

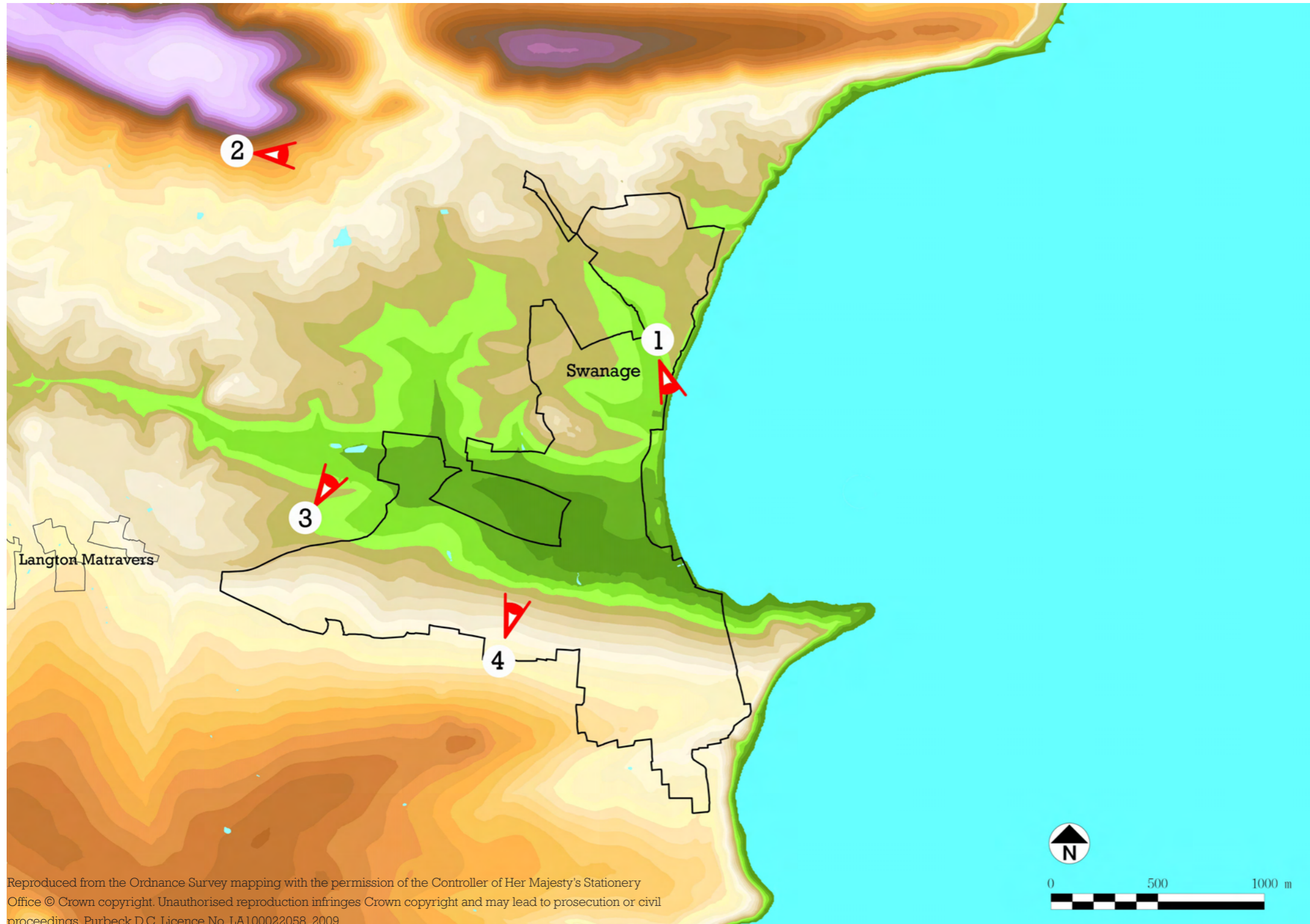


# Swanage

## Town context

### 02.1

#### Geographical context



The geographical context map shows the topography of the landscape around Swanage. The town occupies the majority of low-lying land and has begun to encroach upon the adjacent hillsides. The variable topography and resulting views to and across Swanage are an important element of the town's character.



