

Cerne Abbas Historic Urban Character Area 1

The Abbey

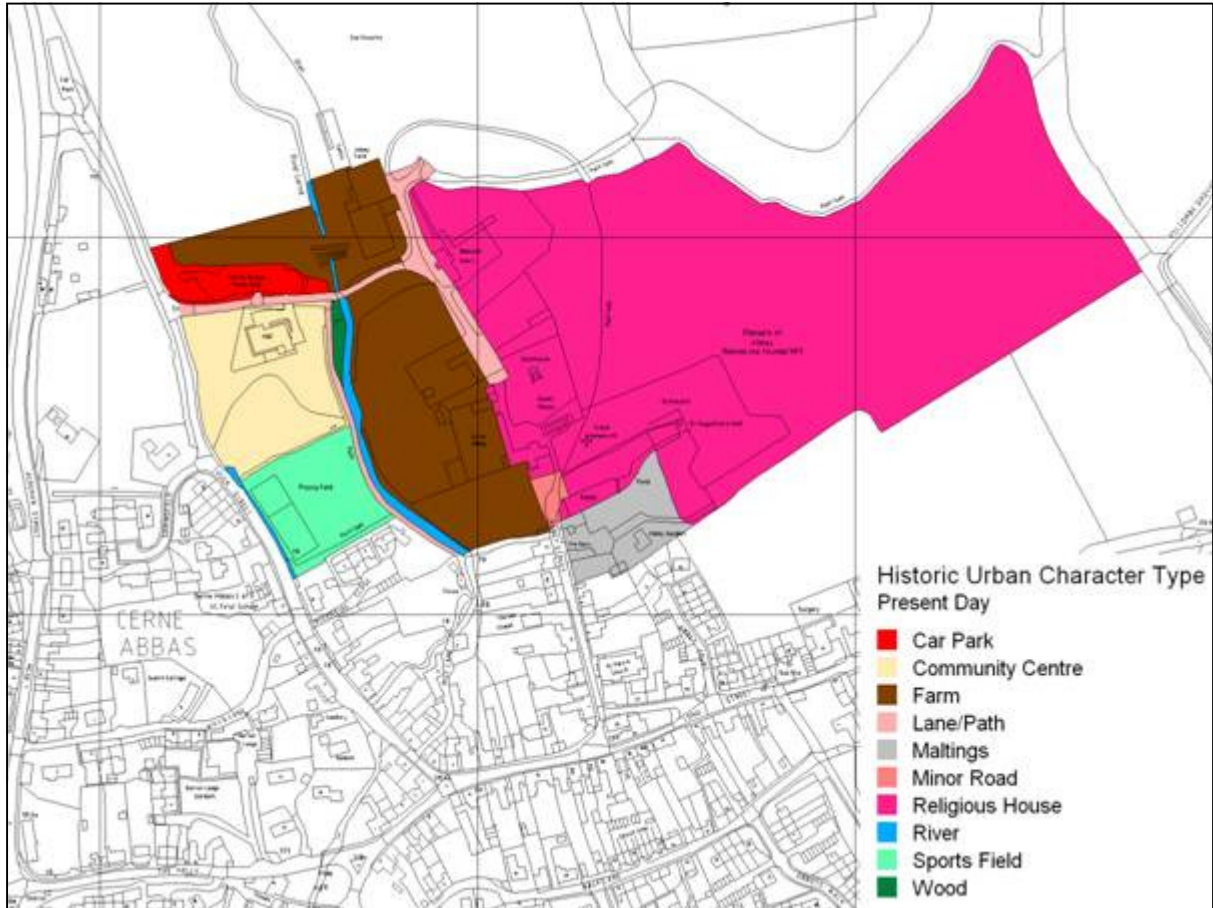


Figure 39: Map of Historic Urban Character Area 1, showing current historic urban character type.



Figure 40: View of Abbey Farm House (right), the former Abbey gatehouse and the former Abbey guest-house.



Figure 41: View of the Abbot's Porch in its garden setting.

Cerne Abbas Historic Urban Character Area 1 Structure of Character Area

Overview

This area comprises the former precinct of Cerne Abbey together with the modern area of Abbey Farm and fields, car park and village hall either side of Kettle Lane. It is defined primarily by its semi-rural nature on the northern fringes of the town centre and by its historic dimension as the precinct of the Abbey and its post-medieval successor, Abbey Farm.

