

Sturminster Newton Historic Urban Character Area 2 The Town Centre

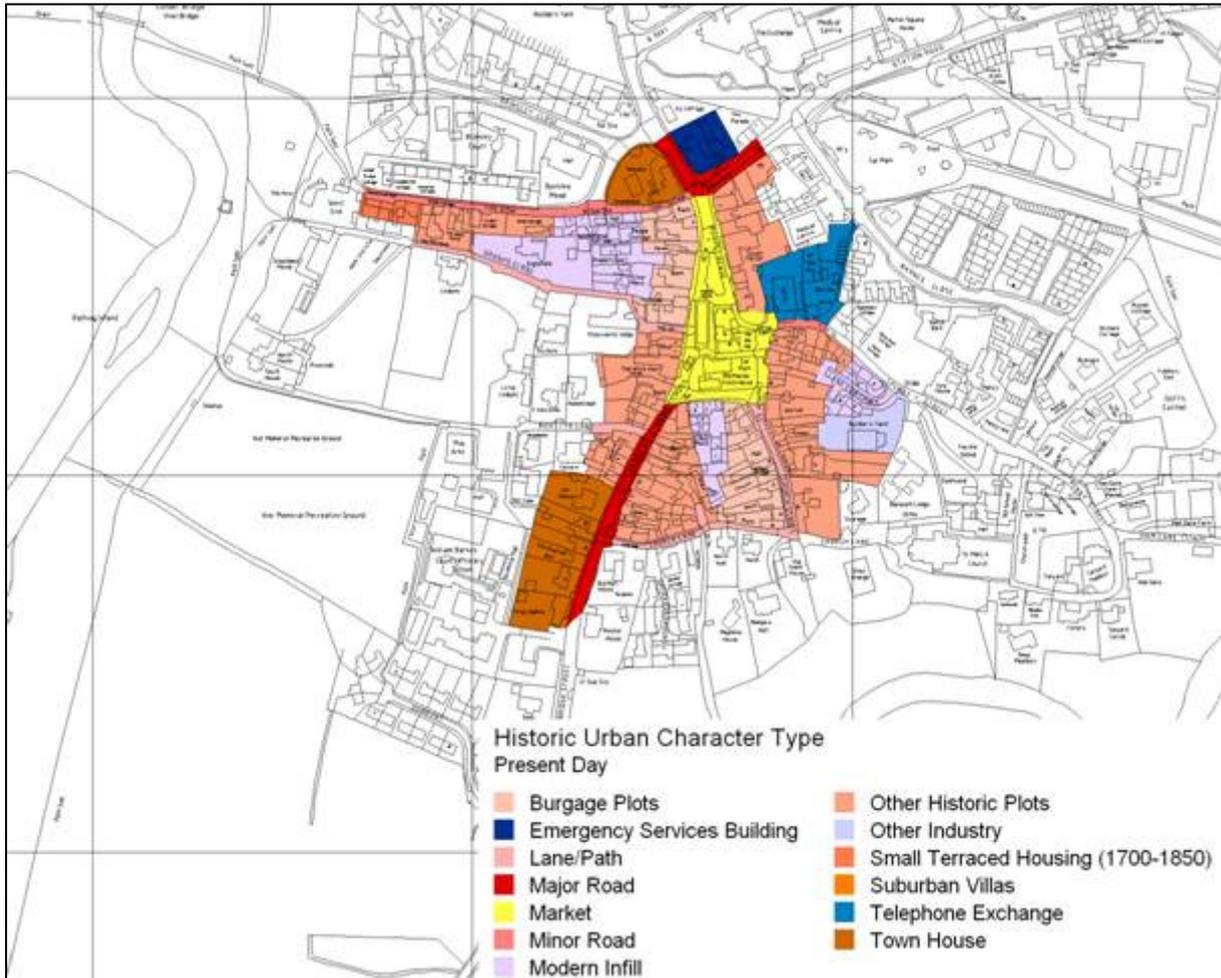


Figure 60: Map of Historic Urban Character Area 2, showing current historic urban character type.



