

## **Part 6: Historic Urban Character Appraisal**



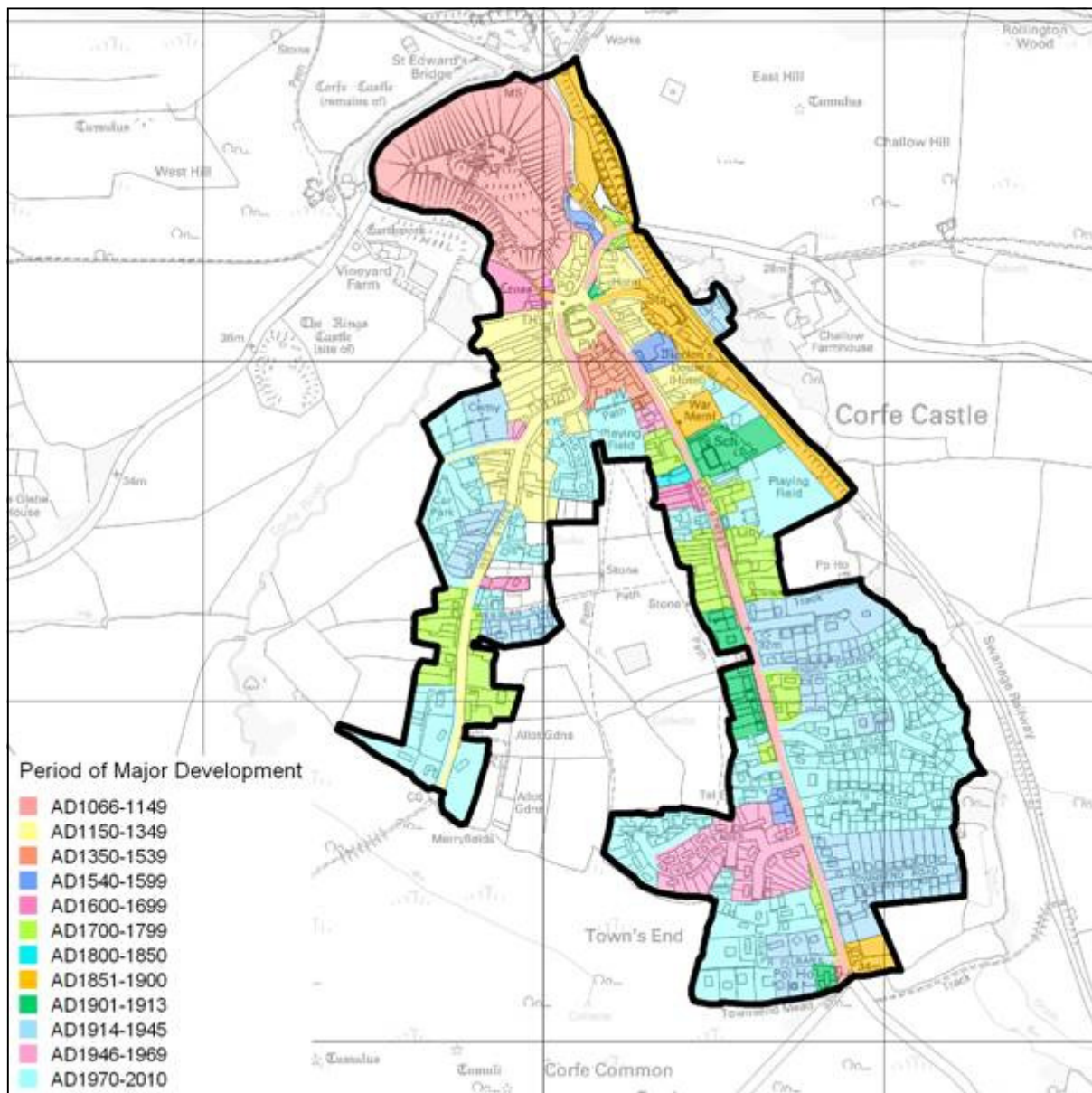


Figure 35: Map showing the major periods of development of Corfe Castle.

## 6.1 The historic urban character of Corfe Castle

The urban character of Corfe Castle, 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 the castle, at a strategic gap in the Purbeck Ridge, has clearly determined the position of the medieval town. The position and aspect of the castle dominates and helps define the character of the town. The highest point of the hill upon which the castle keep and the two inner wards stand is composed of chalk, the outer ward is considerably lower and built on Upper Greensand. A natural gully has formed at the junction of the Greensand and the Wealden Clay, which has been enhanced to form the moat that divides castle from town. The town sits on a raised platform of Wealden Clay standing above the steep valleys of the East West Corfe Rivers flowing on either side. The town has benefited from its location as a communications hub at the heart of the central Purbeck vale.

The plan layout of the present town is no more than an extension of the simple regular layout of the medieval town. The market square was located outside the castle gates and two streets ran southwards from the corners of the square. Each of these streets, East Street and West Street had opposing sets of burgage plots fronting on to a church and possible green immediately south of the square. Both streets continued south and ran into Corfe Common. East Street has formed the main thoroughfare through the town since it was turnpiked in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century, although West Street was the main street prior to that time, leading directly to the early medieval estate centre at Kingston. The historic core of the town survives relatively complete, with a large proportion of historic buildings tightly packed around the market and as ribbon development along East and West Streets. Modern development was heralded by the arrival of the Swanage Branch railway in 1885, truncating the burgage plots on the east side of the town. Eighteenth century municipal development had been around the church and square but late 19<sup>th</sup> century public works tended to line East Street, south of the railway station and included a school, chapels and cemetery. Suburban development largely dates from the period after the First World War with the construction of council housing and suburban villas along

parts of East and West Streets and by inter-war and post-war housing estates arranged around culs-de-sac branching off of the two main streets at the southern end of the town and giving the southern end of East Street in particular a suburban character at odds with the remainder of the town.

