

Wimborne Minster Historic Urban Character Area 1

The Saxon and Medieval Town

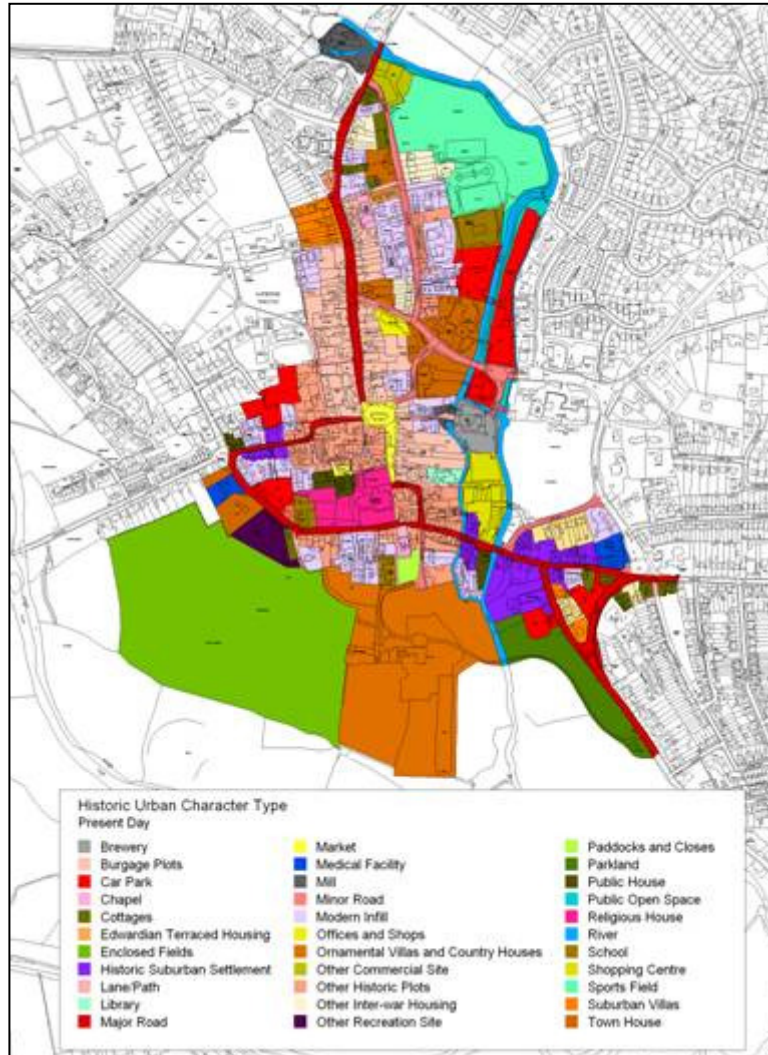


Figure 46: Map of Historic Urban Character Area 1, showing current historic urban character type



Figure 47: Wimborne Minster Church of St Cuthburga



Figure 48: View west of the Corn Market

Wimborne Minster Historic Urban Character Area 1

Structure of Character Area

Overview

This area represents the historic and commercial centre of Wimborne. It is defined primarily by its historic dimension, although the eastern boundary is, for the most part, taken as the River Allen. It is essentially that part of Wimborne occupied during the medieval period and includes the historic suburbs of The Leaze, The Borough, West Street and East Brook.

Topography and Geology

The town of Wimborne Minster was built at the south eastern tip of a ridge of clay running NW-SE between the rivers Stour and Allen. The Geology of the area consists almost entirely of London Clay, apart from a strip of alluvium along the southernmost part of the River Allen.

Urban Structure

The urban structure of this area is varied. Around the Minster there are a network of narrow lanes and alleys. The buildings in this area are tightly packed and front directly on the lanes. A number of small squares provide limited openings within this tight structure. High Street is a wide street that represents the site of the former town market with long parallel narrow plots to the rear of properties on the east side of the street. Similar plots lie behind West Borough extending to back lanes at Redcotts Lane and East Borough. The structure of East Brook is less regular and may indicate a more organic development comprising cottages and houses lining pre-existing streets. The area to the south of the town centre comprises parkland gardens and fields.