Topography and Geology

The Abbey was established adjacent to a spring, which occurs at the junction of the Chalk and Upper Greensand on the lower slopes of the River Cerne. The area exhibits an east-west division, with the Abbey Precinct sitting on Chalk, and Abbey Farm and Kettle Lane located lower down astride the River Cerne on Upper Greensand.

Urban Structure

The river runs along the central western part of the area with the main A352 road forming the western boundary running roughly parallel with it and roughly equidistant on the other side is a lane, all running WNW-ESE. There is little in the way of urban structure surviving in this area. Abbey Farm forms the only significant cluster of buildings.

Present Character

Figure 39 shows the present day historic urban character types. The major component is formed by the former Abbey precinct which occupies the eastern part of the character area. Not all of this eastern section lay within the Abbey precinct; the easternmost part comprises a field which contains earthworks associated with, but outside the monastic area. The central part of the character area is dominated by Abbey Farm (Figure 40). The River Cerne divides Abbey Farm from an area dominated by public amenities. These include from north to

south, a car park and picnic area, Cerne Abbas Village Hall on the south side of Kettle Lane, An area of former water meadows lies between the Village Hall and a playing field to the south. A public path runs south from Kettle Lane towards the village centre alongside the River Cerne and a small area of woodland.

Time Depth

This area, in the form of the Abbey, represents the primary settlement component of the town. The ancient route upon which the Abbey was founded is likely to be late prehistoric in origin. The surviving Abbey buildings date from the 15th and early 16th centuries and the churchyard appears to have been created around Augustine's well during the 17th century. Kettle Bridge also dates from the 17th century or earlier (Figure 42). Abbey Farm house and some outbuildings date from the 18th century. The watermeadow to the south of the village hall also dates from the 18th century (Figure 43). The playing field on Duck Street dates from the 20th century and the village hall was opened in 2006.

Settlement Pattern and Streetscape

This is a sparsely settled part of the town, with the cluster of important historic buildings at Abbey Farm forming the only inhabited section. The historic abbey and farm buildings cluster around an area of informal grassland and more private formal gardens. Mature trees form an important component as do the surrounding farm outbuildings, churchyard and pasture fields. In general the character area has a fine landscape setting with dramatic views of the surrounding topography. The attractive river course with associated footpath forms an important asset, linking the playing fields on Duck Street with the village hall and car park as well as the town centre.



Figure 42: View of the 17th century or earlier Kettle Bridge, Kettle Lane.



Figure 43: View of the Mill Mead 18th century water meadow.

Cerne Abbas Historic Urban Character Area 1

Built Character

Building types

All of the buildings in this character area, apart from the 2006 village hall, are clustered around Abbey Farm. These essentially fall into two distinct types: surviving medieval buildings from Cerne Abbey; and 18th century and later farm buildings. Abbey Farmhouse itself, at the centre of the cluster, represents an amalgamation of the two. Here the late medieval gatehouse and porter's lodge form part of the post-medieval manor house. At one time more of the medieval structure survived but had to be rebuilt following a fire in the 18th century. The guesthouse lies adjacent to the Abbey Farm on the NE side. It is of two storeys and is thought to represent an early Abbot's Lodgings. The porch of the later Abbot's Lodge survives to the north, along with a portion of the west wall of the hall, which extended to the north and south of the porch. The central doorway has moulded jambs and a four centred arch, with a two storied oriel window above. The porch has a damaged fan vaulted roof and was built in 1497-1509. The only other surviving monastic building is the 15th century north barn which lies about 125m north of Abbey Farm House. This barn has been converted into a dwelling (Beauvoir Court) and has a 19th century farm building associated with it.

Kettle Bridge has a single irregular span in rubble stone and flint and dates from the 17th century or earlier.

The churchyard lies to the SE of the Abbey Farm buildings and has a 17th century gateway entrance and contains tombs and memorials dating from the 17th-19th century. The churchyard cross dates from the 15th century, it comprises an octagonal stone plinth and a 1m standing section of octagonal cross shaft.

Building Materials

The remaining medieval monastic buildings are built mainly in Oolitic limestone and knapped flint banding. The ashlar dressings include Portland, Purbeck and Ham Hill stone. The original roofing material appears to have been stone slates (Abbey Farm). The barn adjacent to the pond on Abbey Street has a plain tile roof with two courses of stone slates around the eaves. The Abbey Farm buildings reused some building materials from the former Abbey.

Key Buildings

Medieval monastic buildings: Abbey Farm, Abbey Guesthouse, Abbot's Porch, North Barn, Churchyard Cross.

