Part 3: Town Context

3.1 The Setting of the Town

No town exists in isolation. All towns are shaped and influenced by their surrounding landscape. Topography and geology have a profound influence on the way a town develops; constraining development, shaping communication routes, and providing raw materials for building and other economic activity, amongst other things. In order to understand the character of a town, its surrounding landscape and natural context need to be understood. This section of the report briefly sets out the wider context of the town and the landscape character of its hinterland.

3.2 Topography

The current settlement of Newton lies at the head of Newton Bay on the south side of Poole Harbour (Figure 3). The bay is formed by Goathorn Point to the east and Cleavel Point to the west. The ground is flat and low lying immediately adjacent to the edge of Poole Harbour, between 5 m and 7 m above Ordnance Datum. Further back from the water, the topography has undulating rounded knolls and sand and gravel ridges up to about 15 m above Ordnance Datum.

3.3 Geology

Newton lies on the Tertiary clays, sands and gravels of the Poole Formation of the Bagshot Beds (Figure 4).
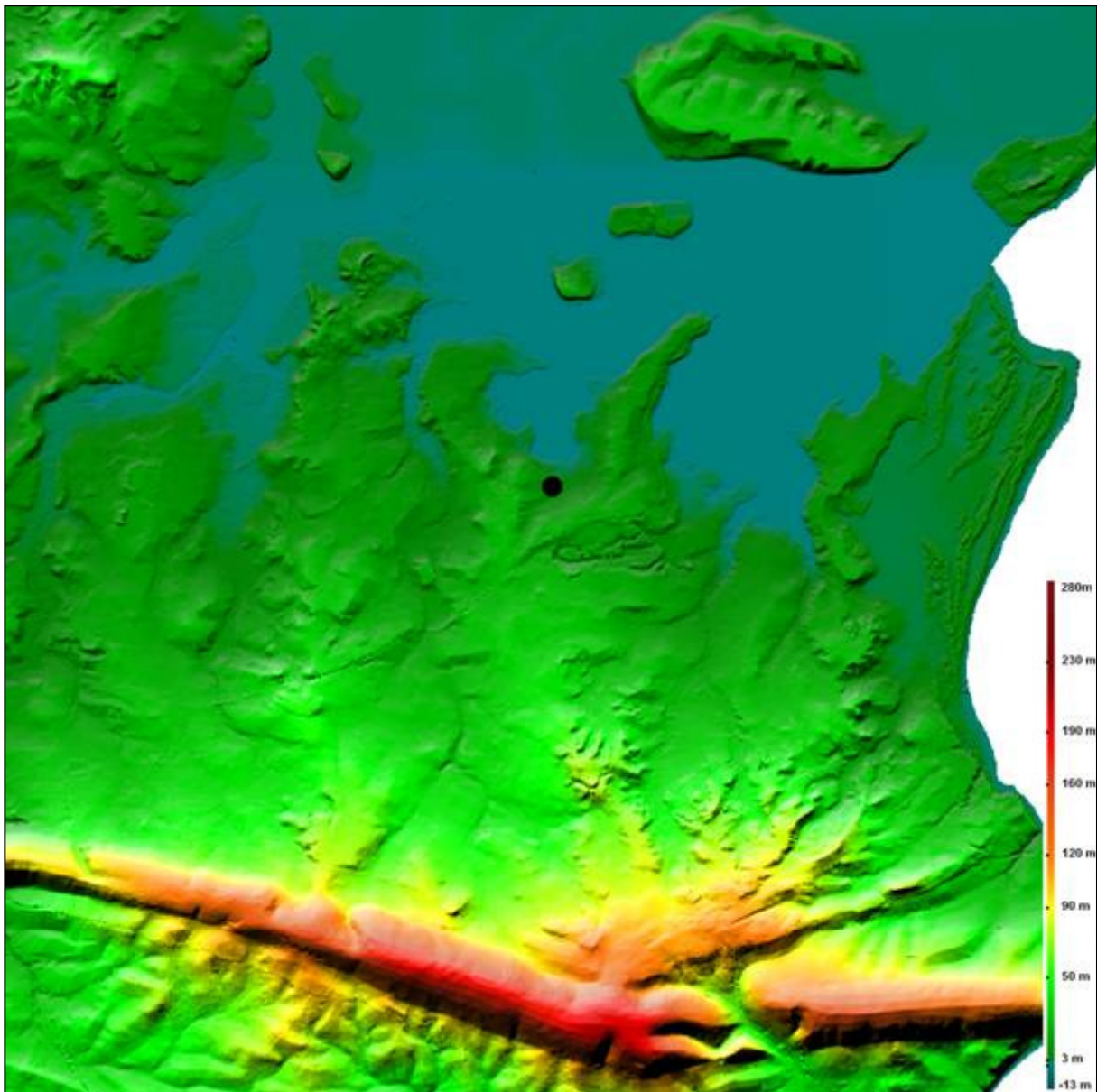

