

Summary

This report contains the results of a consideration of the historical, archaeological, architectural and map evidence relating to the developmental history of Blandford Forum. 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 Blandford. This will enable an informed approach to the management of change and conservation of the urban environment.

Historical Background

There are nine manors with variations on the name Blandford mentioned at Domesday and it is difficult to know whether any of them refer to a settlement on the site of Blandford Forum. It is perhaps more likely that dispersed settlements in Blandford St Mary and Langton predate the foundation of Blandford Forum itself. The earliest documentary evidence for the town suggests that the church was founded in 1110 by Robert de Beaumont. A market was recorded by the early 13th century and Blandford Bridge and St Leonard's Hospital were both recorded by the late 13th century. By the 14th century Blandford sent a member to parliament and the town was taxed at the urban rate. By the late 17th century the economy of the town appears to have expanded into a successful market town. This success may have been briefly curtailed by a series of devastating fires that had destroyed almost the entire town by 1731. Blandford was famously rebuilt under the guidance of the Bastard brothers. Button and lace making, gloving, iron founding, brick making and candle making were important industries during the 17th-19th centuries, but it primarily remained a successful market town. The arrival of the railway in 1863 went some way to ameliorate the effects of the agricultural and economic depressions of the 19th and early 20th centuries. However, it was not until the 1980s that the town expanded beyond its 19th century population with the creation of large modern housing estates to the north and east of the town.

Town morphology

The historic core is arranged around a single main street running parallel to the river Stour with regular burgage plots on both side and

back lanes behind. The market place lay at the junction with the road running across the river from Blandford Bridge. To the north, east and west of the town centre, is some ribbon development along a series of radiating roads. The areas between these routes is infilled with suburban housing estates arranged on a linear grid system, or more commonly on looped networks of roads and curvilinear culs-de-sac. Blandford Forum is divided from Blandford St Mary to the south by the River Stour and its wide floodplain. The suburb of Blandford St Mary is aligned along a route running parallel to the river, with modern suburban housing estates beyond. There are areas of industrial and commercial estates along the south side of the river and at the northwest part of the town.

Built character

Blandford is best known as one of the finest examples of a Georgian country town in Britain. This is a result of the wholesale reconstruction of the town between 1731 and 1760 following its almost complete destruction by fire. The only surviving medieval building is the 15th century St Leonard's Chapel. Three buildings survive from the late 17th century, all to the north of the town and include Dale House, The Old House and Ryves Almshouses. The most important group of Georgian buildings are arranged around the market place and include the parish church with its distinctive cupola atop the western tower and the Town Hall, a particularly fine example of mid 18th century municipal architecture. The south side of the market place includes grand domestic and commercial premises with glazed blue header brickwork and red brick dressings. There is also a fine collection of large detached Georgian town houses behind the church.

There is a good collection of detached mid 19th century town houses along White Cliff Mill Street and a good example of a Victorian suburb, arranged around a grid pattern of streets to the northeast of the town in association with the former railway station. The best example of surviving industrial architecture is the late Victorian Hall and Woodhouse brewery in Blandford St Mary.

Landscape Setting

Blandford lies at an important crossing of the river Stour and within a wide sweeping curve in its course, around the foot of a projecting and tapering chalk ridge. The river lies within a wide and open flood plain which provides a broad green swathe between the medieval town and



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

its suburb of Blandford St Mary. The wooded cliffs and former deer park at Bryanston provide a distinctive backdrop for the town to the west. These features have meant that the natural expansive direction for the modern town has been up the sloping chalk ridge to the north east.

Historic Urban Character

The Historic Urban character of Blandford is closely bound up with its distinctive landscape setting and the quality of its historic fabric, as well as the preservation of its medieval layout. The medieval town plan retains distinctive bur-gage plots into which the distinctive coherent Georgian streetscape has been fitted.

The wide sweep of the river Stour and its associated wooded cliffs and broad meadows, coupled with post-medieval bridges, set the scene on the town approaches. The green swathe, so close to the medieval town centre, also provides a suitable backdrop to the Georgian design as well as to underscore its local setting and emphasise the linkage with the surrounding landscape. Victorian and later suburbs and industrial buildings around the fringes of the medieval town testify to the town's more recent expan-

sion.

Further Research

This report has highlighted many aspects of the historical development of Blandford 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 pre-urban nature of the landscape.
- Research into the origins and economy of the medieval town.
- Research into the sites and origins of the lost medieval sites of St Leonard's and Darmacy Court.