1. View across Swanage Bay from Highcliffe Road



2. The Purbeck Hills dominate the north side of the valley



3. View across the undulating valley towards the Purbeck Hills.



4. Prominent central hill occupied by Harrow House International College.

2.1.1 The essential geographical features of the Isle of Purbeck are clearly defined and easy to recognise.

2.1.2 Most prominent is a narrow but abrupt chalk ridge, the Purbeck Hills, that run from near Lulworth on the coast to the west, to The Foreland or Old Harry Rocks to the east. To the north of the ridge is a broad, open area of sandy soils, often unimproved heathland or conifer plantation, that slopes gently towards Poole Harbour. The southern coast of Purbeck is, for the most part, defined by a broad, exposed limestone upland on which the villages of Kingston, Worth Matravers and Langton Matravers are situated. Located between the chalk and limestone uplands is a low-lying clay vale that drains eastwards towards the coast at Swanage Bay. The bay is defined by prominent headlands to north and south between which is a crescent of sandy beach, beyond which the town is situated.

2.1.3 Needless to say, Swanage is dominated by its marine and landscape setting which do much to define the underlying character of the town. Almost exclusively, the town faces east towards the sea or has oblique views in that direction. In the distance the white cliffs of the Isle of Wight can be seen to the east as well as the long low sandy cliffs of Bournemouth to the north-east.

2.1.4 To the north, the prominent ridge of the Purbeck Hills ending dramatically at Ballard Point forms a backdrop in many views northwards across the town, whilst to the south the broad mass of the limestone downs similarly dominates views southwards.

2.1.5 Although the main geographical features of Purbeck are easy to define, they are in fact quite intricate and complicated in detail. This comment is particularly true of the clay vale between the two uplands which, whilst clearly defined in wider views from the hills above, is in fact very broken and irregular in detail, and the traveller in this landscape is often contained in much more enclosed spaces than might otherwise be expected. Whilst Swanage is mostly situated on an east-facing slope or the regular north-facing slopes of the limestone upland to the south, the topographical disposition of the inland parts of the town can become rather more complicated

where the land becomes more broken and hummocky. A principal local feature is the valley of the stream that drains the clay vale, generally followed by the railway. This creates an area of low and more level ground where the town centre and railway station are situated extending westwards. Reference to the Geographical Context map, shows that west of the town a tributary of The Brook runs northwards towards the Purbeck Hills forming a secondary valley. It will be noted that this feature creates, in effect, a local ridge of higher ground within the town and a locally prominent hill on which the Harrow House International College and white sports dome are situated. Development in this western part of the town therefore appears on the skyline and some of which looks inland, unlike the rest of the town.

2.1.6 Finally it should be noted that much recent expansion of the town has been concentrated on the slopes of the limestone downs to the south. This makes development much more prominent in views from the north and it extends the town close to Langton Matravers, threatening coalescence with the village.

#### KEY POINTS

- The form and character of the town are strongly influenced by their topographical context.
- Views of the sea and hills to north and south are a key feature of the town.
- The north-west part of the town is substantially contained by a local ridge.
- The south-west part of the town is situated on the exposed lower slopes of the limestone downs.
- Topography and sensitive landscape are constraints to further expansion.



## Swanage Town context 02.2 Landscape setting



Aerial photograph courtesy of Purbeck District Council. Source: www.getmapping.com

2.2.1 As the Geographical context has already demonstrated, the landscape setting of Swanage is a fundamental part of the town's character.

2.2.2 The bay with its sweeping beach, enclosing headlands, and the hills to north and south have already been identified, but at a more detailed level the land that immediately adjoins each edge of development affects the setting and character of each part of the town.

