

Part 6: Historic Urban Character Appraisal



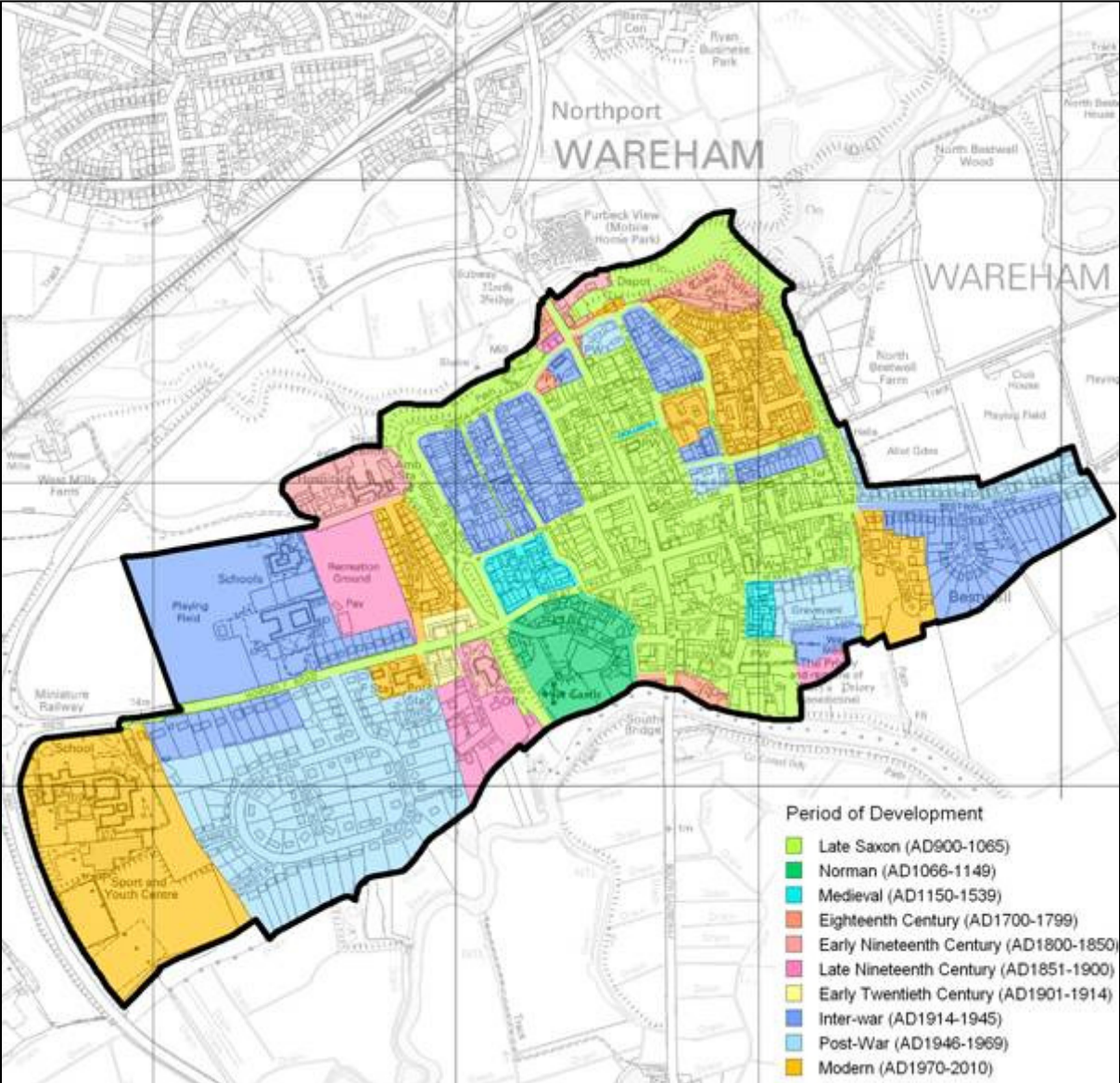


Figure 48: Map showing the major periods of development of Wareham.

6.1 The historic urban character of Wareham

The urban character of Wareham, like any town, is a product of many factors including the topographic position, history of estate ownership and management, geographical relationship with other towns and resources and other historical events.

The topographic position of Wareham, between the Rivers Frome and Piddle, has had a profound effect on the location, form, economy and character of the town. The settlement originated at the lowest bridging point on the River Frome and at a point where tidal waters allowed the development of a port. The location of the town on a narrow ridge between the rivers limited the opportunity for major expansion of the historic town and consequently a large suburb has developed to the north, separated from the historic core by the Piddle floodplain.

The plan layout of the historic core of Wareham is a grid system of streets constrained within rectilinear earthen town defences to the north, east and west and has its origins in the ninth century Saxon burh. The two main streets form a crossroads in the centre of the town and a series of narrow streets and lanes behind. The grid of streets is less well defined in the south part of the town, where the streets are more irregular around the open areas of St John's Hill and the Quay and may hint at an earlier settlement layout in this area. In the southwest corner, the lanes have a distinct curvature, reflecting the line of the former Norman motte and bailey castle. The southern side of the town is formed by the River Frome and its floodplain.

The town developed along the main streets with gradual infilling of the areas behind, a process which continued into the late 20th century. Outside the town walls 20th century development consists of typical suburban estate road layouts along the line of Worgret Road and, to a lesser extent, along Bestwall Road.

The property boundaries along the main streets generally form fairly regular long narrow burgage plots, suggestive of a planned layout. The date of origin of these boundaries is uncertain, but a proportion are likely to be medieval or late Saxon. Beyond the main streets, the pattern of plots is less regular.