The historic buildings form a major element of the historic character of Corfe Castle. There are a good number of 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> century buildings surviving within the town centre, particularly around the Square and along West Street. East Street contains more 18<sup>th</sup> century buildings which may reflect the increased importance of that road following turnpiking. The historic buildings of Corfe are characterised by local Purbeck stone rubble walls topped with stone slate roofs. In general, the skyline is uniformly low, with buildings rarely above two storeys. This adds to the dramatic skyline formed by the juxtaposition of historic town and castle.

Green spaces and trees form only a small component of the urban fabric. In the centre of the town, this is limited to the churchyard. However, beyond the centre there are wide grass verges to both East and West Street with some mature trees and hedges along the south end of West Street and a number of trees in the rear plots behind the street frontage. The largest green space lies in the area between East and West Streets and is the former Middle Hawes medieval open field, now an area of hedged meadowland, with the northern part used as a recreation ground. There is a significant contribution from the high quality surrounding landscape, with the castle hill and the chalk ridge visible from many parts of the town and Corfe Common visible to the south from the southern end.

## 6.2 Historic Urban Character Areas of Corfe Castle

A total of three Historic Urban Character Areas have been defined for Corfe Castle as shown on Figure 36 and listed below. They comprise the Castle and medieval town (Character Area 1), medieval and post-medieval expansion along West Street (Area 2) and 18<sup>th</sup> century and later expansion along East Street (Area 3).

- 1 The Castle and medieval town
- 2 West Street
- 3 East Street

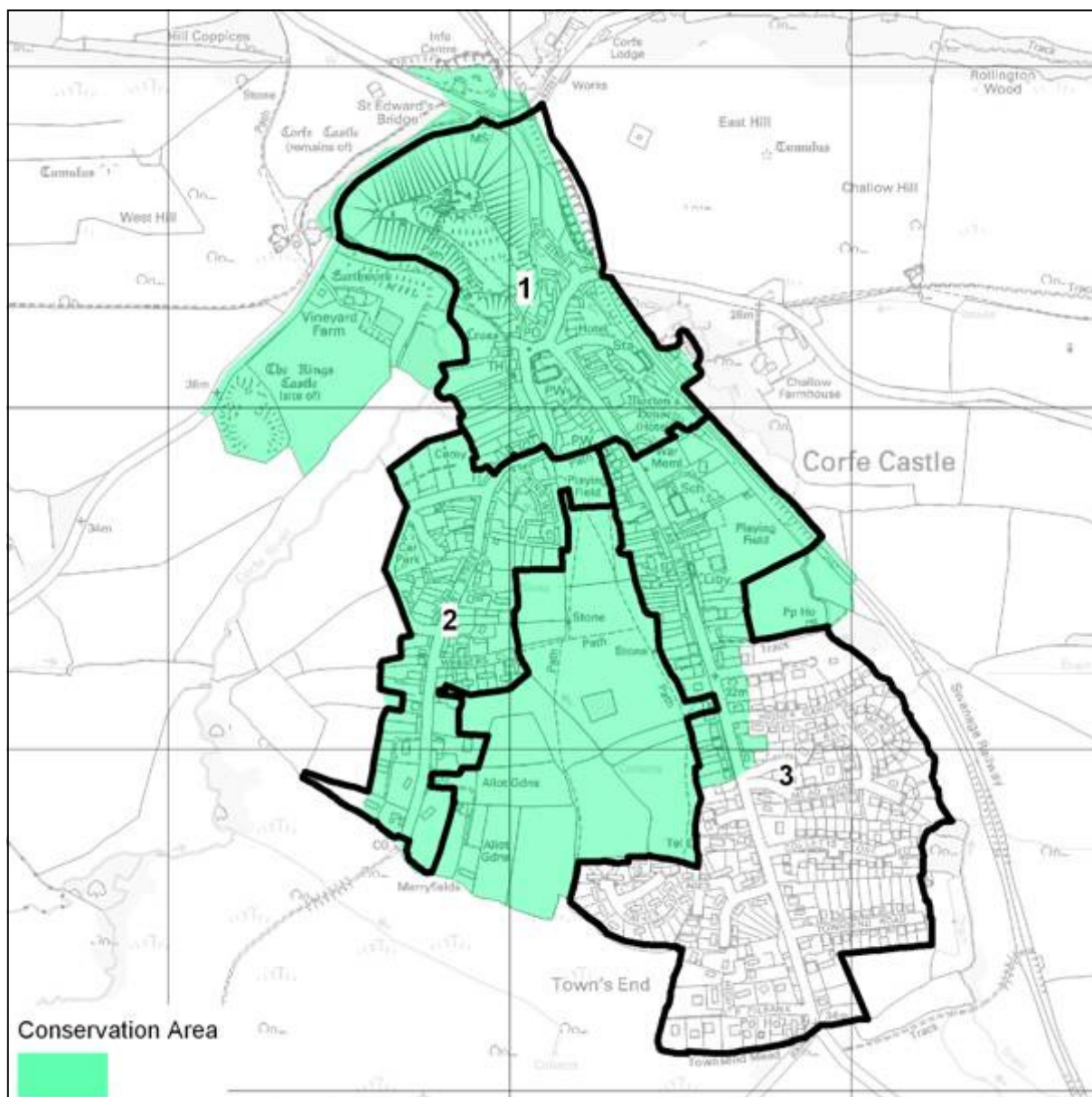


Figure 36: Corfe Castle Historic Urban Character Areas and Conservation Area.