

Christchurch Historic Urban Character Area 1

Burh

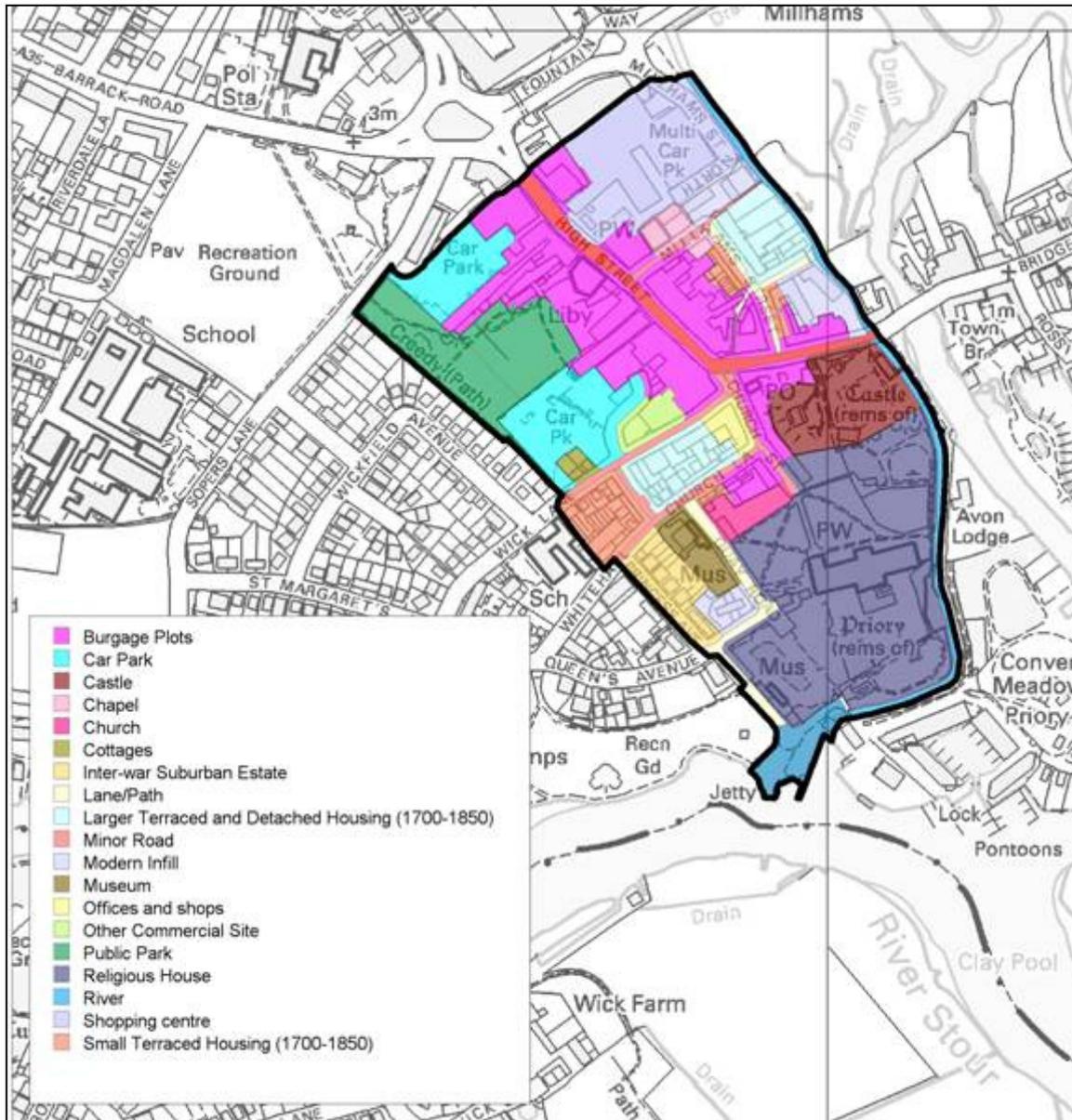


Figure 60: Map of Historic Urban Character Area 1, showing current historic urban character type.



Figure 61: The Constable's Hall and Priors



Figure 62: Castle Street

Christchurch Historic Urban Character Area 1
Structure of Character Area

Overview

This character area is that part of the historical and commercial core of Christchurch within the area of the burh. It is defined largely by the line of the streets and associated back lanes and also the remnants of the historic properties running back from the street frontages.

Topography and Geology

This area lies on the gravel ridge running ENE-WSW between the rivers Stour and Avon. The ground rises to the north, and to the south drops as the rivers converge to meet Christchurch Harbour.