Post-medieval farm buildings and other structures: Abbey Farm, barn adjacent to the duck pond, Kettle Bridge



Figure 44: View of the Abbey Guesthouse (1458-70) from the east .



Figure 45: The 15th century churchyard cross.



Figure 46: View of the brick barn adjacent to the Duck Pond, Abbey Street .

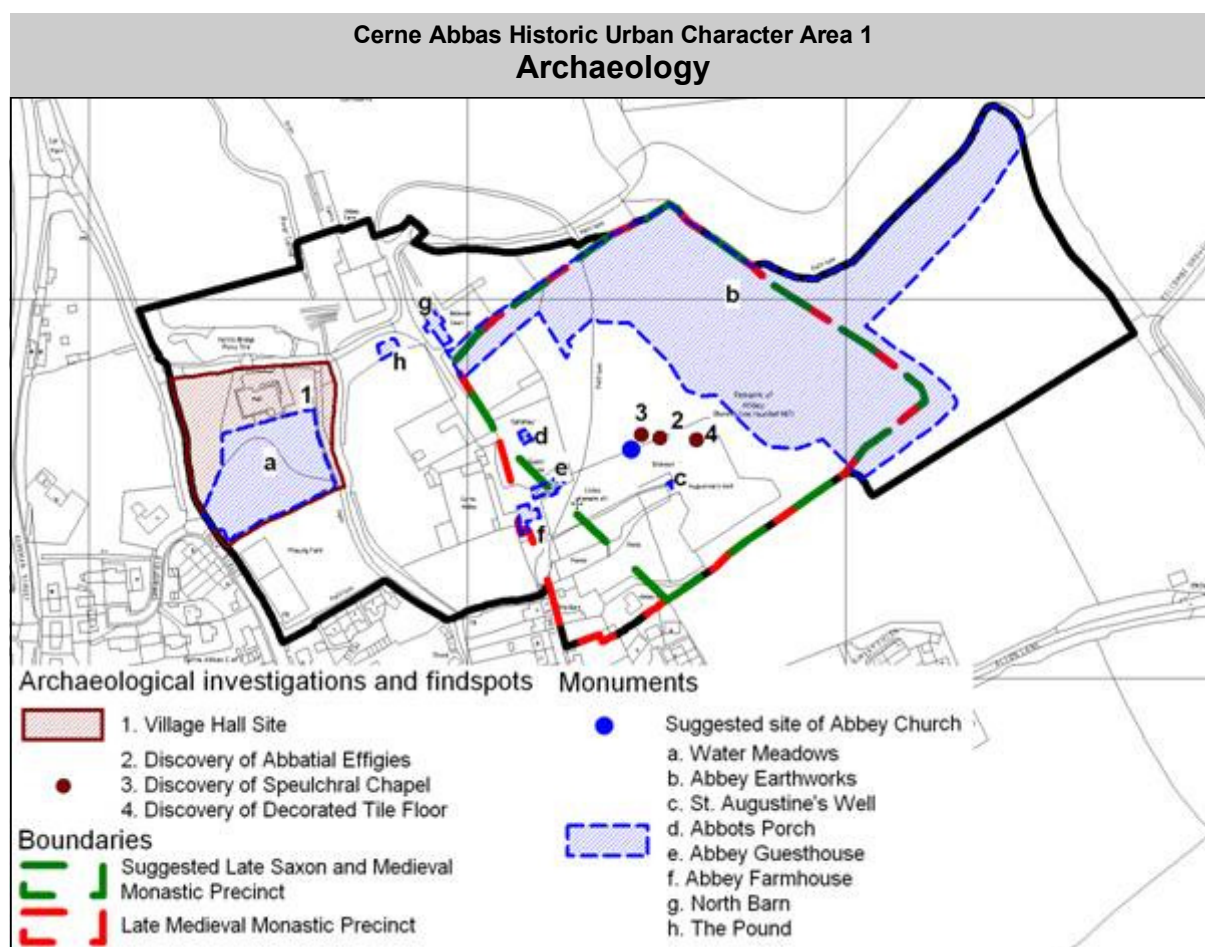


Figure 47: Archaeological Investigations and features in Historic Urban Character Area 1.

