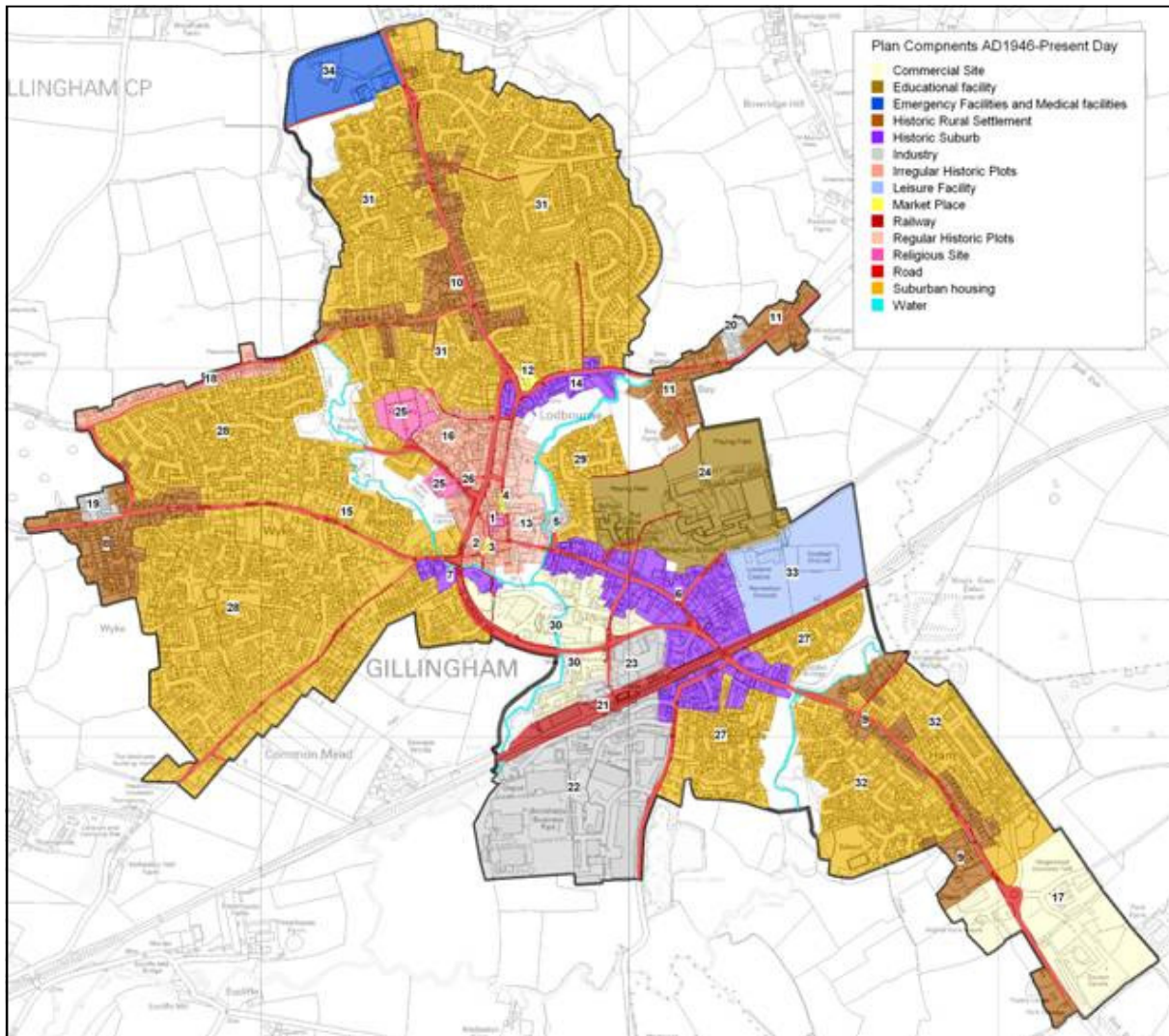


Figure 33: Gillingham Later Twentieth Century Town Plan Components.

9. *Ham Common*. Modern housing estates have encroached upon the area of the historic settlement at Ham Common, notably at Rookery Close, Lockwood Terrace and the grounds of Grosvenor Cottage.

10. *Peacemarsh*. A new fire station was opened on Peacemarsh Road in 1973. The outbuildings at the rear of Peacemarsh Farm were demolished to make way for a modern housing estate at Peacemarsh Farm Close. The farm house has been preserved.

11. *Bay*. Ten large modern detached houses have been built at the eastern end of the settlement, along with a few others scattered amongst the historic cottages.

12. *Lodbourne Green*. It is not known exactly when the last fair was held in Gillingham but they seem to have ceased by the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. A single row of shops has been constructed at the centre of the former fair field

(Figure 10).

13. *Town Burgages*. Plot boundaries to the rear of the Vicarage have been truncated for the construction of a large town centre car park. The Vicarage itself has been extended as sheltered housing (Rawson Court). St Martin's Residential Home has also been built opposite St Martin's Square. The only burgage plot boundaries to survive lie at the northern end of the area, opposite the Queen's Head public house.

14. *Lodbourne*. The only significant change has been the development of the former Great House site at Stour Motors, Queen Street. A garage and modern housing have been built on the site following the truncation of the former plot by the construction of Le Neubourg Way.

15. *Cold Harbour*. There has been little discernable change to the Cold Harbour area during the late 20<sup>th</sup> century.

16. *Rolls Bridge and Tomlins Lane.* The truncation of plots at the rear of The Queens Head pub by the construction of Le Neubourg Way made land available for development as modern housing at Cypress Way, Floramour Place and Whitehouse Court.

