

Gillingham Historic Urban Character Area 3 Le Neubourg Way, Station Road and Brickfields

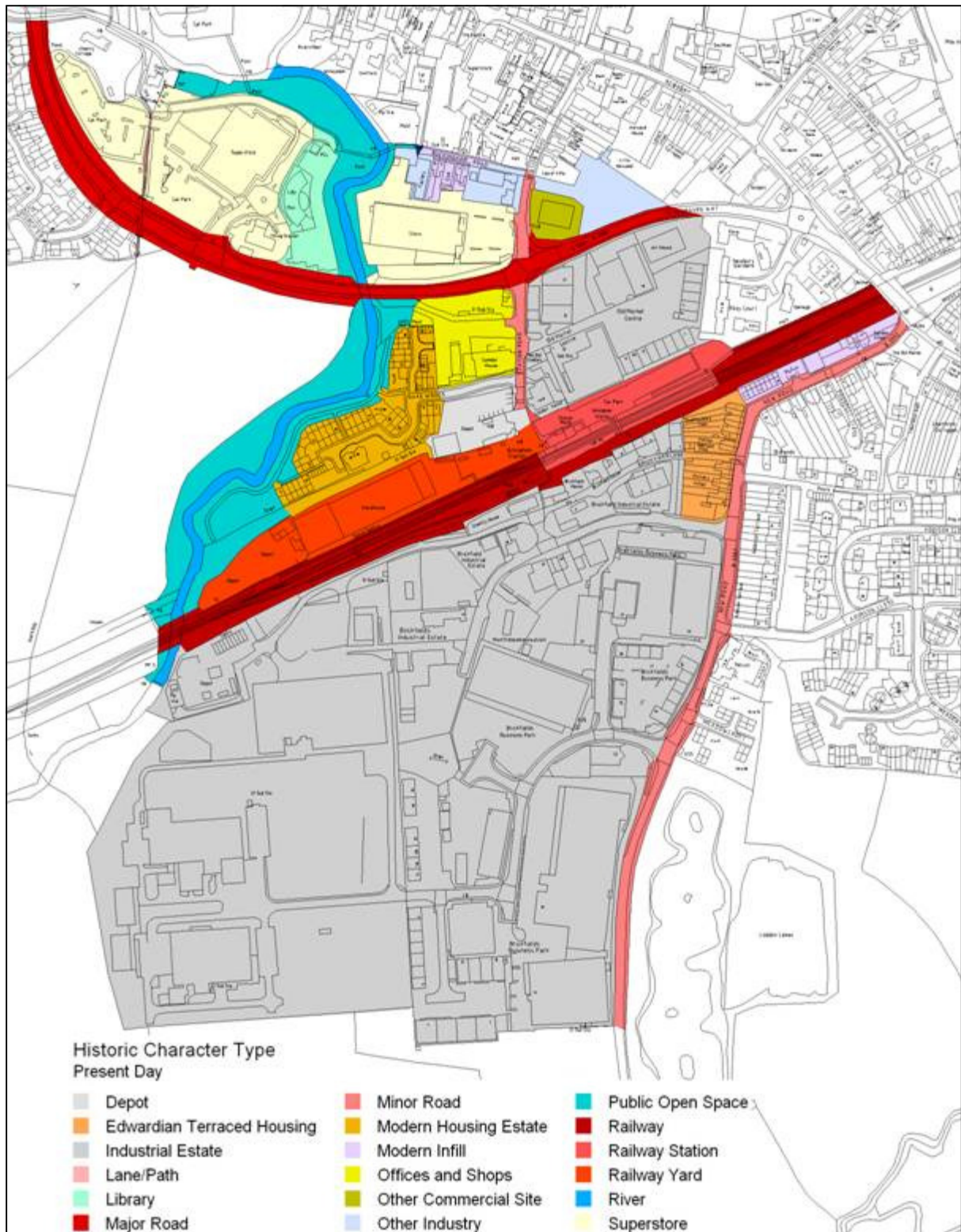


Figure 55: Map of Historic Urban Character Area 3, showing current historic urban character type

Gillingham Historic Urban Character Area 3 Structure of Character Area

Overview

This area is defined by the large areas of late 19th century and later industrial and commercial development to the south of the town, focused on the railway, together with modern commercial development along the Gillingham Relief Road. It includes areas of late 19th century industry (including the former brickfields) and the former medieval suburb at Chantry Fields.