Archaeological Investigations

Only one archaeological investigation has been undertaken in this character area, an earthwork survey of the new village hall site in 1998 (Figure 48; Appendix 3, No 1). This revealed the remains of an 18th century water meadow system of significant local and regional importance (Valentin 1998). Otherwise, there have been a number of casual discoveries of elements of the Abbey. Fragments of two stone coffins bearing the effigies of two medieval abbots were discovered in a ditch on the site of Cerne Abbey in 1810, though the exact findspot is not known (Drury 1931, 257-8). The remains of what were thought to be a sepulchral chapel or shrine were uncovered during excavations for building stone on the site of the Abbey church (Figure 48, No 3) in the mid 19th century (Hutchins 1874, 27). Hutchins also records that a medieval decorated tile floor had previously been exposed in the NE corner of the churchyard (Figure 48, No 4), but had been covered over by turf prior to 1874. This was presumed to mark the site of the Lady Chapel or another chapel at the eastern end of the Abbey church (Hutchins 1874, 27).

Archaeological Character

The archaeological character of the area is dominated by the presence of Cerne Abbey. However, remarkably little archaeological work has been undertaken and our understanding of the layout, development and organisation of the Abbey site is limited. The earthworks to the east of the churchyard are well preserved, but poorly understood. Part of them appears to represent the eastern precinct boundary. One particularly enigmatic section of the earthworks comprises three circular mounds surrounded by ditches, each enclosed within a separate rectangular enclosure.

The site of the Abbey church is assumed to lie north and east of St Augustine's Well and parts of a tiled floor have been unearthed in the eastern part of the graveyard (RCHME 1952, 77). The claustral buildings probably lay to the north of the church, due to the location of St Augustine's well. There are no earthworks in this part of the site and it is thought that the area was extensively robbed of stone soon after the dissolution, but slight earthworks immediately north of the churchyard are suggestive of buried foundations.

There are also likely to be important archaeological remains in the Abbey Farm area. Here it is suggested that the monastic precinct was extended in the late medieval period in association with the realignment of Abbey Street and the construction of a new Abbey gate house (Abbey Farm House). In the late Saxon and earlier medieval periods the area of Abbey Farm may have been occupied by a secular settlement. Thus there may be a dual ecclesiastical and domestic nature to the archaeology in this area.

Important post-medieval deposits also characterise the archaeology of the area. There may be remains of the 18th century pound in the northern part of Abbey Farm and the earthworks associated with 18th century water meadows south of the village hall have also been preserved.

