

Part 6: Historic Urban Character Appraisal



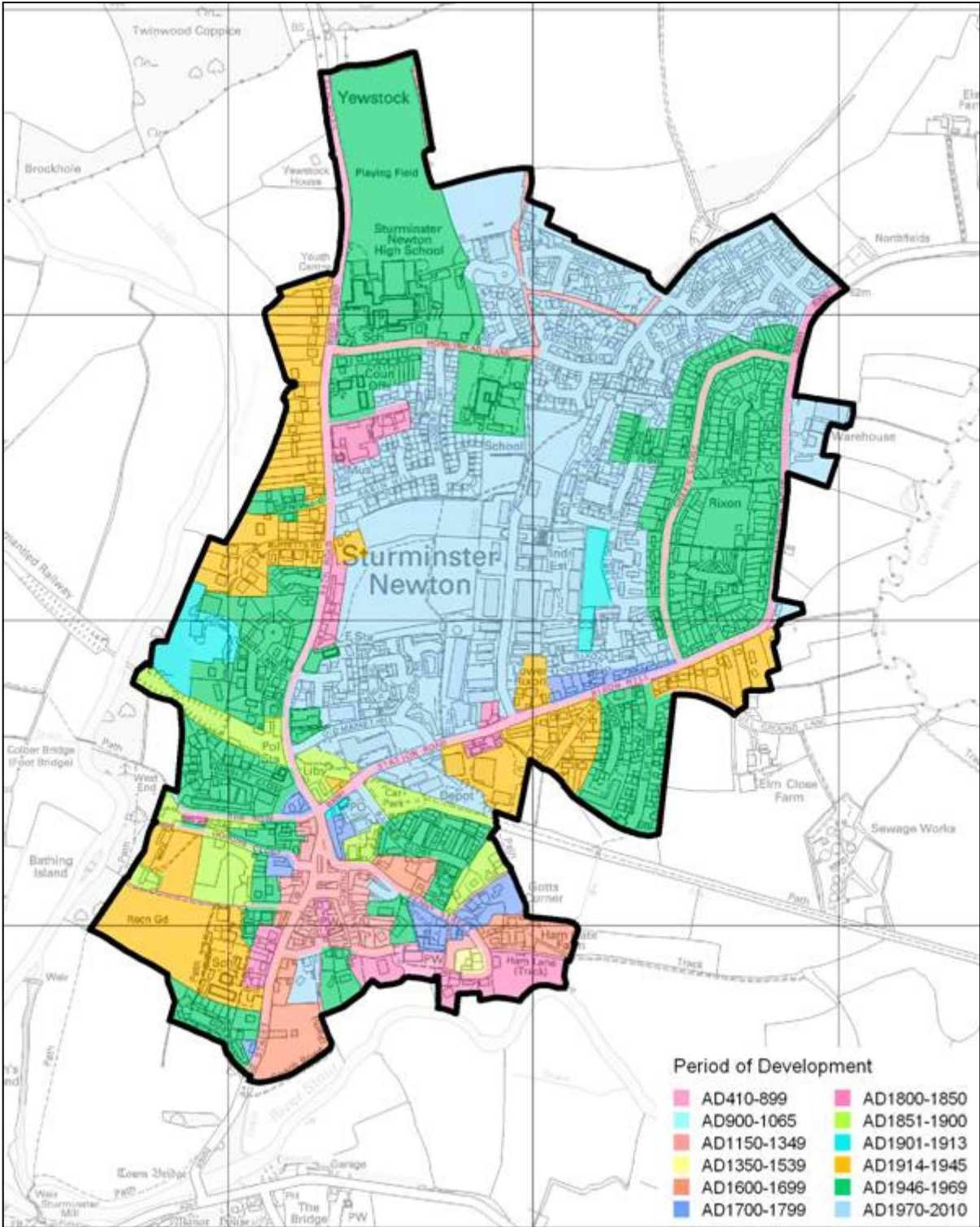


Figure 46: Map showing the major periods of development of Sturminster Newton

6.1 The historic urban character of Sturminster Newton

The urban character of Sturminster Newton, 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 Sturminster, at the southern end of a Corallian limestone ridge within a loop of the River Stour, has a profound effect on the location, form, economy and character of the town. The ridge forms a central spine within the expanse of the Blackmore Vale upon which a major N-S route through the area has developed. The pattern of streets within the town has developed at the junction of this route, with others running parallel with the Stour vale. Furthermore, the position of the town, at the heart of the Blackmore Vale, enabled its growth as a cloth, leather and dairy centre in the region. The town has benefited from its location as a communications hub for the entire upper Stour vale since at least the 9th century when the minster church and small agricultural community occupied a prominent position above the Stour, opposite a putative Royal Castle and Iron Age hillfort. A planned settlement was established in the late Saxon period, possibly under the patronage of Glastonbury Abbey. This settlement straddled the important N-S ridge top route. The minster was already an ecclesiastical centre for the region and the planned town may have functioned as an adjacent market.

The plan layout of the present town is in two parts divided by the line of the former railway, with the nucleated historic town centre focused on the triangular market place to the south and more modern suburban development with looped and cul-de-sac road networks to the north. The position of the church on the edge of the town is unusual, and probably reflects its origins as a Saxon minster church. The historic core of the town survives relatively complete, with a large proportion of historic buildings tightly packed around the market. This area also contains fossilised remnants of earlier street and plot alignments hinting at a complex development history. This is largely a medieval layout, focused on the later medieval market place, with little surviving of the late Saxon plan. There is a clear distinction between the historic commercial town centre and the area of the church (the Saxon minster site), which has a leafy low-density settlement character. Post-medieval expansion was initially concen-

