

Part 6: Historic Urban Character Appraisal



6.1 The historic urban character of Wimborne Minster

The urban character of Wimborne Minster, 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 position of Wimborne Minster, between the Rivers Stour and Allen, has had a profound effect on the location, form, economy and character of the town. The settlement originated as a monastic site and royal homestead at the tip of a low ridge or 'island' between the two rivers. Later Saxon town walls may have been designed to make the most of Wimborne Minster's natural defensive position as well as an effective flood defence.

An essential part of Wimborne Minster's urban character is its significant early history. Elements of the current street pattern may preserve parts of the original Saxon grid plan of streets. The original monastery seems to have been sacked by the Vikings, although the core of the Minster church is late Saxon in origin, re-founded as a College of Secular Canons in the 11th century. It also functioned as a Minster church administering to the religious needs of a large parochia, which covered most of the

lower Allen Valley. It was this role as a regional centre that maintained Wimborne Minster as a market town during the medieval period.

This medieval prosperity is reflected in the current character of the town. Suburban expansion is reflected in the town plan. East and West Borough represent a planned medieval extension to the Saxon core. Earthworks in the Leaze also preserve the remains of another planned suburb, abandoned in the 14th century. Suburbs also grew up organically along the eastern and western approaches to the town. In fact Wimborne Minster is recognised for retaining one of the most important collections of late medieval buildings in Dorset. Victorian suburban expansion east of the town relieved the developmental pressure on the medieval centre. The town also seems to have avoided the devastating fires of the 18th century which destroyed large parts of neighbouring towns such as Blandford and Wareham. This enabled the survival of original medieval buildings in the High Street and Corn Market areas including the Minster Church, The Priests House, St Josephs on King Street and many 16th-18th century shops and pubs.

Wimborne Minster may have a relatively small number of Georgian brick town houses compared to its neighbours but the few that were