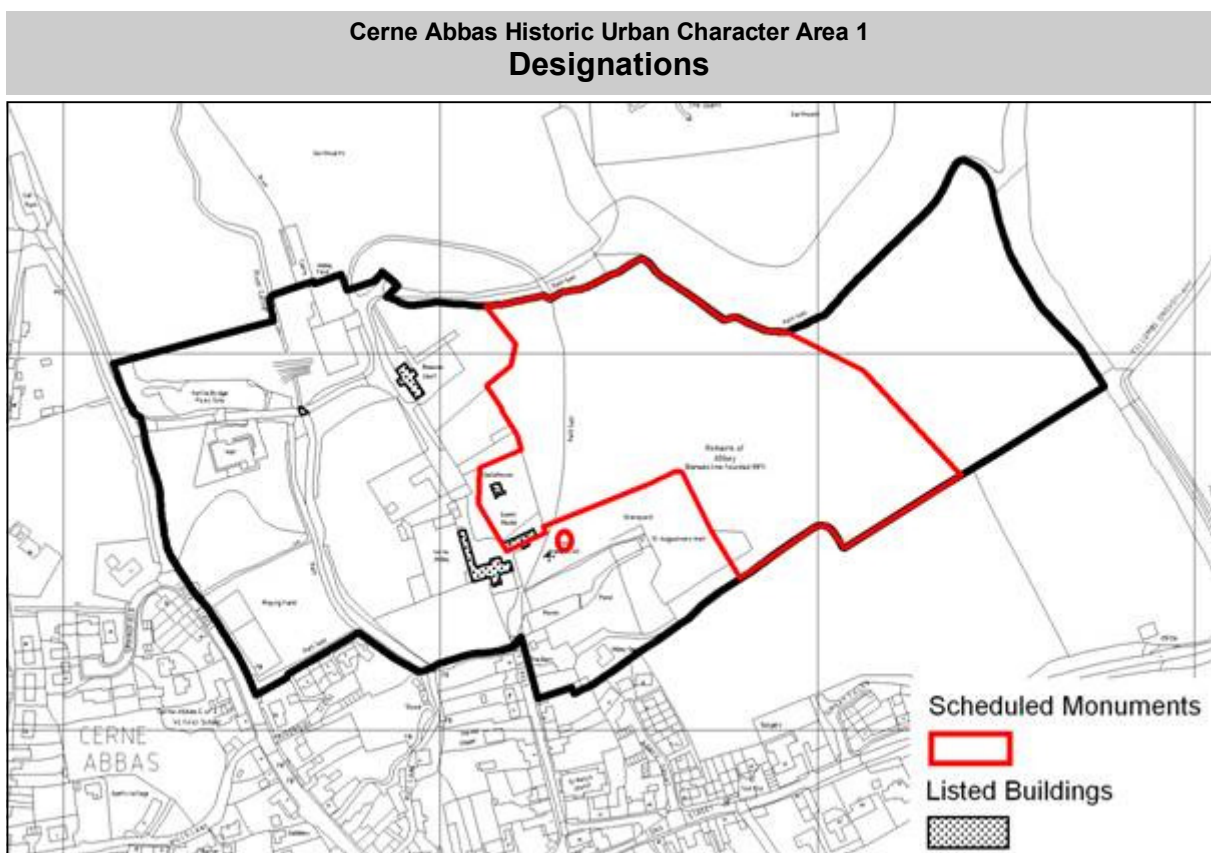


Figure 48: Listed Buildings and other designations in Historic Urban Character Area 1.

Listed Buildings

There are six Listed Buildings in the Character Area (Figure 48), four of which are Grade I (Abbot's Porch, Abbey Guest house, Abbey Farm house and The Churchyard Cross), one Grade II* (The North Barn) and one Grade II structure (Kettle Bridge).

Conservation Areas

The majority of this Character Area lies within the Cerne Abbas Conservation Area. Only the northern part of Abbey Farm, the Village Hall, Kettle Bridge car park and the SE corner of the

field in which the Abbey earthworks lie, fall outside (Figure 38).

Registered Historic Parks and Gardens

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

Scheduled Monuments

There are two Scheduled Monuments within the character area (Figure 49): the site of Cerne Abbey including gatehouse, guesthouse and wine house (North Barn)(DO26), and the Churchyard Cross (DO200).

Cerne Abbas Historic Urban Character Area 1 Evaluation

Strength of Historic Character

The historic character of this area is judged to be **strong**. The character of the Abbey and Abbey Farm areas is a combination of the positive contribution made by a high number of important medieval buildings and scheduled monuments, together with the history and archaeological potential associated with the primary settlement component of Cerne Abbas. The rise and fall of a major medieval institution is tangible here. Furthermore, the formal gardens and post-medieval buildings associated with Abbey Farm are a reminder of the former manorial status of this site. A series of well-preserved earthworks at the abbey site and post-medieval watermeadows further enhance the sense of history. The widespread use of local materials, large numbers of mature trees and rural space are unifying features of the character area.

Sensitivity to Large Scale Development

The area has a **high** sensitivity to major change. Modern development in the area has been restricted to small scale agricultural or community projects in keeping with the character of the area. The major part of the site is in the Cerne Abbas Conservation Area and a substantial portion in the heart of the character area is a scheduled monument. The area is characterised by its semi-rural nature which would be seriously compromised by large scale development.

Archaeological Potential

The archaeological potential of this area is judged to be **high**. It forms the primary settlement component of Cerne Abbas. The lack of modern development means that there is very high potential for important and informative remains of the medieval Abbey remaining intact. Slight earthworks immediately north of the north churchyard wall may indicate surviving foundations of part of the Abbey church, although a detailed survey would be required to demonstrate this. These potential remains are particularly significant in the light of how little is known about the layout and development of the Abbey. Furthermore, this area has the potential to answer questions concerning the origins of the town and the nature of shrunken settlement earthworks to the north of, and just outside, the character area. An outline for the development of the town plan has been suggested in this report, and yet there is very little dateable evidence to support or refute the scheme. The Abbey and Abbey Farm areas provide great archaeological potential to remedy the situation.

Many of the late medieval buildings and outbuildings have been modified in the post-medieval period and remain in use today. There is a high potential for detailed information on the survival of earlier structures hidden within later buildings.

This area has the potential to provide information which would contribute to Research Questions 1- 7, 9, 12, 14-18 (Part 7).

Key Characteristics

- Late Saxon Abbey
- Primary settlement component of historic Cerne Abbas
- Medieval Abbey
- Post-medieval manor
- Upstanding medieval buildings
- High proportion of quality historic buildings with contemporary detail
- Large areas of well-preserved earthworks
- Post-medieval churchyard and medieval churchyard cross
- Semi-rural character with frequent mature trees and formal gardens.