

# Blandford Historic Urban Character Area 1

## The Medieval Town

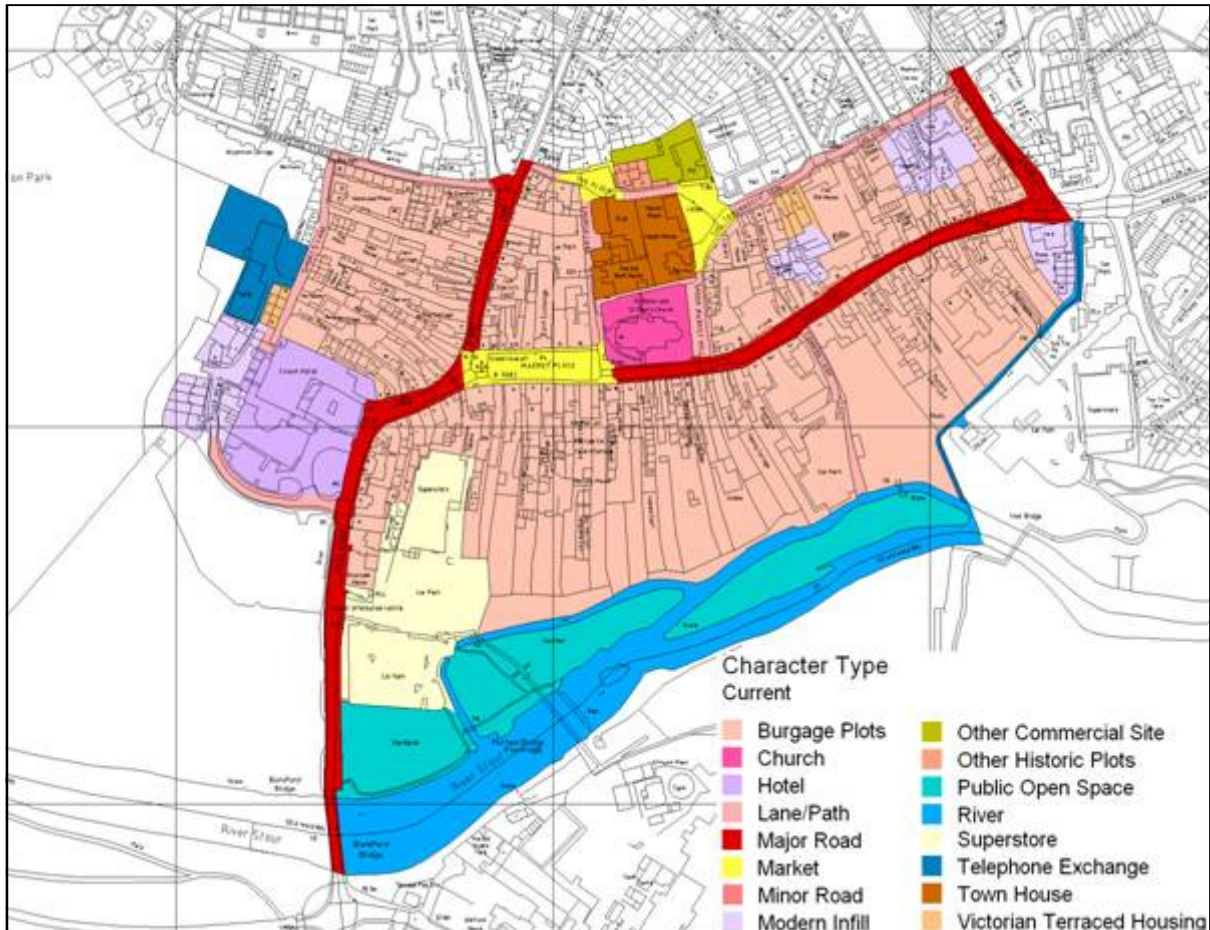


Figure 45: Map of Historic Urban Character Area 1, showing current historic urban character type.



Figure 46: View of the Market Place showing The Town Hall and Parish Church.



Figure 47: View north along Sheep Market Hill.

## Blandford Forum Historic Urban Character Area 1 Structure of Character Area

### **Overview**

This area represents the area of the medieval town and modern commercial centre of Blandford. It is defined primarily by its historic dimension, particularly the survival of a large number of burgage plot boundaries. The southern boundary is, for the most part, taken as the River Stour.