Topography and Geology

This character area lies to either side of the River Stour as it flows to the south of the town. Thus, it includes a long stretch of the valley floor along with two raised areas to the east and west. The slight hill to the east of the Stour was location of the Gillingham Brick works (now the Brickfields Industrial Estate) and the railway station. The raised ground to the west is the location of Chantry fields, a former medieval suburb and now the site of Waitrose Supermarket. The geology of the area entirely comprises Kimmeridge Clay.

Urban Structure

The area is cut in two by the railway line running across the area, with the station on the north side. This is accessed by Station Road running from Newbury. Another minor road, New Road, runs along the south side of the railway then across the River Stour floodplain and forms the east edge of the character area. The relief road curves across the northern part of the area, crossing the River Stour that forms the western boundary of most of the area. There are small areas of housing along New Road, but the bulk of the area south of the railway comprises an extensive area of Industrial Estate and Business Park accessed by a number of curvilinear cul-de-sac. To the north of the railway, there are large plots containing small industrial estates, light industry and warehouses accessed from Station Road and a modern housing estate fitted behind Station Road and the River Stour. There are superstore developments within large car parks and landscaped grounds along the north side of Le Neubourg Road.

Present Character

Figure 55 shows the present day historic urban character types. The dominant character type is Industrial Estate, particularly in the southern part of the area. The northern part of the area includes Superstores and areas of Other Industry, Other Commercial Site and Depot. Residential areas are restricted to a Modern

Housing Estate, together with small areas of Edwardian Terraced Housing and Modern Infill. The main communication elements are the Railway and Railway Station, one Major Road (the relief road) and two minor roads. The River Stour cuts through the character area in a N-S direction, flanked by meadows used as public open space and Gillingham Library.

Time Depth

The majority of this character area comprised meadow and enclosed fields until the mid 19th century when the railway was constructed. Industrial sites developed rapidly in the later 19th century and thrived into the mid-late twentieth century. The area was redeveloped after 1990 when the Gillingham relief road was constructed. However, a small part of the character area, to the south of the town centre, had been the site of a medieval suburb, aligned on a possible Roman road which still exists as a lane running south from Chantry Ford through Waitrose car park. Earthworks associated with this suburb survived until the development of the Chantry Fields site in the early 1990s.

Settlement Pattern and Streetscape

The settlement pattern is typical of industrial and commercial edge of settlement areas with agglomerations of commercial and light industrial estates. Station Road forms the primary component of the development and contains the remnants of 19th century settlement and industrial activity interspersed with more modern development. There is little coherence to this streetscape, which has been truncated and altered by the relief road.

Trees and open green spaces are not dominant in this area, but are most evident along the Stour and along the line of the railway.



Figure 56: View south along Station Road.

**Gillingham Historic Urban Character Area 3
Built Character**

Building types

The area is characterised by a large number of modern industrial and commercial units, notably in the Brickfields and Old Market Centre industrial estates (Figure 57) as well as along Le Neubourg Way. The oldest standing buildings in the area date from the mid-late 19th century and are clustered around the southern end of Station Road. They include the Station building itself (Figure 20); London House, a former hotel on the site of the cattle market (Figure 27); the Old Stables associated with Gillingham Cattle Market; Somdor House which is the site of the cheese factory and a building to the south of it which represents the last vestige of the 19th century bacon factory (Figure 58). The station is a building of mixed levels with gables fronting on to the railway, and gables are typical of the other late 19th century buildings. There are a few surviving mid 20th century industrial buildings, the last surviving brick buildings from the mid-late 20th century can be found at the heart of the modern Brickfields Industrial Estate (Figure 59) and a few workshops and a garage survive to the north of Le Neubourg Way. Brick-built Edwardian houses and late 19th century villas survive on New Road, as well as a Brickfield House on Brickyard Lane (Figure 60). The modern industrial and commercial units are typical steel-framed sheds.