Urban Structure

The late Saxon street layout comprised a simple spine road (High Street) running along the length of the spur ridge and a second road (approximating to Castle Street) crossing it. The castle may have been planted in the 12th century across the eastern entrance to the town diverting Castle Street slightly to the north. A second gate (Bargate) was located at the northern end of the burh on High Street. Medieval burgage plots on High Street survived into the 1970s but have since been destroyed for development.

Present Character

Figure 60 shows the present day historic urban character types. The main streets are lined with former burgage plots, much disturbed by modern infill at the rear with large open areas of car park and shopping centre. The grounds of the priory precinct include gardens, cemetery, and a car park, as well as partially surviving medieval buildings (the Abbots Lodgings, Place Mill, Priory Gate and sections of precinct wall).

Time Depth

The Priory precinct may represent the original plan component onto which the burh developed. The grounds associated with it are largely coterminous with the original precinct. The main street layout is thought to be part of the original late 9th century Saxon burh. The late Saxon Burh is thought to have been delineated, by the MillStream on the east and south sides and an earthwork bank and series of ditches on the north and west sides. The line of these earthworks is no longer clearly visible on the ground but has been located through archaeological excavation and is also taken as the boundary of the character area.

Settlement Pattern and Streetscape

The burh can be subdivided into two sections; the Priory precinct and castle grounds, and the commercial precinct to the north. The settlement pattern generally comprises high density housing on long narrow, but now somewhat disrupted, plots along both sides of the main streets of High Street, Castle Street and Church Street, resulting in a tight urban grain. There are very few gaps along the frontages and the buildings are generally built directly on the frontage at the rear of the pavements.

There are some open spaces and green spaces, with the grounds of the priory in particular forming a continuous public amenity with the 12th century Castle. The motte and ruined keep sit high above Church and Castle Streets with the bailey, incorporating the Constable's Hall (c. AD1160) stretching to the Mill Stream in the east.

Christchurch Historic Urban Character Area 1

Built Character

Building types

Key to the character of the area is the survival of historic buildings, many of them listed. The magnificent Priory Church of The Holy Trinity dominates the town. The 12th century castle ruins and the listed buildings lining the main streets of Castle Street, High Street and Church Street are also significant.

The Priory Church, reputed to be the longest parish church in England, essentially dates from 12th-16th centuries, with some Saxon fabric in the transepts.

Building Materials

The Priory Church, Castle and Constable's Hall are stone. Elsewhere, the dominant building materials are red brick and stone, and the roofs

predominantly slate. Some buildings are stuccoed, either in whole or in part. The Old Court House, 11 Castle Street, is a 15th-16th century timber framed house. 48 High Street and The Olde Barne, Milhams Street date from the 17th century; 2a and 3 Castle Street and 42-44 High Street comprise buildings with 18th or 19th century facades on earlier fabric.

Key Buildings

Ecclesiastical: Priory Church of The Holy Trinity

Public & Institutional Buildings: Christchurch Library, Old Town Hall, the Red House Museum

Commercial and Industrial Buildings: Ship Inn

Vernacular Buildings: The Old Court House, 48 High Street, 2a and 3 Castle Street, 42-44 High Street.