Present Character

Figure 46 shows the present day historic urban character types. The Minster Church of St Cuthburga (Figure 47) is focal to the character area and is surrounded by other historic plots within the area of the former Saxon town. The Corn Market is a small square on the north side of the church (Figure 48) and the former markets of High Street and The Square to the east still form two of the main shopping areas in the town. The major route of King Street and East Street runs along the south side of the Minster. East Borough is lined with town houses in the south and modern housing further north.

Time Depth

The site of the Minster Church of St Cuthburga may be on the site of the monastery founded before AD 705. The network of N-S and E-W

aligned lanes in the vicinity of the Minster Church reflect a modified grid plan originally laid out during the late Saxon period. The Corn Market and High Street represent probable medieval market places. The Square is the site of the former medieval church of St Peter. West Borough is a planned medieval suburb running north from the Saxon town centre. Earthworks in The Leaze represent the site of a deserted medieval suburb. West Street and East Brook may also represent medieval suburbs. Deans Court dates from the 18th and 19th centuries but is on the site of the medieval Dean's Hall. A significant number of 17th century or earlier buildings survive in the vicinity of the Minster Church (Figure 49). 18th century town houses typify the southern part of East Borough. Significant 19th century developments include the former Grammar School building at Queen Elizabeth's Court as well as industrial buildings at Town and Walford Mills.

Settlement Pattern and Streetscape

The late Saxon walled town developed largely to the north of the Minster Church within a rectangular outline and subdivided by a regular grid of streets. Today settlement in this area presents a very tightly packed pattern of 16th-18th century buildings fronting on to narrow lanes with sharp 90 degree bends.

The medieval suburbs are typified by wider central streets radiating from the Saxon core along the four main compass points. West Borough, to the north of the Saxon town, is the best preserved and includes back lanes, burgage plots and settlement fronting directly on the street within the original burgage boundaries. Post medieval infill has typically occurred within the rear of medieval burgages along East Borough and around the fringes of the medieval town at Walford and along the Allen between Town Mill and Eastbrook.



Figure 49: St Joseph's, 5 King Street; late medieval timber framed house

Wimborne Minster Historic Urban Character Area 1 Built Character

Building types

The area has a large number of important historical buildings. These include the Minster church of St Cuthburga, which retains the central crossing and part of the north transept from the early 11th century Saxon church. The Priests House on High Street is a late 16th century town house modified in the 18th century. The White Hart is a 17th century Inn on the west side of Corn Market. The majority of the town's surviving 17th century houses lie along West Street and West Borough. Many of these were originally timber framed but have been refaced during the 18th century. Along West Borough in particular, these combine with houses built in the 18th century to present a relatively uniform Georgian street frontage. The 18th century also saw the construction of a number of grander town houses and hotels around The Square and the south end of East Borough. Significant 19th century buildings include the three storey Allendale House, built in 1823 in the Grecian style, and Queen Elizabeth's Court, built for the Grammar School in 1851. Early 19th century brick cottages, houses and terraces form a significant component of the built character of the town, notably in Eastbrook. 19th century Brick industrial buildings are also important in the vicinity of Town and Walford Mills.

Building Materials

The surviving medieval buildings tend to be stone built. The Minster Church of St Cuthburga is built from a mixture of limestone and local ironstone. The surviving 11th century elements are rubble built with squared string courses whilst later sections have been faced with ashlar. The roofs are largely in lead. The nearby Priests House on High Street has limestone and flint banding, whilst some sections are timber framed. The early 16th century Walford Bridge has stone arches and cutwaters with a brick



Figure 50: Walford Bridge, built in the early 16th century

parapet capped with stone coping (Figure 50). Nevertheless, the majority of medieval buildings were likely to have been timber framed or cob built. St Joseph's on King Street is an isolated example of a timber framed medieval town house (Figure 49), although there are a significant number of 17th century timber framed buildings that may conceivably be of earlier origin. Locally made brick became a universal building material during the 19th century with imported slate for roofing. Limestone dressings remained important on larger buildings. The area is also characterised by intact architectural detail, notably iron railings. Some windows retain casements and glazing bars. Decorative mouldings, porches and 19th century shop windows are also a feature.

Key Buildings

Ecclesiastical: Minster Church of St Cuthburga, Church House, Wimborne Minster United Reformed Church, rear of 88 West Borough (former Baptist Chapel).