2.2.3 To the north, 19th century cliff-top development and 20th century suburban development slightly inland extend the northern edge of the town towards Ballard Down, but it stops short of the hill south of Whitecliff Farm. This space between the downs and development is an important feature of the town's setting. The sweep of the agricultural landscape of the clay vale up to the cliff edge in this small part of the bay does much to strengthen the landscape context of the town, relieve any sense of overcrowded coastal development and provide a buffer of small fields and well planted hedgerows between development and the open downs.

2.2.4 The western edge of the town, north of the town centre, is somewhat irregular in form and extends up the side of a minor ridge between the sea and a small valley, running north, described in the previous section on Geographical context. The south end of this ridge is defined by the International College and the white sports dome.

2.2.5 Development in this area extends onto, and in places slightly across, the ridge. This makes this edge of the town widely visible, not only from higher ground to north and south, but also in local views from within the clay vale west of the town. The effect is not for the most part negative (with the notable exception of a prominent unscreened caravan park), and the buildings are seen integrated within a matrix of small fields, hedgerows and mature trees. The language school makes a prominent and interesting focus at the end of the ridge and fortunately the brilliant white dome of the sports centre is generally screened from this direction. However this edge of the town is highly sensitive because of the widely visible and generally open nature of west-facing slopes.

2.2.6 South of the town centre, during the 19th century, development spread outwards along the coast and

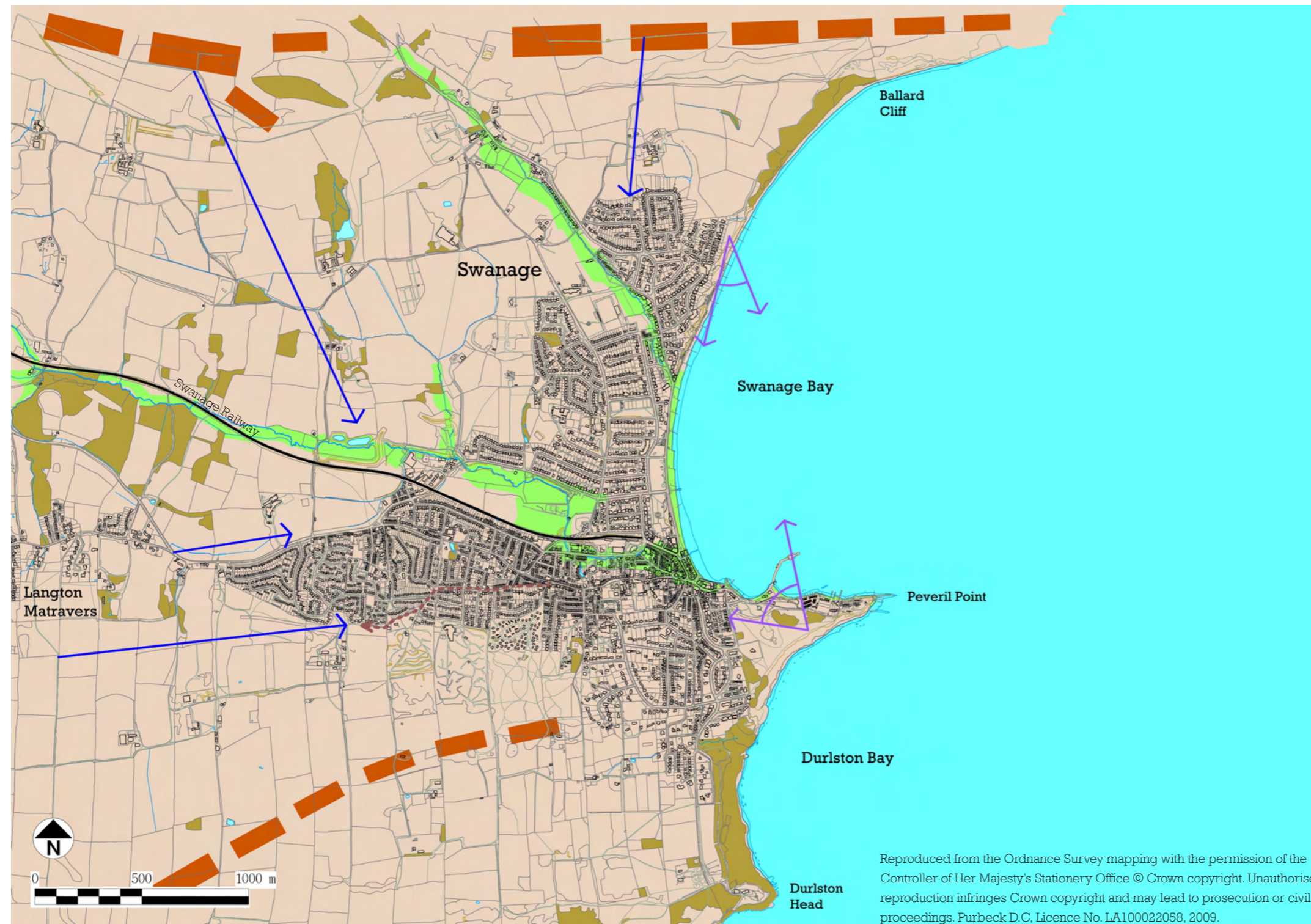
across the lower eastern end of the limestone ridge that ends in Peveril Point. This consisted mostly of large detached villas in generous well-planted grounds, but today the effect of development in such a potentially exposed location is substantially reduced and mitigated by the amount and height of existing tree cover.