Christchurch Historic Urban Character Area 1 Archaeology

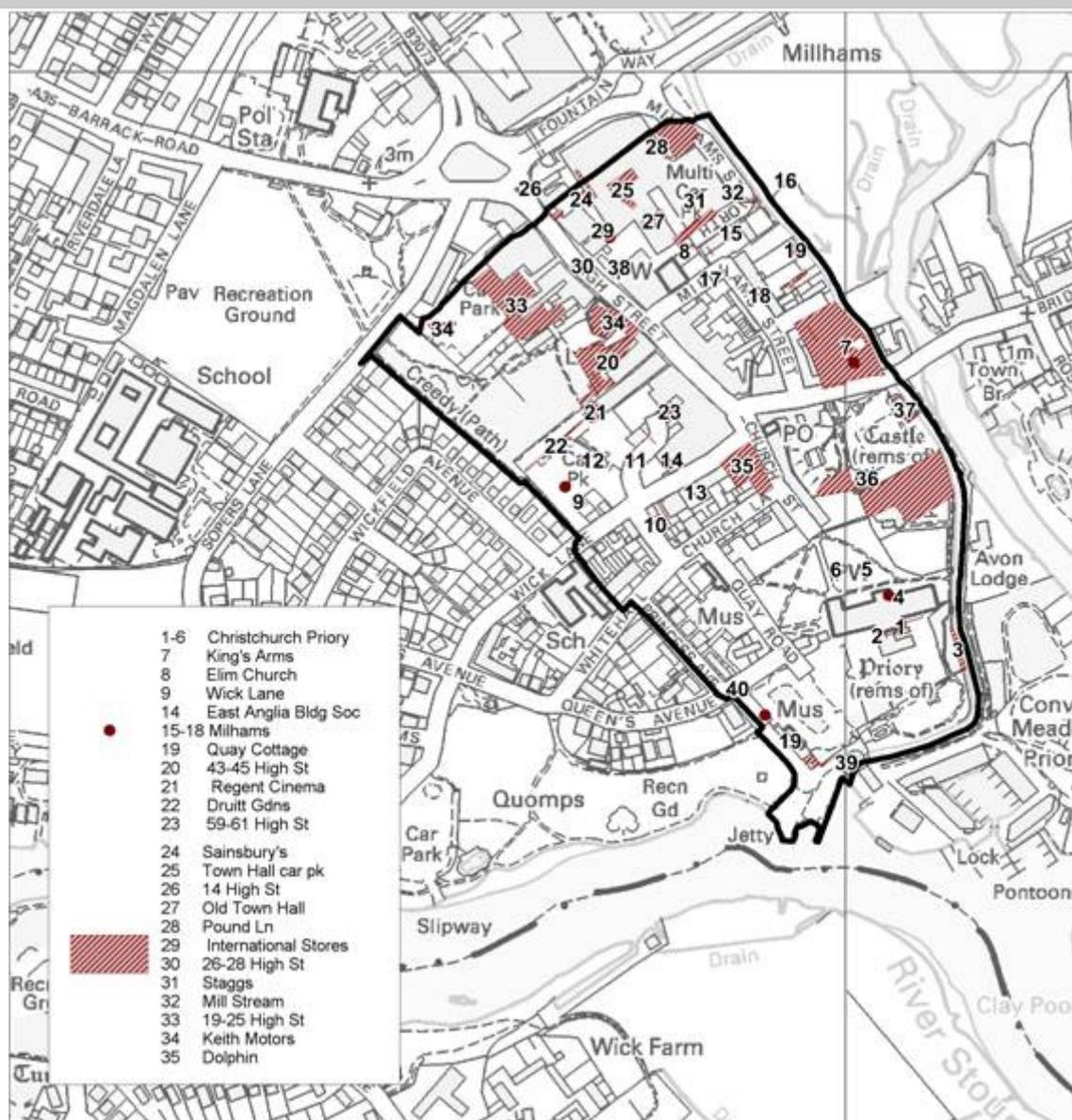


Figure 63: Archaeological features in Historic Urban Character Area 1.

Archaeological Investigations

Seventy eight archaeological investigations have been undertaken in this character area (Appendix 3; figure 63). A concerted campaign of archaeological excavation and research into the origins of the Saxon town was conducted in the 1970s and 1980s. This included trial excavation in the priory precinct; along the line of the northern burh bank; Millhams Street ; The western defences (Druitt Gardens & Trokes Garden); Town Hall Car Park and The Dolphin development; Staggs site and Kieth Motors (Jarvis, 1983). Wessex Archaeology also conducted a number of excavations in the burh between 1981-3 (Davies, 1984).

Archaeological Character

Christchurch is one of the best understood of the Dorset burhs. The line of the northern late Saxon burh bank is well established, although the western return is poorly dated and may be Norman in origin. Saxon structures have been excavated on Church Street and a long sequence of Saxon and medieval features have been excavated on the east side of High Street. Recent development led work has revealed elements of the Saxon fabric of the Priory Church and medieval remains at The Kings Arms, Castle Street.