Figure 61: View of historic plots fronting on to the market place.



Figure 62: View south along Church Street.

Sturminster Newton Historic Urban Character Area 2 Structure of Character Area

Overview

This area is the historic commercial core of the town centred on the medieval market square. The character area also incorporates *The Row* on its west side. This street has a tight urban structure on an important early E-W route, although the settlement here may be of post-medieval date. The area as a whole is defined partly by its historic dimension and partly by the tight knit urban settlement pattern which distinguishes it from the area of the minster.

Topography and Geology

Sturminster town centre sits at the southern tip of the N-S aligned limestone ridge. The area of the town is relatively flat but slopes away sharply on the south side towards the River Stour.

Urban Structure

The market place is the focus, set to the east of the major N-S route and a number of minor streets and lanes running off it in other directions. The plots face on to the market place and the surrounding streets and there is some infill of the market place itself. The plots are generally narrow rectangular or rectilinear in shape, but generally irregular in their proportions, though those on the west side of the area are more regular.

Present Character

Figure 60 shows the present day historic urban character types. The area essentially comprises historic plots fronting on to the market place (Figure 61), *The Row*, Church Street (Figure 62) and Church Lane. A variety of urban commercial and public services are represented at the northern end of the town including a police station, library, gas works, doctor's surgery and a community centre. Some large

townhouses survive along Bridge Street and north of the Market Place.

Time Depth

The present town layout focused on the triangular market place essentially dates to the late medieval period, but there are a number of surviving road and plot alignments that appear to have originated in the late Saxon period. The development down the southern part of Bridge Street and to the north of *The Row*/Station Road dates from the 18th and early 19th century. Development behind the market place frontages along Penny Street and Gough's Close date from the late 19th and later 20th century.

Settlement Pattern and Streetscape

The settlement pattern is one of high density housing fronting on to the market place and the streets radiating from it. The tightly packed buildings are generally set directly on the street frontage, with a few exceptions, particularly along Bridge Street. The streets are narrow and slightly curving, generally rising towards the north. There is very little contribution from trees and green spaces in this character area, which has a very hard character, with a great sense of enclosure.



Figure 63: View down into north end of Market Place.



Figure 64: View along Gough's Close towards Market Place.

Sturminster Newton Historic Urban Character Area 2

Built Character

Building types

The buildings are of two main types: mid 18th century and later houses and commercial premises constructed following the 1729 fire; and 16th and 17th century vernacular houses within the side streets surrounding the market. There are also a small number of modern houses infilling some areas behind the market place.

The former group is generally 2 or 2.5 storeys high providing a consistent roof line with dormer windows. Lloyds Bank, a typical Edwardian town building, is a focal point (Figure 65). The Market Square itself includes the 17th century market house, the 15th century market cross and early 20th century cast iron water fountain. Other shops within the square tend to be 18th century but retain important details such as sash and wooden casement windows, a doorway with segmental hood, and a date stone marked '1729' (RCHME 1970, 279).

The second group of buildings is more vernacular in style, closely packed on narrow street frontages. These include a row of 18th-19th century brick cottages and the 17th century vernacular Church Farmhouse with outbuildings on Church Street (Figure 66).

There are a number of small modern infill developments. These are mainly short terraces of two storey houses, generally of a scale and materials that fit with the traditional appearance of this area (Figure 68).

Building Materials

The majority of vernacular buildings are of local Corallian limestones, most particularly Todber Freestone (also known as Marnhull stone). A number of buildings also have Forest Marble plinths. Local red brick, probably from Bagber, is also widely used. Painted rendered façades are common. Slate and plain red clay roof tiles are more common as roofing materials than thatch. The thatched cottages tend to be in the southern part of the town centre (Figure 67).

Key Buildings

Public Buildings: Market House, Market Cross House, Assembly Rooms, Market Cross, water fountain, Wesleyan Methodist Chapel.

Commercial Premises: Lloyds Bank, The Swan Hotel, The White Hart Hotel.