16th -17th century timber framed houses: St Josephs; The Priest's House; 14 High Street; 7 Cook Row; 6, 28 and 28a West Street; 26, 39, 41 and 43 West Borough; 6, 18 and 19 East Borough.

18th and 19th century large villas and town houses: Dean's Court; Allendale House; 4 and 9 East Borough; 1 West Borough; 1 High Street; 4-5, 7-12 and 16-17 The Square.

Industrial Buildings: Millbank House, Walford Mill and building adjoining Mill House (Figure 51).

Commercial and Public Buildings: White Hart Inn, King's Head Hotel, Tivoli Theatre, Queen Elizabeth Court.



Figure 51: Walford Mill House and adjoining industrial buildings

**Wimborne Minster Historic Urban Character Area 1
Archaeology**

Archaeological Investigations

Thirty Four archaeological investigations have been undertaken in this character area (Figure 52, Appendix 3, Nos. 1-34).

The earliest archaeological investigation in Wimborne Minster was the observation and recording of a tessellated pavement during renovations in the Minster nave in 1857. It was originally thought to be Roman, although the latest thinking favours it being part of the

original 8th century monastic church of St Cuthburga (RCHM 1975, 80 & 85; Woodward 1983, 57). The Wimborne Historical Society conducted an excavation and survey of earthworks at The Leaze during 1961-4 and demonstrated that this was the site of a medieval suburb abandoned during the 14th century, later AC Archaeology discovered evidence for Late Iron Age and Early Romano-British occupation to the west of the earthworks. During the late 1970's and early 1980's a series