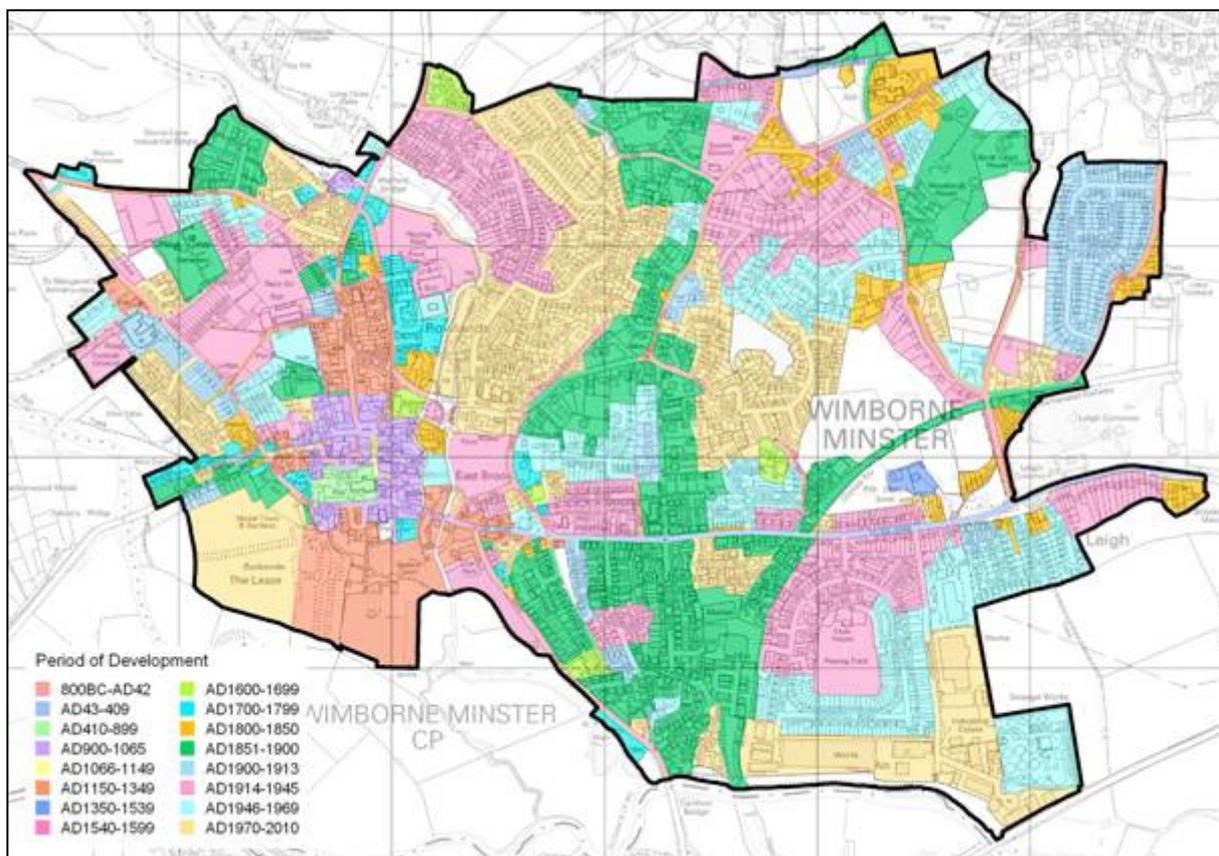


Figure 44: Map showing the major periods of development in Wimborne Minster

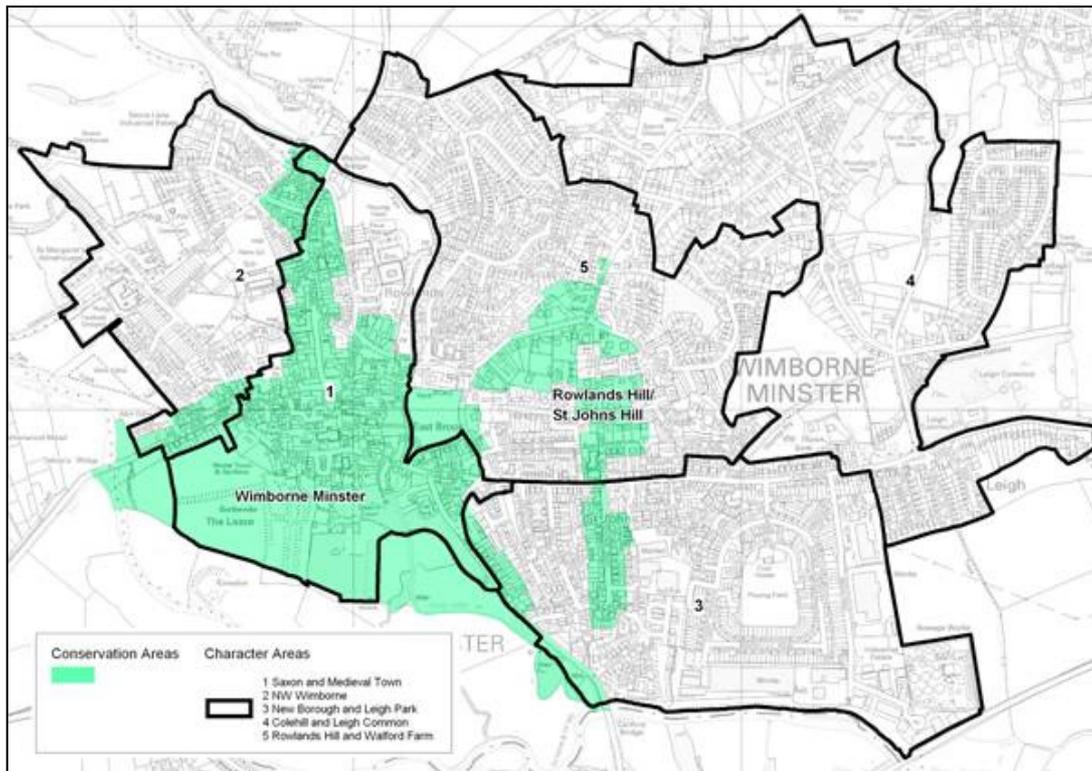


Figure 45: Wimborne Minster Historic Urban Character Areas in relationship to the Conservation Area

built impart a sense of grandeur and prosperity to the town. Many older buildings were also given Georgian facades during the 18th century. Wimborne Minster certainly did prosper during the 17th, 18th and 19th centuries, particularly from the Victorian period and the arrival of the railway in 1847. It was at this time that suburban expansion exploded on the eastern side of the River Allen. The Rowlands Hill, St John's Hill and New Borough areas of Wimborne Minster are still characterised by grand Victorian villas and have been designated conservation areas.

It was the south facing aspect, coupled with excellent transport links and proximity to the south coast that attracted the independently wealthy and professional classes to settle in Colehill and St John's. This meant that Wimborne Minster escaped the worst depredations of the 19th century Agricultural depression and the great depression of the 1920's and 30's. In fact by this time suburban expansion began anew and continues to this day. Inter war suburban estates are also a feature of the Colehill and Leigh suburbs, notably at Leigh Park. Even the demise of the railway in 1977 could not slow the pace of suburban development and much of the former track bed was quickly redeveloped for commercial, industrial and residential use. 20th century industry and commercial development has naturally tended to congregate in the former station area. Large

scale 19th and 20th century industry were overwhelmingly associated with the construction and service industries. This included gravel and clay extraction for road construction and the brick making industry. A number of brick kilns could be found in Colehill and NE Wimborne Minster. The brewing industry and the manufacture of machinery for bottling were also important in the town.

Green spaces are concentrated on the river flood plains and remnants of former unenclosed heath and common in Colehill (Figure 44). Views across the Stour Vale to the adjacent conurbations of Poole and Bournemouth are also important to the character of the town.

6.2 Historic Urban Character Areas of Wimborne Minster

A total of five Historic Urban Character Areas have been defined for Wimborne Minster as shown on Figure 45 and listed below. They comprise the area of the Saxon and medieval town (Character Area 1); Suburbs on the north west side of the town (Area 2) and to the east of the River Allen (Areas 3-5).

1. The Saxon and Medieval Town
2. North West Wimborne Minster
3. New Borough and Leigh Park
4. Colehill and Leigh Common
5. Rowland's Hill and Walford Farm