16th -17th century cottages: Church Farmhouse, Carriage Cottage, The Nutshell, The Thatch (all Church Street)

18-19th century Houses: 23-27 Church Street, Myrtle House, The Town House, Worton.



Figure 65: View of Lloyds Bank, Market Place.



Figure 66: View of Church Farmhouse, Church Street.



Figure 67: 23-27 Church Street, a group of late 18th-early 19th century brick and thatched cottages.



Figure 68: Modern Housing development on Penny Street.

Sturminster Newton Historic Urban Character Area 2 Archaeology

Archaeological Investigations

Only one archaeological investigation has been undertaken in this character area (Appendix 3, No. 1; Figure 69). An archaeological evaluation was undertaken in advance of housing development behind Lloyds Bank. No archaeological features and only modern finds were found.

boundaries, post-holes and pits. Potential late Saxon and medieval plot boundaries surviving in the modern townscape have been marked on Figure 69.

Archaeological Character

The limited archaeological investigation gives little detail on the archaeology of this area. The true archaeological character of the area can be expected to feature surviving medieval and post-medieval structures and pits at the rear of the historic plots. Sturminster was a busy market during that time and evidence for commercial and small-scale industry can be expected. There is also the possibility of structural evidence surviving from the late Saxon planned town in the form of plot