Christchurch Historic Urban Character Area 1 Designations

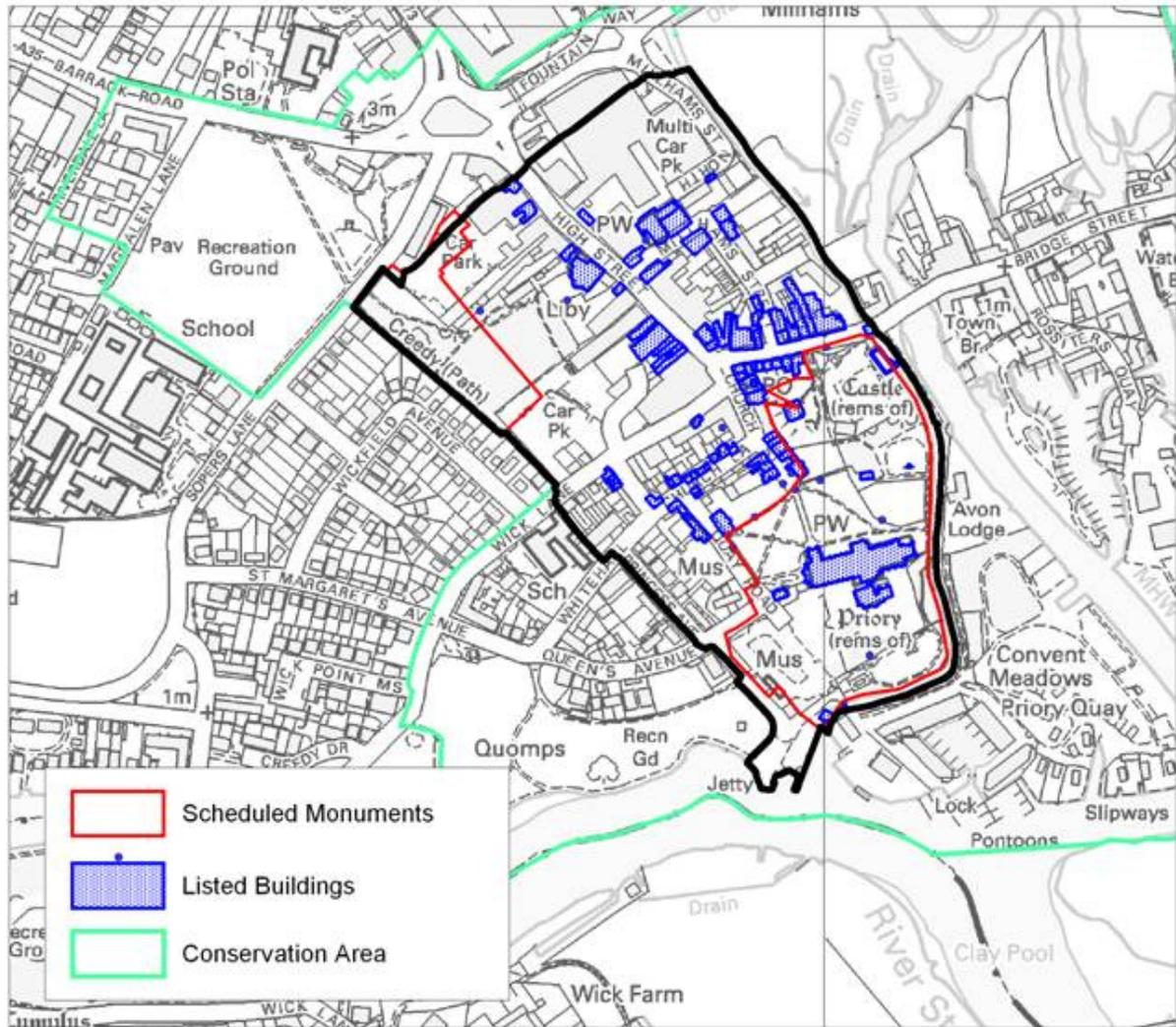


Figure 64: Listed Buildings and other designations in Historic Urban Character Area 1.

Listed Buildings

There are 76 Listed Building designations in the Character Area, of which three are Grade I (The Priory Church, Castle and Constable's Hall) and six are Grade II* (Church Hatch (house, wall, railings, gate), Church Street; Place Mill; Priory Cottage, Quay Road; Red House Museum). The remainder are Grade II.

Conservation Areas

Most of this Character Area lies within the Christchurch Conservation Area (figure 64).

Registered Historic Parks and Gardens

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

Scheduled Monuments

There are 2 Scheduled Monuments in the Character area.

Christchurch Historic Urban Character Area 1 Evaluation

Strength of Historic Character

The strength of character of this area is judged to be **strong**. It has good survival of the principal street layout of the Saxon burh and associated historic plots potentially of Saxon or medieval date. There is a strong contribution from the large number of historic buildings, primarily of late 18th century date. The widespread use of local stone, brick and tile gives a pleasing coherence to the built character. It also includes nationally-significant buildings, particularly the Priory.

Sensitivity to Large Scale Development

The area has a **high** sensitivity to major change, particularly in areas around the Priory, Castle and main street frontages. There are a large number of good quality Georgian houses in a relatively unbroken street frontage fitted within a regular network of narrow burgage plots. Large-scale development that disrupted these plots and the streetscape would have a major impact to the coherence and rhythm of the street frontage and reduce the legibility of the historic property boundary layout.

Archaeological Potential

The archaeological potential of this area is judged to be **high**. The Priory precinct has particularly high archaeological potential, not only for Saxon and medieval monastic remains, but also for a potential Mid-late Saxon settlement and royal residence. The area of the castle has high potential for Saxon and medieval remains, as does the market and south end of High Street. Finally the western defensive line of the burh is not fully understood

and may in fact represent a Norman refinement to a Late Saxon promontory burh.

There is some potential for detailed information on the survival of earlier structures hidden within later buildings, which could contribute to the understanding of the development of houses in Christchurch.

This area has the potential to provide information which would contribute to Research Questions 1- 4, 8-10, 12-14, 17-20 and 22-26 (Part 7).

Key Characteristics

- **Priory and castle precincts**
- **Sub-surface archaeological deposits**
- **High Street, Castle Street and Church Street frontages**