The historic buildings form a major element of the character of Wareham. The main streets have almost continuous built frontages comprising predominantly Georgian brick houses of

two and three storeys, post-dating the 1762 fire, with only a few buildings set back from the frontage, mainly towards the margins of the town. The main streets are wide and straight, becoming wider towards the central cross. This is in contrast to the back lanes which are often narrow, with smaller cottages and houses along them. There are also a few important medieval and earlier buildings, of which the best example is St Martin's Church.

The centre of Wareham is a densely packed urban environment with little in the way of open green spaces, which are concentrated around the edge of the historic core. The grass-covered town walls are the main green space in the town and provide good views over the Piddle floodplain to the north and over the Bestwall peninsula to the east. The views across the Frome river meadows to the Purbeck Hills in the south are an important aspect of the character, particularly of the area around the quay.

6.2 Historic Urban Character Areas of Wareham

A total of eight Historic Urban Character Areas have been defined for Wareham as shown on Figure 49 and listed below. They comprise the area of the main streets (Character Area 1), the early settlement focus of St John's Hill and Lady St Mary (Area 2), the area of the former Norman castle (Area 3), the town walls (Area 4), the areas behind the main street frontages in the north part of the town (areas 5 and 6) and suburban expansion to the east and west of the town (areas 7 and 8).

- 1 The Town Centre
- 2 St John's Hill
- 3 Pound Lane
- 4 Town Walls
- 5 Northeast Quarter
- 6 Northwest Quarter
- 7 Worgret Road
- 8 Bestwall Road

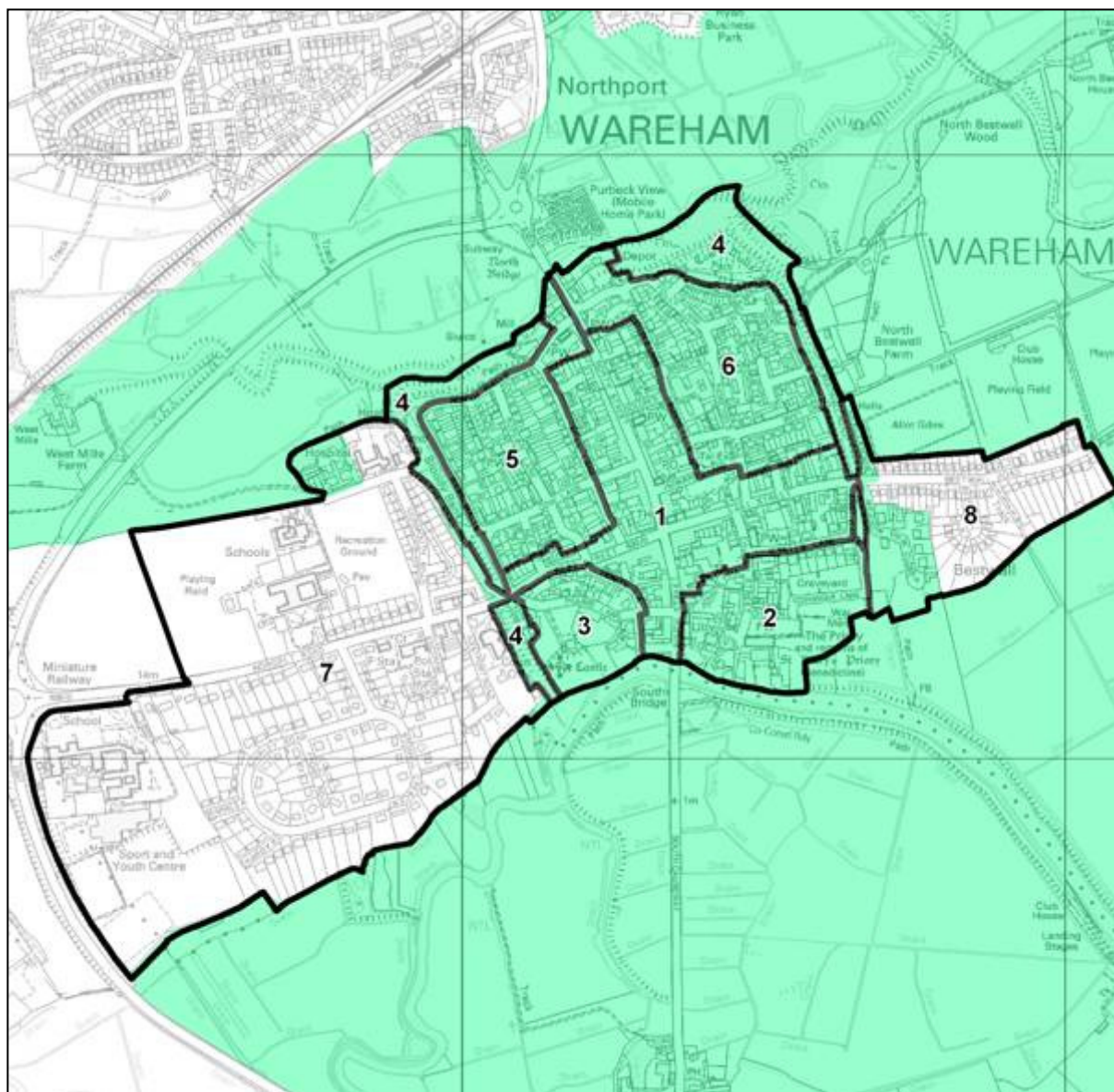


Figure 49: Wareham Historic Urban Character Areas and Conservation Areas.