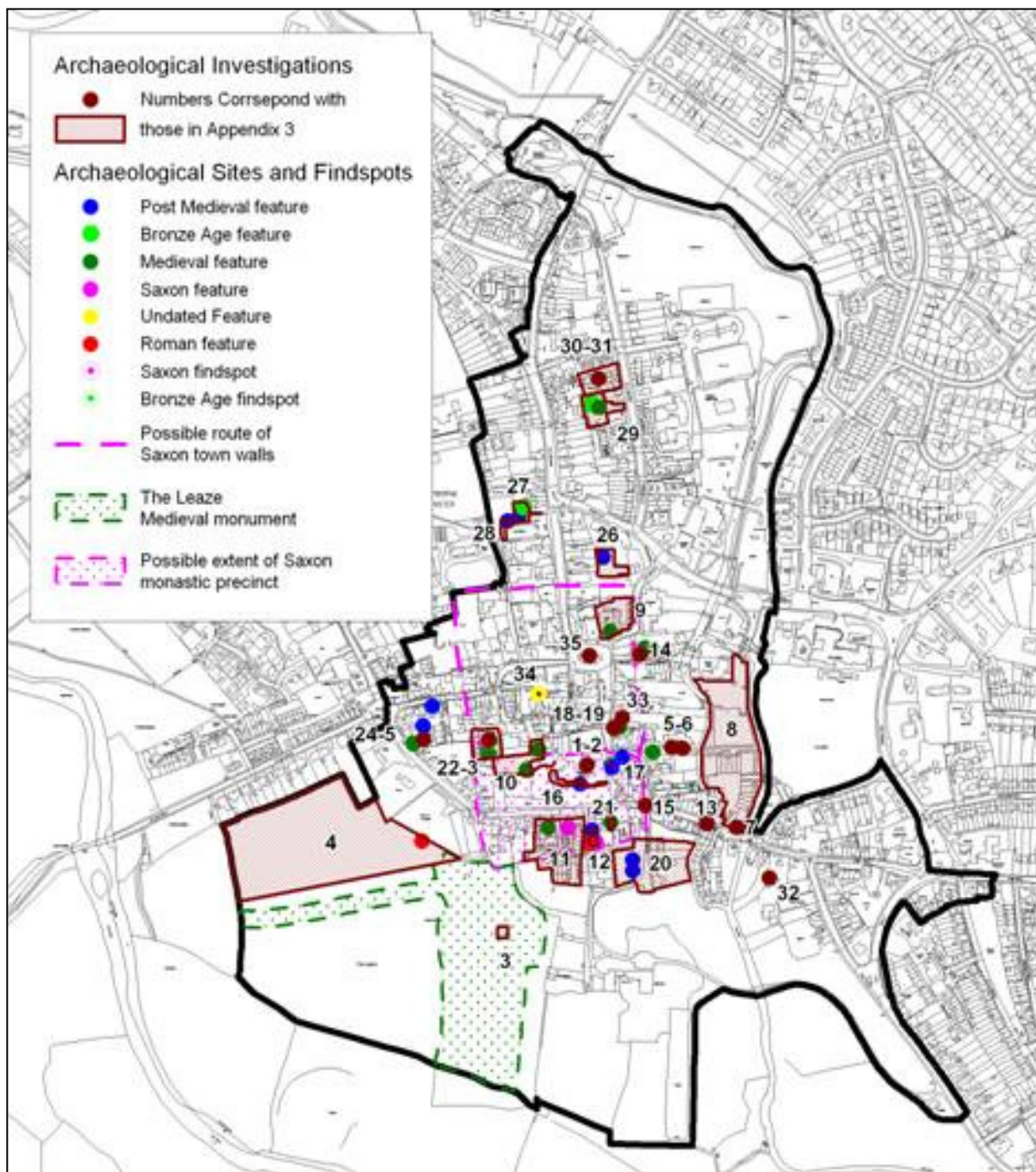


Figure 52: Archaeology of Historic Urban Character Area 1

of archaeological investigations were conducted in the historic town centre by a number of different fieldworkers under the umbrella of the Dorset Archaeological Committee (Woodward, 1983). These investigations revealed evidence for medieval activity including plot boundaries on land between the Minster and Corn Market, which also revealed medieval structures, pits and a substantial ditch and at the Grammar School site where evidence for medieval pits and early medieval buildings were uncovered. Salvage recording also led to the discovery of a post medieval culvert beneath East Street in 1974. The East Dorset Archaeological Society conducted observations at Mill Lane in 1984 where a medieval plot boundary was revealed, similar work during a sewage repair scheme on King Street in 1992 revealed evidence for the former extent of the Minster graveyard. This was corroborated by later investigations by The Trust for Wessex Archaeology. Archaeological investigations during the early 1990's were still concentrated within the limits of the Saxon town at 29 High Street, Dean's Court Lane, the rear of 5 King Street and the former model town site to the NW of the Minster Church. These investigations generally produced evidence for medieval activity in the form of pits, post-holes and ditches.

Following the introduction of PPG16 in 1991, archaeological investigations began to be undertaken around the fringes of the medieval town at the West Street/King Street, former burgage plots at 24 and 25-7 West Borough and at the Tivoli Theatre, East Borough and the Post Office site on East Street. These generally produced evidence for low level medieval activity and post medieval structures. There have also been recent investigations within the heart of the Saxon Town, including a watching brief at The Priests House in 2002. The most recent excavations have been at 6 Church Street and The Square during 2009, in where an undated gully and the possible site of St Peter's chapel and graveyard were revealed.

Archaeological Character

The general sub surface archaeological character of the area has so far produced very little evidence for prehistoric activity. There is a scatter of worked flint from various sites in the town centre lying along the clay ridge between the rivers Stour and Allen. There is a single site at The Leaze where more substantial Late Iron Age or Early Romano-British features have been recorded, including linear features and a pit. This site faces south across the Stour towards the known Roman settlement at Lake Farm. The only other suggestion of Roman activity within the

site of the later town comes from the tessellated pavement discovered beneath the nave of the Minster Church, although latest thinking would date this pavement to the 8th century. Isolated tesserae have also been recovered during recent investigations at The Square. These were associated with a wall interpreted as the east end of the chancel of St Peter's Chapel. It is not clear whether they indicate the presence of a Roman building or an earlier Saxon church on the site of St Peter's (Ladle 2010). Further archaeological evidence for the form of the Saxon town is limited. Evidence for a substantial timber building was excavated on the site of Queen Elizabeth's Grammar School on the south side of King Street. This remains undated, although it was stratigraphically earlier than the earliest medieval features on the site. Isolated Saxon pottery was also found at the former model town site to the NW of the Minster Church. Both of these sites lie within or immediately outside the suggested Saxon monastic precinct.