Building Materials

The 19th century buildings are built exclusively in brick with slate or tile roofs. The station building is in painted brick with a slate roof. It also has a surviving canopy with cast iron braces and pillars. The modern industrial buildings utilise non-local materials such as corrugated roofs, concrete, and glass. Modern housing at Oake Woods is built using non-local materials; pale brick fronted with slate or tile roofs.

Key Buildings

Commercial Premises: Gillingham Station, London House, the Old Stables

19th century houses: Gordon Villas, New Road



Figure 57: Old Market Centre Industrial Estate, Station Road.



Figure 58: J. H. Rose, last remaining standing building from the 19th century bacon factory.



Figure 59: Sigma Aldrich, Brickfields Industrial Estate.



Figure 60: Brickfield House, Brickyard Lane.

Gillingham Historic Urban Character Area 3
Archaeology

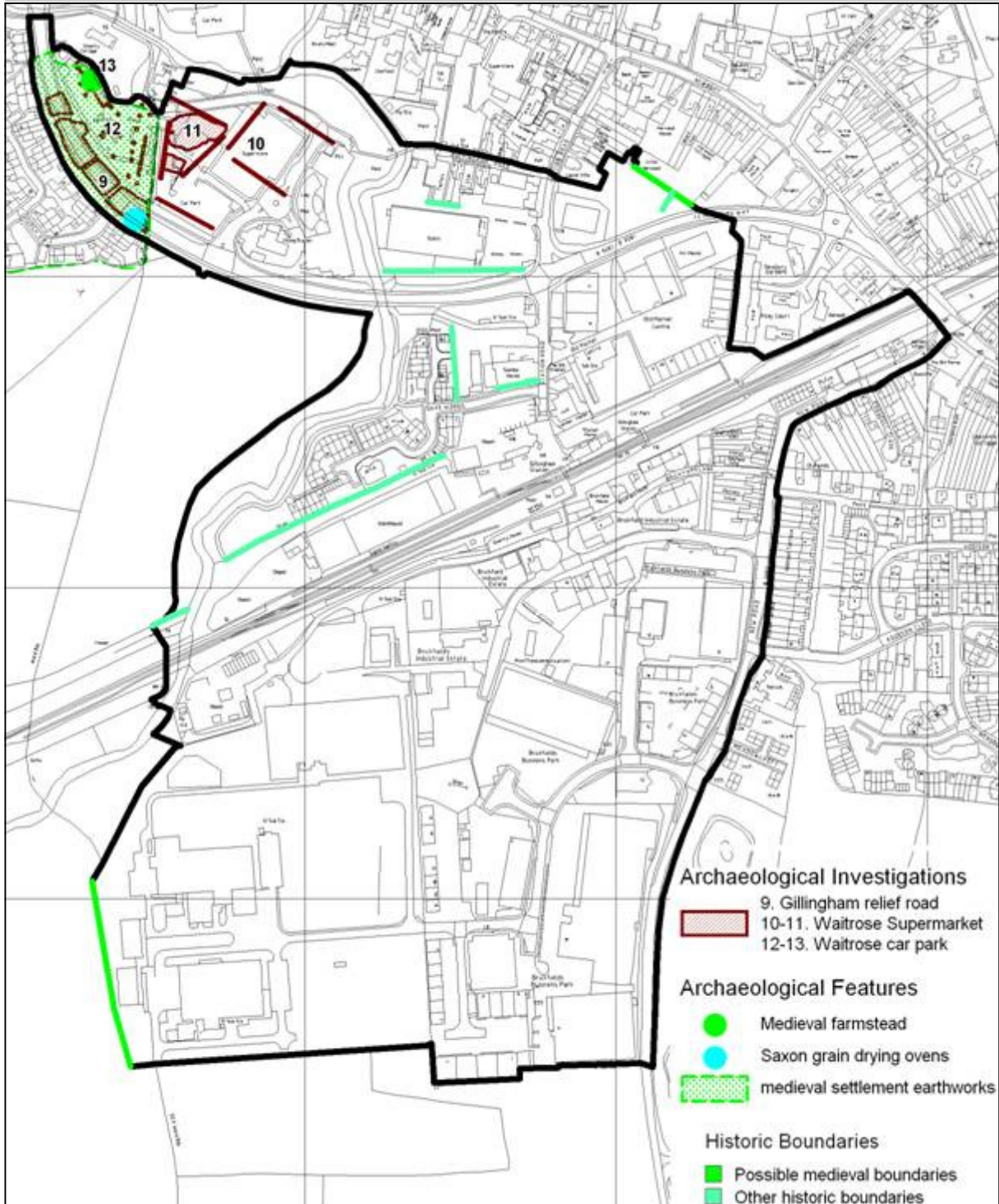


Figure 61: Archaeological investigations in Historic Urban Character Area 3.

Gillingham Historic Urban Character Area 3 Archaeology

Archaeological Investigations

Six archaeological investigations have been undertaken in this character area; three archaeological evaluations, all followed up by more extensive archaeological excavation (Appendix 3, Nos. 1 & 9-13). All the archaeological work was concentrated in the Chantry Fields area along the route of the relief road and on the adjacent Waitrose supermarket site (Figure 61). This work has revealed important evidence for Saxon activity in the form of two grain-drying ovens and other features, together with extensive traces of medieval settlement and agricultural activity (Heaton 1995). There is also a range of prehistoric and Roman finds recovered from the area.

Archaeological Character

Chantry Fields had a set of formerly well preserved earthworks, now destroyed through development, which represented the site of a medieval suburb on the south side of Chantry Ford. The discovery of middle Saxon corn drying ovens suggests that there was either industrial activity taking place here prior to the

establishment of the suburb, or that the suburb itself originates in the Saxon period. These findings are of considerable importance in understanding the origins of the town. The title map suggests that the rest of the character area comprised meadows and enclosed fields during the early 19th century. The archaeological character is likely to comprise a background scatter of medieval and Roman pottery derived from manuring over much of the site, although the Madjeston road ran north-south through the eastern edge of the area and may retain evidence for dispersed settlement, particularly on the higher ground between the rivers Stour and Lodden. Any such settlement might date from the Neolithic to medieval periods. However, it must be noted that large areas of this higher ground have been quarried away during clay extraction.

