

Summary

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

Christchurch has a distinctive historic character reflecting both its origins as a Saxon burh and its maritime associations. Despite the rapid proliferation of housing estates from the late 19th century onwards, the original geographically isolated position of the historic core means that it still retains the character of a small medieval town. This character is further distinguished by its maritime connection, including the harbour, salt marshes and sandy beaches of Christchurch bay. The growth of modern marinas reinforce the significance that Christchurch harbour has played in the development of the town and the position of the Priory Church is such that it still dominates the harbour today much as it has done throughout the last millennium.

The urban morphology of the historic core of Christchurch is a function of the topography of the gravel ridge upon which it sits. The earliest settlement was around the Saxon Minster church on the site of the present Priory Church at the southern tip of the ridge. The town then developed only slowly northwards from the Minster and later Priory along the central spine Road of High Street. A cross ridge road probably ran along the approximate route of the modern Castle Street and Wick Lane to form a central cross road to the north of the Minster. This street arrangement may have been modified by the insertion of a Norman castle across the earlier route of Castle Street, diverting it slightly to the north. There are few visible remains of the late Saxon defensive bank and ditches or stone town wall; demolished by the 13th century. However a concerted campaign of archaeological excavation in the 1970s and 80s has highlighted the significance of these structures for the town's development, as well as the potential for further sub-surface archaeological remains.

Christchurch had two medieval extramural suburbs at Bridge Street and Bargates. Bridge Street retains significant character whilst the historic part of Bargates has been decimated by the construction of the Christchurch by-pass in 1958.

The historic suburban centres of Purewell, Stanpit and Mundeford also retain important historic street frontages which form a continuous link around the east side of Christchurch harbour and with the town centre via Bridge Street. The cluster of buildings at Staple Cross retain a village feel with a small green and stone cross separated from the suburb of Somerford by the Christchurch by-pass. Former medieval hamlets at Bure, Somerford, Nea and Hoburne do not retain their character so well, being subsumed into the suburban housing estates of Somerford and Highcliffe. The group of 18th century cottages at Chewton Common retain their character but are backed by a modern housing estate occupying former common land. The 19th century settlements at Walkford and Highcliffe Newtown have retained their period feel. To the north of Christchurch town centre medieval settlement had been characterised by dispersed farms (Grove Farm and Bosley) set within enclosed fields and common. They have now become completely absorbed into the inter-war suburban developments here.

The division of the modern urban area of Christchurch into 34 Historic Urban Character Areas enables an overview assessment of the historic character of the town to be presented (Table 1). An assessment of the significance of the contribution of each Historic Urban Character Area to the historic character of Christchurch reveals that the areas of highest significance are the historic core comprising the burh and medieval suburbs of Bargates and Bridge Street, together with the former common at Quomps, now a public park (Map 15). This area contributes to the historic character through its settlement time depth, historic street and boundary pattern and historic building stock. Avon Mead and Stanpit Marsh are included, not only because of their archaeological significance, but also because of their historical integrity as green commons associated with and delineating the medieval town centre. Similarly Chewton is an example of surviving medieval common containing a fine collection of 18th century cottages. 18th century cottages also survive at St Catherine's Hill, on the edge of a significant prehistoric Roman and medieval monuments. Highcliffe Castle is in-



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

cluded on the grounds of the quality of the renovated house and grounds. The hospital and workhouse is a conservation area with important historic buildings as well as depth of social history.

Other areas of which provide a high contribution to the historic character are the historic village centres of Purewell (Street), Mudeford, Staple Cross, and Bosley (Map 15).

Areas of medium contribution to the historic character of Christchurch include the industrial areas of Mill Plain (Avon Industrial Zone) and Stony Lane. Priors and Rossiter's Quays also have an industrial element. The site of the barracks has been redeveloped but has national importance in terms of military history. Medieval rural areas bereft of significant surviving fabric have been included in this category, including Stanpit, Bure, Somerford, Nea, Hoburne, Latch Farm and Knapp, Roeshott Farm, and Grove Farm. Nevertheless, Map 15 shows that in many of these areas the core of these settlements have been categorised as of presenting a high contribution to the historic character of Christchurch (Stanpit, Bure, and Hoburne). Highcliffe Newtown and Portfield housing estates retain significant late 19th and early 20th century character that are also sensitive to change. The areas which contribute least to the historic character are the areas of modern housing estates and retail parks at Grove, Somerford, Highcliffe and Walkford.