### **Topography and Geology**

This area lies on the lower northern slopes and floodplain of the River Stour. The ground rises northwards, gently at first, from about 32m above OD at the river to 34m at the market square, then more steeply. This area lies on the chalk with alluvium along the southern margins.

### **Urban Structure**

The urban structure of this area essentially comprises a T-shape of major roads with West Street crossing the river and East Street running parallel to the River Stour. The streets are sinuous and West Street has a distinct dog-leg. The rectangular market place is at the junction of these roads. Behind the main roads are back lanes running parallel to the north and west with some small lanes linking the two.

The plots off the main roads are generally regular long narrow burgage plots, with very few wider plots along the frontages, most notably, the parish church and the Crown Hotel. The regularity of the settlement pattern breaks down in the area around The Plocks and Sheep Market Hill, where there are small market places and larger house plots. There is some amalgamation of burgage plots behind the street frontages.

### **Present Character**

Figure 45 shows the present day historic urban character types. Most of the area comprises Burgage Plots. There are three Markets and the Church adjacent. To the north is a block of



Figure 48: View west of Blandford Bridge

Town Houses. There is a large area of Superstore and Hotel and the southern end is formed by the River and Public Open Space. Other minor character types include Other Historic Plots, Victorian Terraced Housing, Telephone Exchange and Modern Infill.

### **Time Depth**

This area represents the primary historic component of the town. The layout suggests that the church, market square and burgage plots along East Street were planned and laid out in a single event, perhaps in the early 12<sup>th</sup> century. Blandford Bridge is first recorded in the 13th century and the current line of West Street and the associated burgage plots along on its east side is probably of a similar date. The burgage plots on the west side of Salisbury Street are probably later medieval in origin. The town houses are 18th century, fitted into the essentially medieval plot layout.

### **Settlement Pattern and Streetscape**

The settlement pattern is primarily one of high density housing in a regular narrow plot layout along the major streets. The street frontages are almost completely built up with the houses set along the street frontages. There are a number of narrow access routes into the spaces behind the frontages. The streets remain relatively narrow and curving, but open up into the market square and adjacent churchyard. The carefully designed Georgian streetscape provides an architectural focus to the area of the market place with its more imposing groups of buildings. Salisbury Street is narrower and more enclosed. The street frontages of The Plocks and Sheep Market Hill include several detached Georgian town houses. In general modern infill lies hidden behind the Georgian façade and many modern shopping arcades behind East Street respect the former burgage boundaries.



Figure 49: The Plocks

## Blandford Forum Historic Urban Character Area 1

### Built Character

#### **Building types**

The historic centre of Blandford has been described as having one of the most satisfying Georgian ensembles anywhere in England (Newman and Pevsner 1972, 95). The most prominent group of Georgian buildings are arranged around the market square and include the large church of St Peter and Paul on the east side of the square. It has a high west tower topped by a cupola rather than the intended spire. The chancel was extended in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century and has a circular apse on its east side. A fire monument was constructed in front of the church adjacent to the market square by John Bastard to mark the completion of his works of reconstruction and to provide a water supply for the town. It has Doric columns of Portland Stone topped by an entablature and triangular pediment. The triangular pediment is also a feature of The Town Hall, re-built centrally within the north façade of the market square. The pediment tops three arched bays of suitable municipal design. The remainder of the buildings around the square are of three storeys and of four or five bays in width. The Red Lion Inn has a central carriage entrance (Figure 51). The Old House on The Close is the only surviving 17<sup>th</sup> century building in the character area. It is a large detached house with a hipped roof but of a slightly asymmetrical design; with an off centre porch and attic dormer. The Crown Hotel (Figure 52) on West Street was rebuilt in the neo-Georgian style in 1937-8 (Newman & Pevsner 1972, 95-8).

#### **Building Materials**

The majority of the Georgian buildings in Blandford are of brick, with some Portland stone dressings on prominent buildings. The parish church is the only Georgian building built entirely from stone. It has Greensand walls with Portland Stone dressings. All of the private buildings around the market square are brick built but with some decorative detail achieved through walls of vitrified bricks laid as headers and dressings of rich crimson brick. Each window head has a white keystone at its centre. Blue vitrified brick dressings are a feature of properties on Salisbury Street and Lime Tree House on Church Lane has purple brick walls with red brick dressings. Coupar House also has a polychromic facade of purple and red bricks as well as Portland Stone pilasters.