Boundaries depicted on Figure 61 demonstrate that very few historic boundaries have survived the wholesale conversion of the area into industrial sites from the late 19th century onwards.

Gillingham Historic Urban Character Area 3 Designations

Listed Buildings

There are no Listed Buildings in the Character Area.

Conservation Areas

Only the north western tip of this character area lies within the Gillingham Conservation Area (Figure 39).

Registered Historic Parks and Gardens

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

Scheduled Monuments

There are no Scheduled Ancient Monuments within the character area.

Gillingham Historic Urban Character Area 3 Evaluation

Strength of Historic Character

The strength of character of this area is judged to be **low**. Although there is an historical dimension to development here, very little survives to impart character to the area. The oldest surviving urban character dates from the late 19th century construction of the railway. The construction of a relief road, modern industrial estates, supermarkets and modern housing has destroyed almost all historic character across large parts of the area.

Sensitivity to Large Scale Development

The area has a **low** sensitivity to major change. Large scale development already dominates this character area. Future large scale development might be beneficial to the historic character was it to comprise buildings constructed in a vernacular style from local materials, especially brick, and reinstate historic boundaries.

Archaeological Potential

The archaeological potential of this area is judged to be **medium**. The potential of the Chantry Fields remains high. The density of archaeological features here means that significant archaeological deposits are likely to remain unexcavated and undisturbed by development. The potential of the south eastern part of the Brickfields site is low following the excavation of clay from large swathes of land in this area. Nevertheless, in terms of industrial archaeology, there is the possibility of remains relating to narrow gauge railways, kilns and workshops in this area. The vast majority of the area has a medium potential for deposits relating to almost any period from the Mesolithic onwards.

This area has the potential to provide information which would contribute to Research Questions 1-3, 10-11, 16-25 (Part 7).

Key Characteristics

- Late 19th century railway and station
- Late 19th-early 21st century industrial area
- Modern relief road and supermarkets
- Site of late 19th century brick works and cattle market
- Site of Saxon and medieval suburban settlement site at Chantry Fields