Figure 3: Newton's topographic setting — the location of Newton Cottage is marked by the black dot.
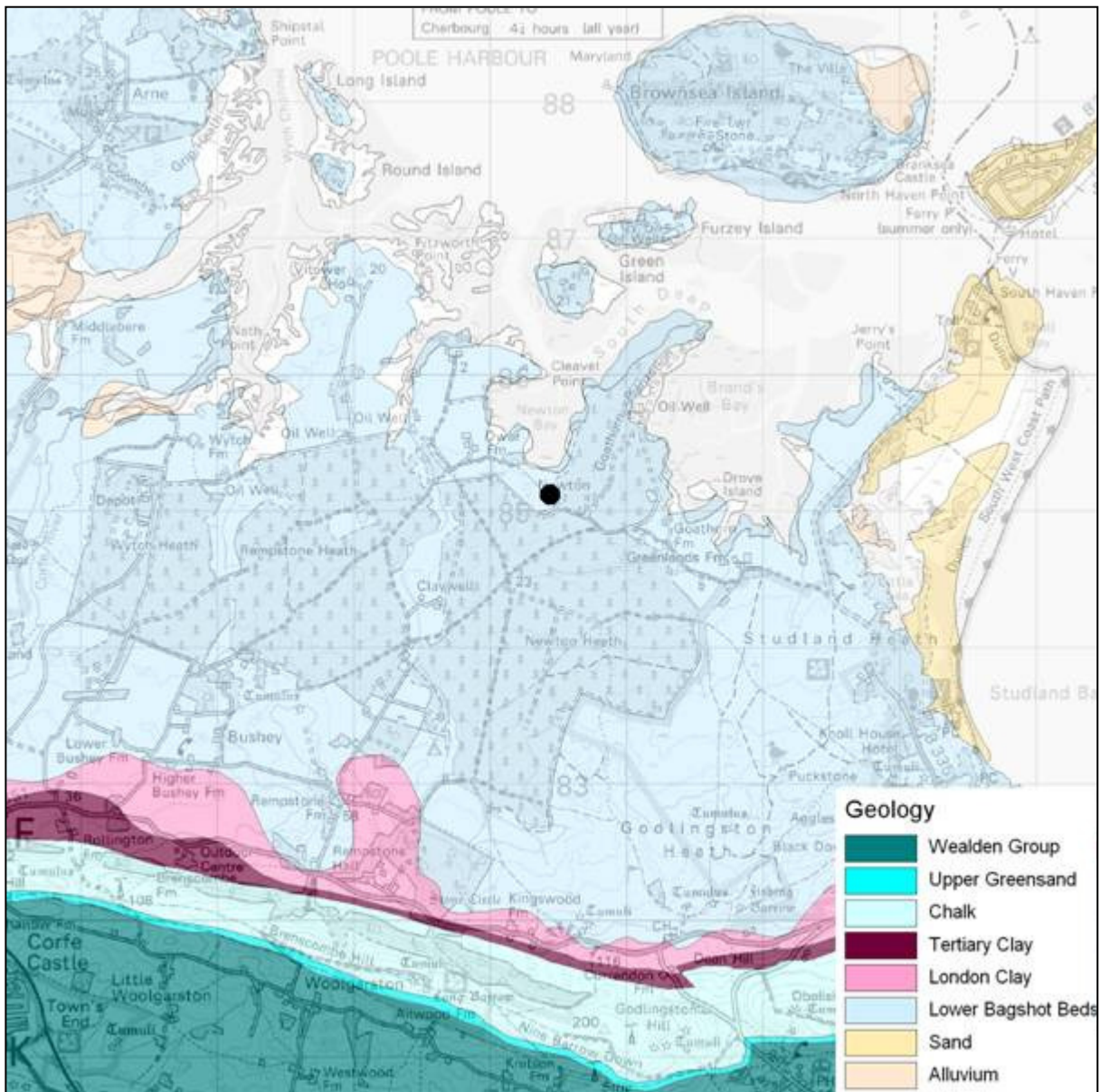
Figure 4: Geology of the Newton Area.

3.4 Landscape Character

Newton lies within the Dorset Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB), recognised as a nationally important landscape. This area has been the subject of several landscape character assessments, which help place the town into its wider surroundings.

In the national assessment of countryside character, Newton lies within National Character Area 135 *Dorset Heaths* (Countryside Agency 1999).

The key characteristics of National Character Area 135 are listed as:

- An exposed, open, broad-scale landscape forming a strong contrast with the adjacent character areas.