Archaeological evidence for the medieval town is more substantial and falls into three main categories. Very well preserved evidence for a deserted medieval suburb has been excavated at The Leaze. Secondly, evidence for the former extent of the Minster graveyard has been revealed through a series of investigations. Importantly, the distribution of burials shows that the churchyard formerly extended under Church House, as far south as King Street, but was separated from Corn Market by a substantial ditch that was filled in during the 17th century. The third category of medieval archaeological deposits comprises pits and plot boundaries at the rear of houses throughout the medieval town. Evidence for post medieval activity is again more substantial and comprises remains of brick buildings, tiled ovens, and industrial activity such as quarrying and lime burning.

Figure 53 depicts Historic boundaries visible on 18th and 19th century maps. The putative town walls and Saxon monastery precinct boundaries are shown. Burgage style plots visible on 18th and early 19th century maps are presumed to be of medieval origin. Plots in the Eastbrook suburb are visible on the Tithe map but may be of earlier, medieval origin.

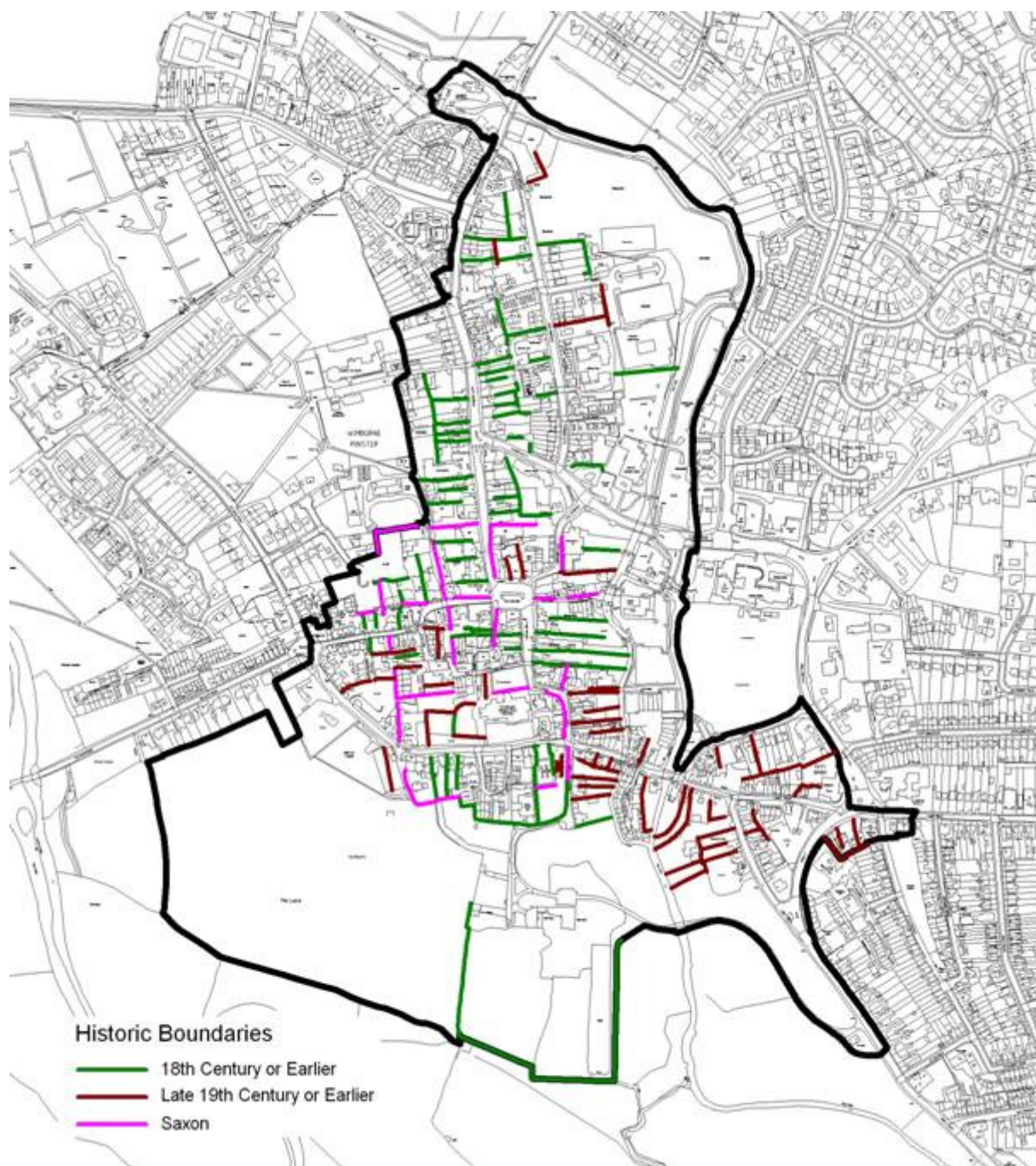


Figure 53: Historic Boundaries within Historic Urban Character Area 1

Wimborne Minster Historic Urban Character Area 1 Designations

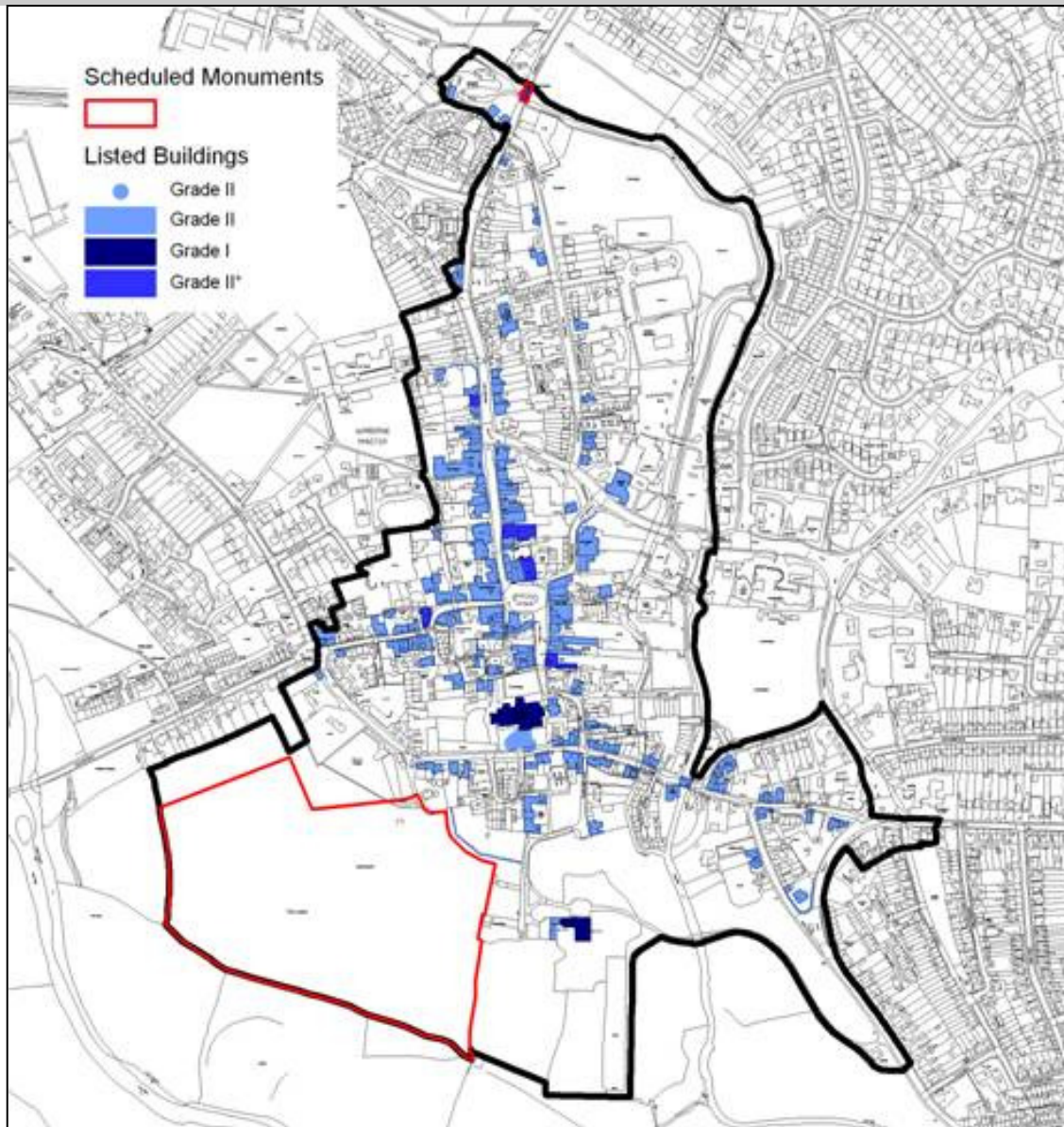


Figure 54: Listed Buildings and Scheduled Monuments in Historic Urban Character Area 1