2.2.7 This contrasts markedly with the later estate development inland in the Herston area that spreads up the exposed lower slopes of the limestone downs. The effect is hard and rather bleak although, in time, some tree planting already carried out in these areas within will no doubt soften them as they mature. However, the edge of the town in this area is often raw and uncompromising with suburban estate development backing directly onto open downland.






2.2.8 It should also be noted that the extension of the town westwards in this area threatens to compromise the rural setting and character of Coombe immediately to the west, and it is therefore important that no further development in this locality should result in coalescence and threaten the hamlets identity.

### KEY POINTS

- The landscape setting of the town is a fundamental part of its character.
- An important undeveloped space separates the northern edge of the town from the lower slopes of Ballard Down.
- The north-western edge of the town extends onto a local ridge beyond which the land is visually sensitive.
- The south-eastern part of the town, adjacent to Peveril Point, has many fine mature trees that do much to mitigate the effect of development in this area.
- The south-western part of the town in the Herston area has little tree cover and can appear rather bleak and uncompromising in wider views, with abrupt urban edges. Recent development in this area also threatens coalescence with Langton Matravers.



2.2.9 This drawing shows the intrinsic landscape elements that define the form and setting of Swanage. The town is contained to the north and south by prominent ridges of high ground at the head of a clay vale opening onto a crescent bay. Three principal extensions to the town centre can be identified; to the north along the bay, south across the limestone ridge to Durlston Bay and west, inland, towards Langton Matravers. The secondary ridge that contains the inland edge of northern extension to the town is indicated on the drawing.

-  Brook / water feature
-  Sea
-  Floodplain
-  Raised land above floodplains
-  Mixed & deciduous woodland
-  Visually exposed ridge
-  Historic route
-  Principal view towards town from surrounding area
-  Principal vista towards town

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## Swanage Town context 02.3 Landscape Images



1. **The outstanding landscape setting of Swanage can be well appreciated from this view.** The pronounced ridge of the Purbeck Hills running out to Ballard Point can be seen on the left, the clay vale and Swanage in the centre, and to the right and beyond, the limestone downs ending in Peveril Point.