#### **Key Buildings**

*Pre fire buildings:* The Old House; numbers 7-17 (odd), 21-31 (odd), 35-39 odd) and 18-26 (even) East Street



Figure 50: The Old Bank House, Church Lane.



Figure 51: The former Red Lion Inn, Market Place.



Figure 52: The Crown Hotel, West Street.

*Post Fire Public Buildings:* Parish Church of St Peter and Paul; Town Hall; The Fire Monument; Old Almshouse entrance, Church Lane

*Post-fire town Houses and commercial premises:* The Red Lion Inn, 75 East Street, 26 Market Place, The Old Greyhound Inn, Lime Tree House, Coupar House, Old Bank House

*19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century buildings:* The Crown Hotel

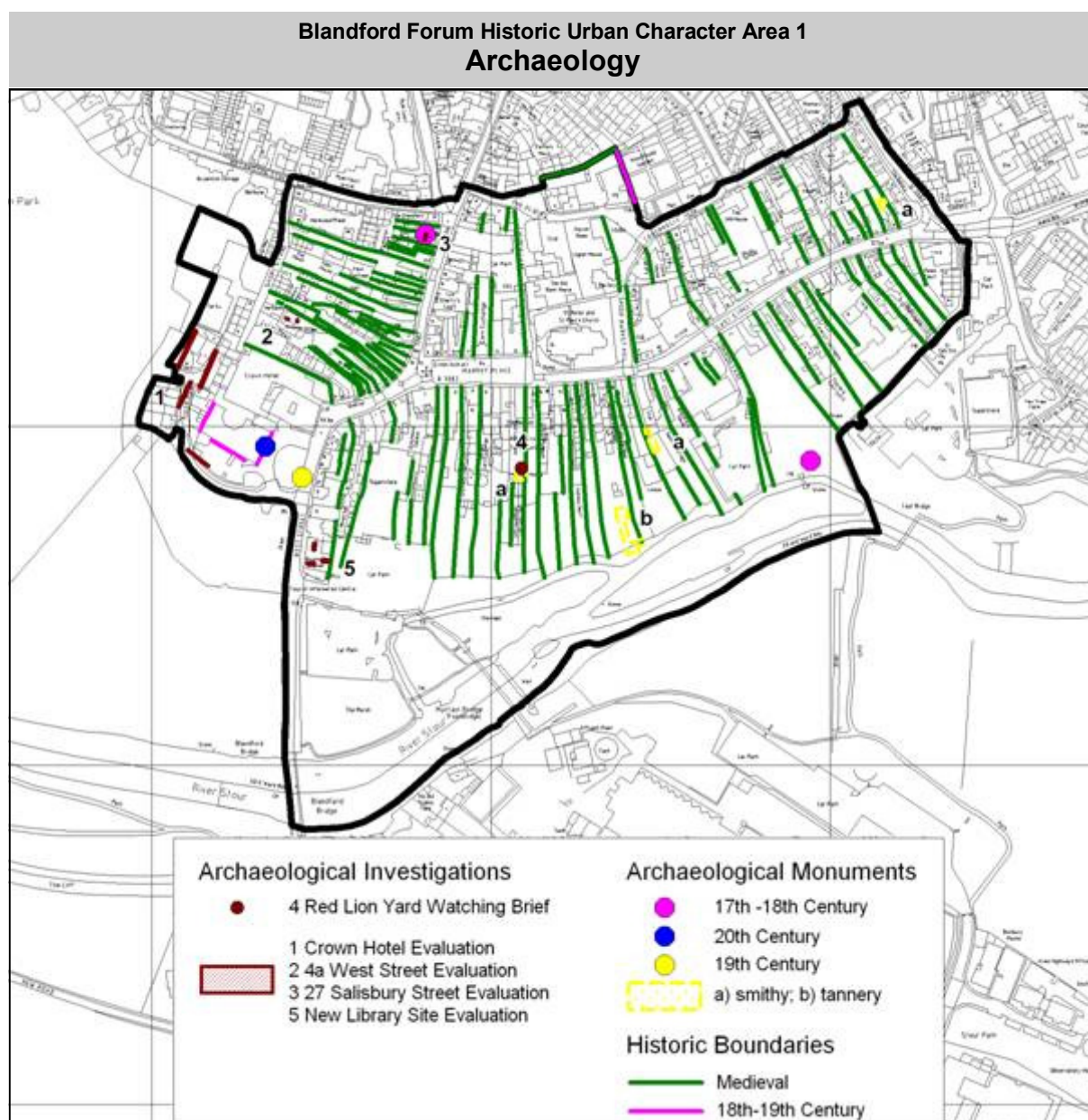


Figure 53: Archaeology of Historic Urban Character Area 1.