- Undulating lowland heath with tracts of heather, stunted pines and gorse scrub.
- Blocks of conifers forming locally-prominent landmarks.
- Mosaics of heathland, farmland, woodland and scrub.
- Much is sparsely populated areas with scattered settlements and a few small villages and towns but the extensive conurbation of Poole-Bournemouth forms a major influence in the south and east.
- Flat-bottomed, open valleys with floodplain pastures and willows.
- An outer edge of low, rolling hills with an irregular patchwork of pasture, woodland and dense hedges marking the transition to the chalk.
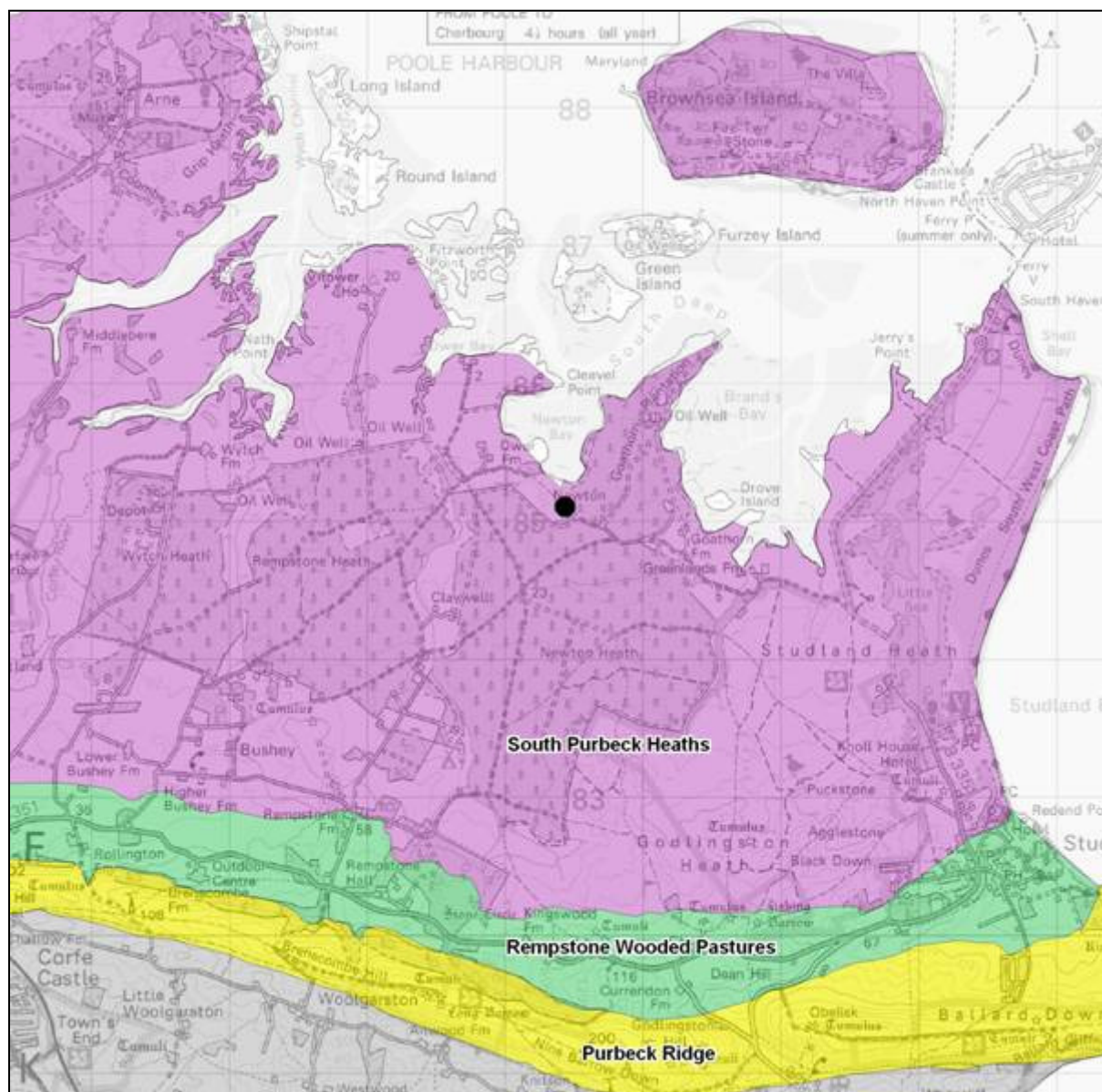
Figure 5: Newton in its landscape character setting (Dorset AONB Landscape Characterisation).

Newton is included in the Landscape Character Assessment of the Dorset AONB (Dorset AONB 2008). Newton lies within the South Purbeck Heaths Character Area, part of the Lowland Heathland Landscape Type (Figure 5).