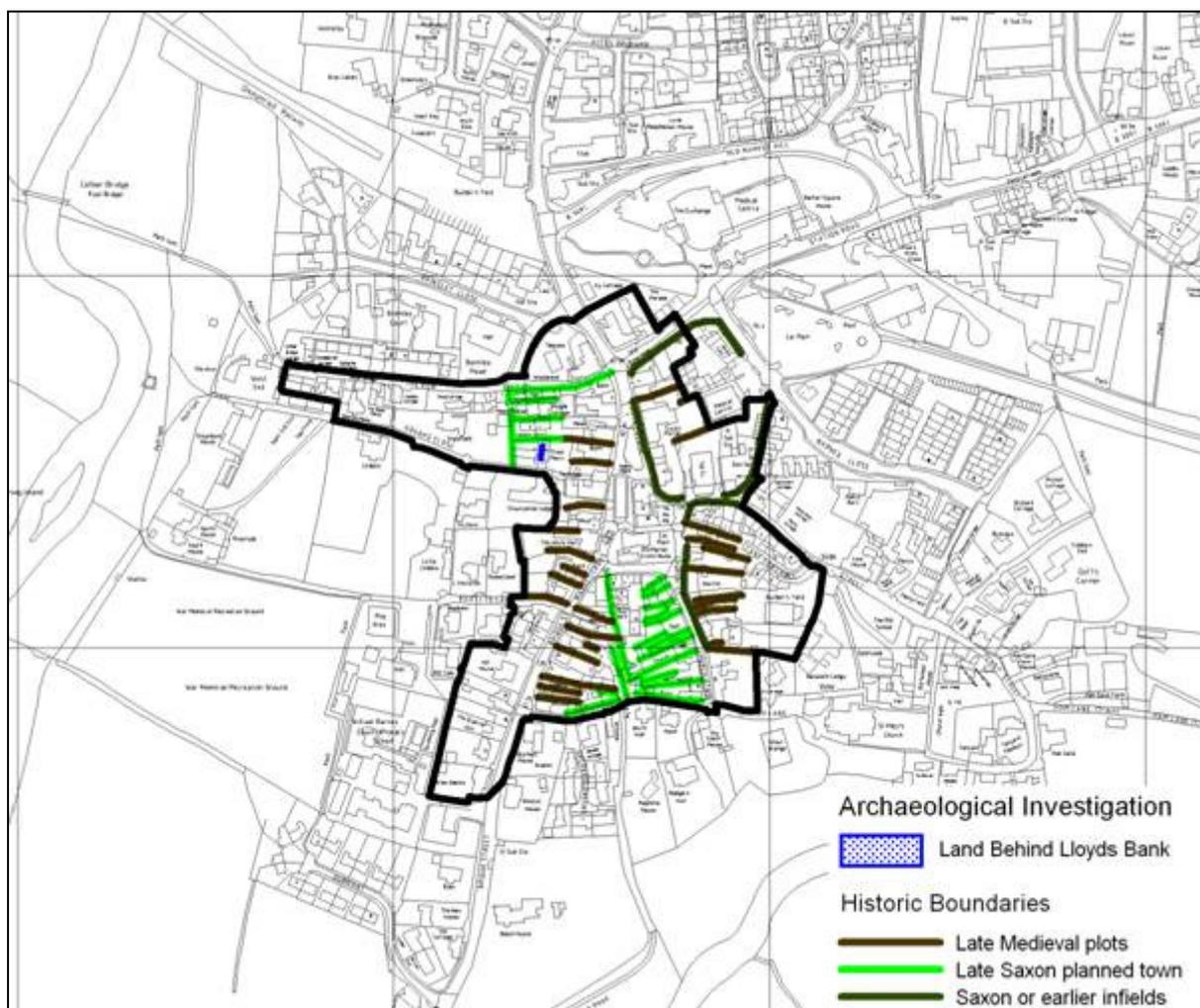


Figure 69: Archaeological investigations and features in Historic Urban Character Area 2.