### Archaeological Investigations

Five archaeological investigations have been undertaken in this character area (Figure 53; Appendix 3, Nos. 1-5). They comprised four evaluations on the periphery of the medieval core and a watching brief.

In general, the investigations in Blandford town centre have only produced evidence for post-medieval activity. The watching brief in the Red Lion Yard revealed 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century yard surfaces, but medieval deposits may be preserved beneath these. The evaluation of the proposed new library site revealed nothing other than a 17<sup>th</sup> century or later cultivation soil.

### Archaeological Character

The results of the small number of

archaeological investigations probably do not give a good indication of the archaeological character of the core of the medieval town. It is likely that the character of the sub-surface archaeology would include a series of medieval and post-medieval rubbish pits, boundary ditches and possibly evidence for earlier structures and small-scale industrial and craft activity. A number of medieval coins, dating from the late 11<sup>th</sup> century onwards, have been recorded for Blandford, although their exact provenance is unknown.

There has been little evidence for prehistoric activity recovered to date. Nevertheless, it is clear from a landscape analysis of the region that an extensive rectilinear field system existed at Blandford, potentially from the Bronze Age

through to the post-medieval period (Dodd 1994). Remains of this field system may survive in the town and the location at a crossing point of the river may suggest that other evidence for prehistoric activity could survive in this area. There is no evidence for the Romano-British occupation, though seven iron and bronze figures, thought to be Romano-British votive objects, have been found at Blandford, although the exact circumstances of their discovery are unknown (Green 1976, 189).

Nineteenth century maps of Blandford indicate that industrial activity was still prevalent within the rear of burgage plots at that time. Figure 53

shows the location of former 19<sup>th</sup> century smithies and a tannery within the burgage plots. This reflects continuity of the medieval situation and it might be expected that archaeological deposits relating to all periods be preserved here. Again evidence for post-medieval sub-surface archaeological deposits is rare within Blandford town centre, generally limited to 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century pits and cultivation soils.

Figure 53 also depicts Historic boundaries visible on 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century maps. The burgage plots are presumed to be of medieval origin.