It will be noted that much of the central and northern part of the town is hidden from view behind a shallow ridge that extends across the central part of the photograph. Only buildings on and close to the summit of the ridge in the northern and central parts of the town are visible against the sea beyond. It can be appreciated that any further expansion of the town in this area that extends down the inland-facing slopes of this ridge would be highly visible in the wider landscape.



2. **This view of Swanage is taken from further east along the Purbeck Hills on Ballard Down.** In this photograph it is possible to see the southern and western extension of the town on the lower slopes of the limestone downs on the far side of the town. However it will be noted that development does not interrupt the skyline, except in a limited area near Peveril Point where the effect is substantially mitigated by mature trees. It is also possible to appreciate from this view the importance of the open space between the foot of Ballard Down and the northern limit of the town, seen in the near middle distance.

This view also looks along the length of the shallow ridge that defines the north-western boundary of the town. This runs approximately from the farm at lower right of centre (Whitecliff Farm) to its end approximately at the prominent white sports dome in the far middle distance. Again, it will be noted that development does not extend to the right of this ridge where open fields on the reverse slope face inland, although with the exception of the caravan park, seen above Whitecliff Farm.



3. From Washpond Lane to the north-west of Swanage it can be seen that the landscape has a notable undulating topography of rolling hills. This quality of the valley is not readily apparent when viewed from above on the adjacent high ground, where it often appears much flatter. The folds in the landscape and fields enclosed by mature hedgerows visually obstruct the majority of the town beyond, but afford views to the distant parts of Swanage located on the elevated southern slopes. Note the prominence of the International College building located on the central ridge. The caravan park and housing estate visible in the middle ground follow the topography of the ground closely and the variable roofscape of the estate actually provides some positive visual interest. The choice and colour of materials also effects the degree of visual impact of these developments.



Landscape map indicating the positions where photographs were taken.



## Swanage Town context 02.3 Landscape setting images



4. **Swanage and Ballard Down seen from the limestone downs just above Belle Vue Farm** (partly visible in the near middle distance towards the left of the view). The northern part of the town can be seen extending towards Ballard Down, whilst the town centre is situated out of sight approximately behind the foreground bush on the right. To be noted in this view is the green finger of undeveloped land that extends eastwards into the town, seen in this view a little above the right foreground gate post. This area does much to reduce the overall mass of development and to visually connect the town with the countryside in views from the south. It also emphasises the landmark significance of the adjacent International College (and sports dome) at the southern end of the intermediate ridge that defines the north-western edge of the town. It will also be noted that, in terms of the visual relationship of the town to the landscape in wider views, this green space has a much more significant role than the green space along the river, (that includes the golf putting course and playing fields) immediately north of the railway, which goes substantially unappreciated in views such as this.



5. **The front at Swanage seen from near the Pier Head Cafe looking towards Ballard Down and Ballard Point.** It will be noted how along the northern part of the bay, vegetation on the cliffs and around properties along and near the cliff-top helps to assimilate this part of the town into the countryside beyond. This contributes to giving this area a rather different character from the more intensively developed front near the town centre. It is apparent that the mass, scale, height and colour of development is a very relevant issue that affects the character of this important face of the town. This view also demonstrates how the sight of the backdrop of hills beyond the town is an important feature of Swanage.



6. **View east towards Swanage from the fields south-west of Langton Matravers** (buildings on the edge of the village partly visible in the near middle distance towards the left of the view). The southern and western extension of the town is largely obscured from view by landscape features and vegetation, although the roofs of some buildings are just visible. More prominent are those elements of the town along the coast and on north side of the valley. The International School sports dome again features prominently on this view. The green finger of undeveloped land is less visible due to obstructing vegetation, although the green edge to east side of Swanage exhibits an immediacy of relationship with the countryside and visually contains this side of the town.



Landscape map indicating the positions where photographs were taken.