The key characteristics of the South Dorset Heaths area are:

- Undulating and exposed heathland landscape with dense heather carpets, valley mires, gorse and isolated Scots pine
- Occasional small birch and oak woodlands
- Patches of rough acidic grassland and small rough enclosed pastures
- Mosaics of patchy heathland and scrub with woody thickets
- Reed beds and marshes grading towards Poole Harbour

- Wide open views of colourful and textured heathlands with tranquil experience
- Straight roads flanked by broadleaved woodlands and surrounding open heathlands
- Occasional isolated linear and clustered settlements.

The draft Historic Landscape Character mapping shows Goathorn peninsula and much of the area to the south as mixed plantation. Newton Cottage and the block of fields along the edge of Newton Bay towards Ower Farm are mapped as piecemeal enclosures.

3.5 The Present Town

The present settlement of Newton consists of a

single house, Newton Cottage. The small
farms of Ower and Goathorn lie about 800 m to
the west and east respectively. The remainder
of the area is primarily forestry plantations and
open grazing.

Part 4: Sources

4.1 Previous research

There was little early research into Newton, The charters relating to *Gotowre super mare* in Studland and *Nova Villa* in the warren of Corfe, appear to be unknown to early historians, such as Hutchins and Sydenham. These charters were first transcribed by James Tait in 1933, who suggested that the town laid out at *Gotowre super mare* and that at *Nova Villa* were one and the same (Tait 1933).

Newton was included in the pioneering studies of medieval new towns by Maurice Beresford, and he and J K St Joseph suggested a potential location of remains of the lost town (Beresford and St Joseph 1958). This site was investigated by Colin Bowen and Christopher Taylor in 1963 (Bowen and Taylor 1963).

In 1980, the evidence for Newton was summarised by Penn in his monograph on the historic towns of Dorset (1980).

More recent research has focused more on the archaeology as part of the Wytch Farm project (Cox and Hearne 1991). However, in 1998 T C Welsh re-evaluated the documentary evidence and suggested an alternative location for *Gotowre super mare* and *Nova Villa* (Welsh 1998). Subsequent to this, David Hinton has provided a useful summary review of current knowledge of Newton (Hinton 2002).

4.2 Historic Maps

There are no historic maps showing the town of Newton Studland, which had disappeared before the earliest maps of Dorset were produced. Nevertheless, the settlement of Newton is shown on a number of early maps of the county, for example Christopher Saxton's 1575 Map of Dorsetshire, John Speed's 1610 Map of Dorsetshyre and Robert Morden's 1695 Map of Dorsetshire. The 1597 map of Poole Harbour in the Hatfield Collection (DHC photocopy 403) marks Newton as a settlement, but provides no more useful detail than found on the county maps.

The 1765 map by Isaac Taylor marks an area called Newton to the east of Goathorn Point, close to the present Greenland's Farm. The 1st Edition one-inch Ordnance Survey map of 1811 shows buildings and closes around the present Newton Cottage, but does not mention Newton by name. These closes and Newton Cottage are shown in detail on the Studland Tithe Map (DHC T/STD). The later 19th and earlier 20th century 1:2500 scale Ordnance Survey maps apply the name Newton to the

clay works to the south of Goathorn Farm.

4.3 Documentary Evidence

There are two crucial documents relating to the history of Newton. The Calendar of Patent Rolls (ii, 217) records the appointment on 7 January 1286 of two commissioners to lay out a new town at *Gotowre super Mare* in the parish of Studland. The Calendar of Charter Rolls (ii, 337) records a charter dated 10 May 1287 granting two weekly markets and an annual fair to *Nova Villa* in Dorset.

Other documents mentioning Newton include a survey of 'The castle and chase of Corfe Castle' dated 1326 (transcribed by Rushton 2002) and Treswell's survey of Studland (DHC B/KL).

4.4 Archaeological Evidence

There have been two main phases of archaeological investigation associated with Newton (Appendix 3). In 1964 Colin Bowen and Christopher Taylor investigated the buildings suggested by Beresford and St Joseph (1958) as potentially marking the site of the town of Newton (Bowen and Taylor 1964). A number of small trenches were excavated and the results suggested that the remains were of a small cottage and outhouses no earlier than the first half of the 17th century in date. No remains that could be considered as being part of the town of Newton were found.

The second phase of archaeological work was carried out between 1987 and 1994 as part of the archaeological mitigation of the Wytch Farm Oilfield works (Cox and Hearne 1991; Dodd 1994). This included geophysical survey, test pitting, excavations and watching briefs.

4.5 Historic Buildings

No historic buildings associated with the planned town of *Gowtowre super mare* or *Nova Villa* survive. Newton Farmhouse or Newton Cottage is of late 17th or early 18th century date, but extensively modernised (RCHME 1970, 282).