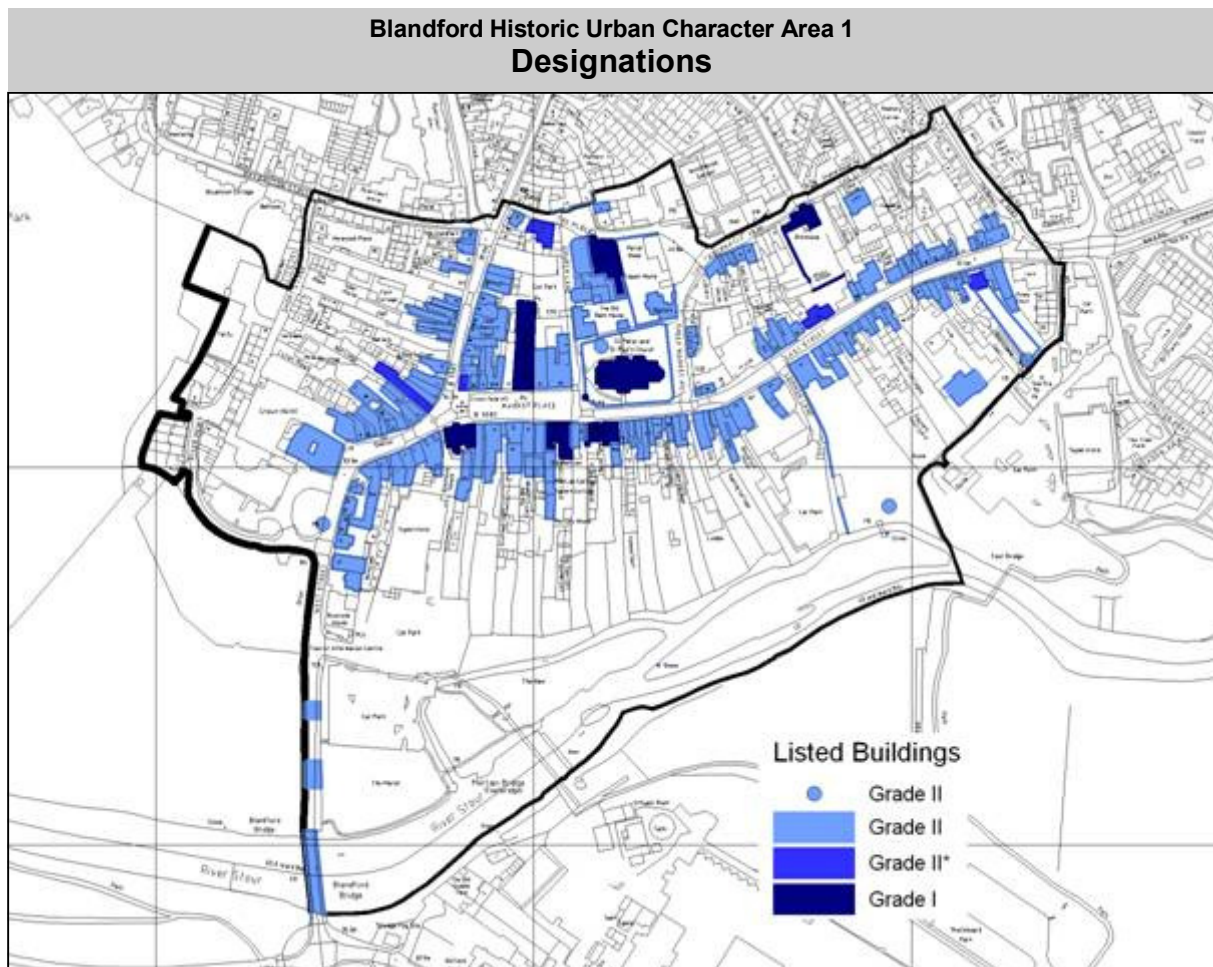


Figure 54: Listed Buildings Historic Urban Character Area 1.

### **Listed Buildings**

There are 127 Listed Building designations in the Character Area, eight Grade I, five Grade II\* and the remainder are Grade II listed (Figure 54).

### **Conservation Areas**

All of this Character Area lies within Blandford Forum Conservation Area (Figure 44).

### **Registered Historic Parks and Gardens**

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

### **Scheduled Monuments**

There are no Scheduled Monuments within the Character Area.

## Blandford 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, the intact medieval town plan and its topographic location within a bend in the River Stour. Approximately 76% of the buildings within the character area date from the 18<sup>th</sup> century or earlier. This represents one of the highest concentrations of historic buildings in any of the Dorset towns. Perhaps more important however, is the entire ensemble of Georgian brick architecture; the whole being greater than its individual components and a nationally important example of a Georgian country town.

### ***Sensitivity to Large Scale Development***

The area has a **high** sensitivity to major change. The medieval town layout and burgage plots provide a worthy backdrop upon which the Georgian town sits. The layout essentially dates from the original foundation of the town during the early 12<sup>th</sup> century and as such is a rare example of an intact planned medieval market town. The burgage plots are extremely vulnerable to large scale development and a few have already been lost to Superstore development and modern housing. More survive however, with narrow shopping lanes utilising historic outbuildings and fitted within medieval burgage plot boundaries. Large scale development has the potential to disrupt and overshadow this definitive element of the town's historic character. Large scale modern development also has the potential to disrupt

the harmonious Georgian facades and roof lines which extend beyond the confines of the medieval town.

### ***Archaeological Potential***

The archaeological potential of this area is judged to be **high**. It forms the primary settlement component of Blandford Forum. The relatively low level of modern development within the medieval core means that there is very high potential for important and informative remains of the medieval town and its economy to remain intact. Although we can speculate that the current layout of the town reflects its Medieval 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 Medieval Blandford lie within the rear of burgage plots fronting on to East Street, Market Place and West Street.

Furthermore, Blandford lies on well drained gently sloping land with a south westerly aspect close to a pre-existing crossing of the River Stour. The area is well placed to exploit a variety of resources and likely to have been a preferred site for at least a small settlement during the late prehistoric and Romano-British periods. The potential for remains dating to this period can be demonstrated through the high level of Iron Age and Roman activity in the surrounding area.

This area has the potential to provide information which would contribute to Research Questions 1-2, 4-6, 8-11, 13-16, 19-21 and 23-26 (Part 7).

### **Key Characteristics**

- Planned medieval market town
- Intact medieval burgage plots
- Nationally important Georgian country town
- Very high density of historic buildings