# Swanage

## Town context

### 02.4

#### Historic background

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OS 1902

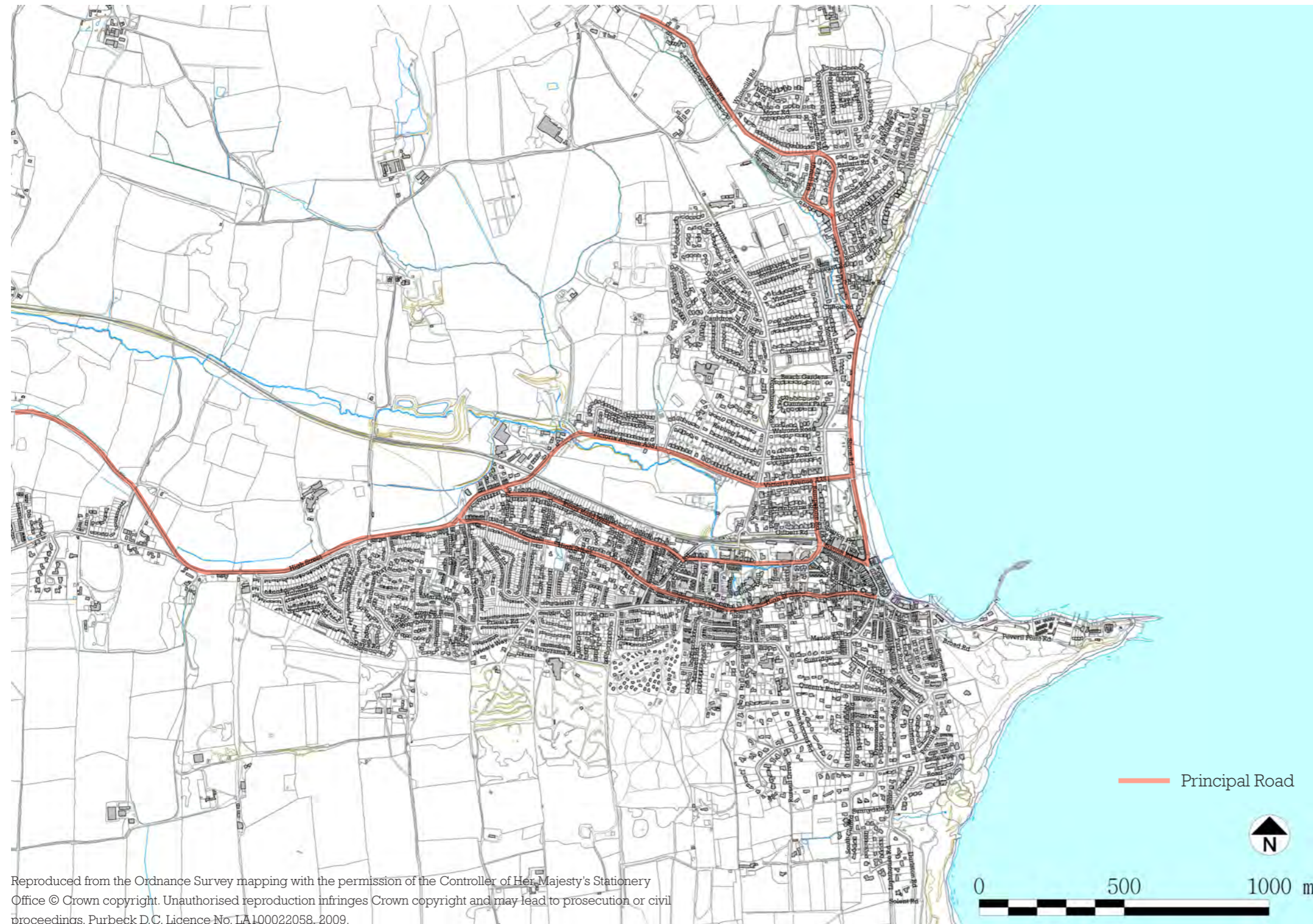
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OS 1928

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This selection of maps showing 20th century and contemporary Swanage illustrates how the town developed over the decades.

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