17. *Park Farm.* The former Park Farm site has been developed as a modern industrial and retail park. The former farm buildings have been preserved and incorporated into the development (Figure 74) and new farm buildings constructed outside the study area to the east. Part of the former Higher and Lower Ham settlement has also become incorporated into the industrial and retail area.

18. *Wavering Lane.* A few large modern detached houses have been added along Wavering Lane during the later 20<sup>th</sup> century.

19. *Wyke Brewery.* Matthews and Co. Brewery in Wyke was taken over by Hall and Woodhouse in Blandford St Mary during 1963, along with 61 tied pubs.

20. *Malthouse Farm, Bay.* In 1993 the Malthouse, already a large residential property, was converted to a residential care home along with the stables at the entrance to the site.

21. *The Railway.* Gillingham Station is now run by South West Trains on the West of England Main Line. The station retains many of its original features, although the majority of goods sheds and industrial fittings such as cranes have been lost.

22. *Brickfields and Station Road Industrial Area.* The brickfields on the south side of the railway closed in 1969. The site has been developed as a large industrial estate by the Gillingham Pottery Brick and Tile Company. The Station Road area has been divided by the construction of Le Neubourg Way and largely converted to retail and commercial use, or incorporated within the Old Market Industrial area.

23. *Gillingham Cattle Market.* The cattle market

ceased trading in the mid 20<sup>th</sup> century, its business going to Sturminster Newton. In recent years, following the construction of Le Neubourg way in 1990, the site has been extended and converted in to the Old Market Business Centre, with modern retail, wholesale and light industrial units.

24. *Gillingham School.* The school became a comprehensive in 1959. A new sports hall was built in 2004-5 and the car park extended at the same time.

25. *Gillingham Cemeteries.* There has been little discernable change to Gillingham's two cemeteries during the late 20<sup>th</sup> century, other than the earliest, southern, cemetery has had the gravestones removed and is now a memorial garden (Figure 34).

26. *Gillingham Gas Works.* Nothing now survives of the old gas house in Gillingham. The site was flattened prior to construction of Le Neubourg Way in 1990.

27. *Lodden Meads Housing Estate.* Lodden Meads housing estate has grown rapidly in the later 20<sup>th</sup> century to incorporate a large area east of New Road, south of the railway and west of the Lodden and on both sides of Newbury. The housing stock incorporates a variety of styles from mid 20<sup>th</sup> century semi-detached council houses with hipped roofs, to modern terraces in small plots arranged around curvilinear culs-de-sac.

28. *Wyke Marsh Housing Estate.* This large area of modern suburban housing lies on the west side of Gillingham town between it and the historic rural settlement of Wyke. It is centred on Wyke Road but extends from Wavering Lane in the north to Common Mead Lane in the south, including the former Chantry Fields and Common Mead. The estate has developed over a number of years and includes an extensive area of 1970s bungalows in the former Common Mead area and 1990s detached houses and short terraces arranged around curvilinear culs-



Figure 34: Mortuary Chapel, Gillingham Garden of Remembrance, Cemetery Road.



Figure 35: Barnaby Mead Housing Estate.

de-sac to the north of Wyke Road.

29. *Barnaby Mead Housing Estate*. This modern housing estate was built in the first years of the 21<sup>st</sup> century and comprises medium-large detached houses within medium plots and arranged around a curvilinear cul-de-sac. The estate has been constructed within former meadows on the east bank of the River Shreen, close to Town Mill (Figure 35).

30. *Le Neubourg Way Commercial Zone*. Gillingham's relief road, Le Neubourg Way was constructed in 1990, largely in back plots and meadows around the west and south sides of the town centre. The section of meadows on the south side of the town, between it and the new road immediately became prime development land and Waitrose Supermarket, a library and museum were built on the site. The road also cut across former industrial land on Station Road, which also provided land suitable for commercial redevelopment. This includes a garage, superstore, furniture store, car hire and a small residential estate.

31. *Peacemash Modern Housing Estate*. This large housing estate lies to the north of Gillingham town centre and is centred on the historic settlement of Peacemash, either side of Peacemash Road. The earliest part of the estate lies closest to the town centre and was constructed in the immediate post war period. It comprises semi-detached council houses with hipped roofs arranged in a geometric pattern at Fairey Crescent, a name possibly derived from its proximity to the Gillingham fair field at Lodbourne. Development spread north and east from here in the form of detached and semi-detached houses arranged around geometrically planned avenues and culs-de-sac. The latest development lies in the northern part of the area and comprises a mixture of short irregular terraces, detached and semi-detached houses arranged within small plots around linear and curvilinear culs-de-sac.

32. *Ham Common Modern Housing Estates*.

The development of this area began with a couple of closes of bungalows and detached houses at Kingscourt Road, Kingscourt Close, Rookery Close and Lockwood Terrace. The greater part of the estate was not developed until the early 21<sup>st</sup> century, initially in 2000 at Fernbrook Lane and later in 2003-5 at Ham Farm. A new primary school (St Mary the Virgin) was constructed in 2003-4 as part of the development (Figure 36).

33. *Gillingham Leisure Centre*. The town council purchased a recreation ground adjacent to the Grammar School on Hardings Lane in 1935 for the sum of £800. In 1973 the construction of a leisure centre and heated covered swimming pool began on the site.

34. *Middlefield House*. This modern development lies at the extreme northern end of the urban area of Gillingham on the northern edge of the Peacemash housing estate. It has been built on one of the former medieval arable fields, middle field. The development contains a day nursery, doctors' surgery, pharmacy, dentists' surgery and other commercial properties (Figure 37).



Figure 36: St Mary The Virgin Primary School, Ham.



Figure 37: Middle Field House, Peacemash.