Listed Buildings

There are 160 Listed Building designations in the Character Area, two of which are Grade I (The Minster Church of St Cuthburga and Dean's Court). Six are grade II* listed (Walford Bridge, The Priest's House Museum, numbers 10 and 43 West Borough, Barclay's Bank on The Square and the former Wimborne Book Shop at 26 West Street). The remainder are Grade II. A grade II listed building at 1 Grammar School Lane was demolished during the early 1980's to make way for a modern housing development.

Conservation Areas

The majority of this Character Area lies within the Wimborne Minster Conservation Area. The

east side of East Borough, Allenbourne School, north of the Allendale Centre, and Queensmead car park, forms the major exclusion. St Catherine's Court and the northern part of Westfield Close car park also lie outside the Conservation Area (Figure 54).

Registered Historic Parks and Gardens

There are no Registered Parks and Gardens within the Character Area.

Scheduled Monuments

Two Scheduled Monuments lie within the character area; Walford Bridge (SM Dorset No. 142); and the medieval site at The Leaze (SM Dorset No. 678).

Wimborne Minster Historic Urban Character Area 1 Evaluation

Strength of Historic Character

The strength of character of this area is judged to be **strong**, being a combination of the significant historical background and time depth, the positive contribution made by a very high number of historic buildings, its topographic location between the Rivers Stour and Allen, and the rich archaeological record.

Approximately 65% of the buildings within the character area date from the late 19th century or earlier. The area also contains several upstanding medieval structures, including one (The Minster Church) which retains elements from before the Norman Conquest. The relatively large number of 16th and 17th timber framed buildings which, coupled with important groups of Georgian brick houses, forms a significant aspect of the historic character. Furthermore, the area displays good survival of the Saxon town plan, modified during the medieval period, as well as medieval burgage plot boundaries.

Sensitivity to Large Scale Development

The area has a **high** sensitivity to major change. The historic town centre has a tightly packed settlement pattern arranged in small blocks defined by an irregular grid of narrow lanes. The course of these lanes and plots is a function of a complex historical development spanning the late prehistoric, Saxon and medieval periods. Large scale development has the potential to disrupt and overshadow this definitive element of the town's historic character. To date development has largely been on a small scale within the pre-existing street pattern, or within former open spaces alongside the River Allen. Even then the medieval aspect of the town; sitting between the flood plains of two rivers has been detrimentally

affected.

Archaeological Potential

The archaeological potential of this area is judged to be **high**. It forms the primary settlement component of Wimborne Minster. The relatively low level of modern development means that there is very high potential for important and informative remains of the Saxon town and monastery to remain intact. Although we can speculate that the current layout of the town reflects its Saxon origins, very little secure dating evidence has been recovered to confirm this theory. The investigations conducted to date suggest that the highest potential for intact remains of Saxon Wimborne Minster lie within the vicinity of the Minster Church, the Corn Market and on the south side of King Street.

Significant evidence for medieval activity in the form of pits and plot boundaries has excavated from the entire area of the Saxon town, suggesting that this was the most economically active part of the town at that time.

Nevertheless, there is further potential for medieval evidence from the West Borough, West Street and East Brook areas. Some late medieval buildings and outbuildings have survived, modified in the post-medieval period, and remain in use today. There is therefore potential for detailed information on the survival of earlier structures hidden within later buildings. Evidence for Post Medieval activity has been unearthed in the vast majority of archaeological investigations undertaken within this character area.

This area has the potential to provide information which would contribute to Research Questions 1, 4-15, 17-25 and 27-30 (Part 7).

Key Characteristics

- Saxon Monastery and medieval Minster
- Late Saxon walled Town
- Medieval planned suburbs
- Deserted medieval suburb at The Leaze
- High proportion of 16th-18th century historic buildings
- Large Villas at Dean's Court and Allendale
- Well preserved Industrial buildings at Town Mill