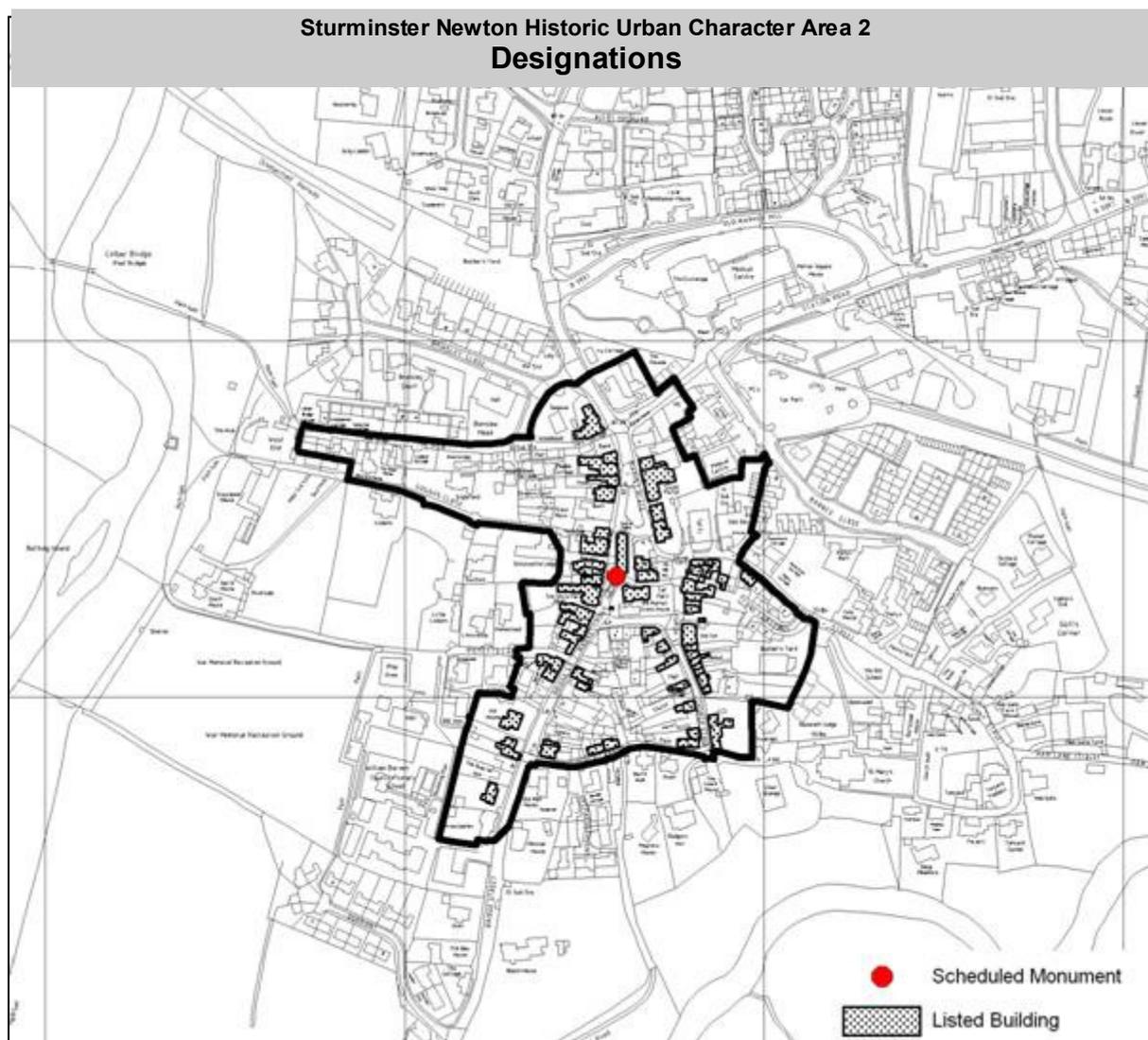


Figure 70: Listed Buildings and other designations in Historic Urban Character Area 2.

Listed Buildings

There are 54 Listed Building designations in the Character Area, all Grade II, including the Market Cross (Figure 70).

Conservation Areas

The entire Character Area lies within the Sturminster Newton Conservation Area (Figure 47).

Registered Historic Parks and Gardens

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

Scheduled Monuments

There is one Scheduled Monument within the Character Area; the Market Cross (SM 27353) which dates from the 15th century and comprises four octagonal stone steps with an octagonal pedestal above (Figures 15 and 18). The shaft and cross have gone (RCHME 1970, 271).

Sturminster Newton Historic Urban Character Area 2 Evaluation

Strength of Historic Character

The strength of character of this area is judged to be **strong**. There is a significant contribution from the 16th, 17th and 18th century historic buildings on the Market Square and Church Street. The street layout essentially dates from the late medieval period with some plot boundaries potentially being late Saxon or earlier in date. The area also benefits from the fact that there has been relatively little modern development either on the street frontages, or in rear plots. Those rear plot developments that have been undertaken are usually on a small scale and/or in a style sympathetic with the historic character of the town.

Sensitivity to Large Scale Development

The area has a **high** sensitivity to major change. Major developments in Sturminster have generally been carried out to the north of the former railway line, allowing the historic town centre to retain its historic character and sense of scale. No buildings are taller than three storeys within the historic town centre. Major development potentially would not be in keeping with the scale and character of the town centre.

Archaeological Potential

The archaeological potential of this area is judged to be **high**. This has been the commercial heart of Sturminster Newton since at least the late medieval period. However, very little is known about medieval Sturminster, partly because it has been a manor of

Glastonbury Abbey since the 10th century which means that documentary information relating to the economy of the town is subsumed within that of the abbey as a whole. This area then has considerable potential to inform us about the medieval economy of the town through archaeological deposits. This evidence is likely to take the form of artefacts relating to specific industries or commercial activities contained within pits, gullies, structures and boundaries within the back plots of properties fronting on to the market square. It is perhaps unfortunate that a number of small infill developments have taken place in recent years within the historic town without archaeological mitigation.

Furthermore, this report has outlined a speculative scheme for the development of the town from the late Saxon period through to the late medieval period. Only archaeological deposits have the potential to support or refute this scheme. Late Saxon material contained within structures, boundaries or pits would lend support to the theory of a late Saxon planned town in the vicinity of Church Street and the market.

There is also potential for recovering archaeological information concerning pre-urban activity, considering the position of the area close to the Minster site.

This area has the potential to provide information which would contribute to Research Questions 1- 3 and 7-21 (Part 7).

Key Characteristics

- Medieval and post-medieval market place
- Site of possible late Saxon planned town
- Medieval and earlier street plan
- Medieval and earlier plot boundaries
- 16th and 17th century vernacular houses
- 18th century town houses