Summary

This report contains the results of a consideration of the historical, archaeological, architectural and map evidence relating to the developmental history of Sherborne. It has focused on the understanding of the overall development of the town from its earliest beginnings to the present day. This work has been conducted in order to; achieve a better understanding of how the historical dimension has influenced the modern townscape; identify what historical features and structures survive within the modern town and; comprehend the contribution made by this historic dimension to the present character of Sherborne. This will enable an informed approach to the management of change and conservation of the urban environment.

Historical Background

Sherborne originated as an important Saxon ecclesiastical centre. The bishopric of Sherborne was founded in AD 705, probably on an existing British monastic estate. Aldhelm, the first Bishop of Sherborne, is thought to have built a church here. In AD 998, the Benedictine Abbey of Sherborne was founded by Bishop Wulfsige III and a series of monastic buildings were built to the north of the church. A secular settlement developed next to the church and Abbey and by the eve of the Norman conquest was a sizeable nucleated settlement, which developed into a thriving market town. Sherborne Old Castle was built around AD 1137, and formed the focus of the borough of Castleton, probably created in the 12th century. The town grew throughout the medieval period and, in the early 13th century, the planned borough of Newland was created. Sherborne became an important cloth-making town during the 15th century. The dissolution of the Abbey in 1539 had relatively little effect on the economy of the town, which prospered into the 18th century, largely because of its woollen cloth industry. The cloth trade declined and button making, glove making, haberdashery and silk manufacture became more important in the 18th and early 19th century. The town's fortunes were boosted by the arrival of the railway in the mid 19th century. There was continued but slow expansion in the late 19th and early 20th century. After the Second World War there was significant suburban expansion of the town, particularly to the west, east and northeast.

Town morphology

Sherborne has a complex plan form with two main north-south roads (Cheap Street and Acreman Street) two major east-west routes (Greenhill/Newell and Half Moon Street/Long Street) with a diagonal road (Newland) running from the north end of Cheap Street to Castleton. This street arrangement, with some modifications, dates from the medieval period, but some elements are much earlier. Cheap Street forms the central focus of the town from at least the Norman period onwards and represents the core of the original nucleated settlement. It runs along the east side of the Abbey precinct, between two medieval market areas at Greenhill and outside the Abbey Gate. Newland is the main street of the medieval planned suburb of Newland, which had its own market area. Linear settlement developed along the major approach roads (Westbury, Coldharbour, Kitt Hill) from the medieval period onwards. Within the main framework of streets is a range of minor historic streets and roads. The railway line skirts the southern edge of the town, running along the river floodplain and forms the urban edge along this side. Areas of industrial character have developed along the edge of the town next to the railway. The modern suburban development is concentrated towards the north, east and west, infilling large areas around the periphery of the town. These suburban estates have been planned with their own looped road networks and culs-de-sac, which have little in common with the historic road networks and the earlier settlement morphology.

Built character

Sherborne has many buildings with significant historical character in the area of the medieval and post-medieval town. The widespread use of local Sherborne Stone enhances the connection between the town and its landscape setting. Of particular significance is the Abbey church and associated buildings of Sherborne School, some of which occupy surviving elements of the medieval monastic precinct. Medieval monastic buildings also enhance the market place. The ruins of the early 12th century Old Castle to the east of the town were incorporated into the grounds of the current Sherborne Castle built in 1594. Important 17th and 18th century town houses include Greenhill, Cornhill, Kitt Hill and Newell House. Industrial expansion in the 19th century saw the building of finely-detailed red brick terraces around Westbury and Horsecastles. Landmark buildings of the late 19th and early 20th centuries are the Digby Hotel, Sherborne Station and Sherborne Girls School. Edwardian terraces and suburban villas also add

Figure 1: Vertical aerial photographic view of Sherborne, 2005 (© Getmapping.com, 2005).

to the character of the area to the north of The Green at Priestlands, Kings Road, Wootton Grove and Simons Road. Notable industrial buildings are the silk mills at Westbury and the Dorsetshire Brewery.

Landscape Setting

Sherborne lies on the north side of the Yeo valley upon the gentle dip slope of the Jurassic Inferior Oolite beds. The grounds of Sherborne Castle estate occupy the south bank of the river. Modern development is restricted to the northern slopes and the former common pasture of Lenthay to the west.

Historic Urban Character

The Historic Urban character of Sherborne is closely bound up with its distinctive landscape setting and the quality of its historic fabric, as well as the quality of its documented history. The late Saxon and medieval town plan survives virtually complete, and the associated post-medieval streetscapes are largely intact. The location of the Abbey and historic town centre are also significant in terms of landscape setting, sitting as they do, just above the open meadows of the Yeo floodplain. The good survival of the historic town structure is complemented by the many historic buildings. The survival in the historic core of many unbroken groups of buildings, with little disruption from modern development, is a major factor which highlights the contribution made by historic elements to Sherborne's urban character. The harmonious use of local building materials helps underscore its local setting and emphasises the linkage with the surrounding landscape.

Further Research

This report has highlighted many aspects of the historical development of Sherborne and how this has shaped the modern town. It has also indicated gaps in our knowledge and areas which would repay further research.

The main areas of suggested further research include:

- Research into the layout of the middle to late Saxon cathedral and Abbey precincts and associated secular settlement.
- Research into the late Saxon and medieval development of the town, its economy, industry and secular buildings.
- Research into the pre-urban landscape; the origins and development of field systems and dispersed settlement patterns, particularly the Roman and post-Roman settlements at Pinford Lane, Sherborne old Castle and potentially Sherborne Abbey.