trated to the south of the medieval town and comprised suburban villas and town houses seeking a good prospect across the Stour valley. This desirable suburban development soon spread to the vistas to the west of the town in the 18th and 19th centuries. Modern development was heralded by the arrival of the railway outside of the historic core to the north. Initially the deep cut and embanked railway created a barrier to northerly expansion, although during the mid 20th century it became a focus for commercial and industrial expansion. 19th century squatter style cottages had developed along the two main roads to the north and north east of the town during the 19th century. However, it was the creation of a new cattle market adjacent to the railway station and yard that enabled Sturminster's rise as a modern cattle rearing and dairy centre. This area, around Butts Pond, remains the industrial and administrative hub of the town despite the successive closures of the railway, cattle market and cheese factory between 1966 and 2000. Commercial success during the 20th century meant a steady population rise at a time when other small Dorset towns were waning. 20th and 21st century housing developments now occupy an expansive area to the north of the former railway track (Figure 46).

The historic buildings form a major element of the historic character of Sturminster Newton. There are a good number of 16th and 17th century buildings surviving within the town centre, particularly in the southern part of the town. The northern part of the historic town contains more 18th century buildings which may represent replacements following a fire in 1729.

Sturminster Newton is blessed with a largely intact historic core and a ring of green spaces and meadows between it and the River Stour. A substantial area of former fields survives at the centre of the modern housing estates to the north of the town. Modern re-development in the area of the former railway and cattle market is also a prominent component of Sturminster's urban character.

6.2 Historic Urban Character Areas of Sturminster Newton

A total of five Historic Urban Character Areas have been defined for Sturminster Newton as shown on Figure 47 and listed below. They comprise the Minster (Character Area 1), the historic town centre (Area 2), the suburban expansion of the town to the south and west in the later post-medieval period (Area 3), the central industrial zone (Area 4) and modern

housing estates to the north east of Sturminster Newton (Area 5).

- 1 The Minster
- 2 The Town Centre

- 3 The Western Fringe
- 4 Central Industrial Zone
- 5 North East Housing Estates

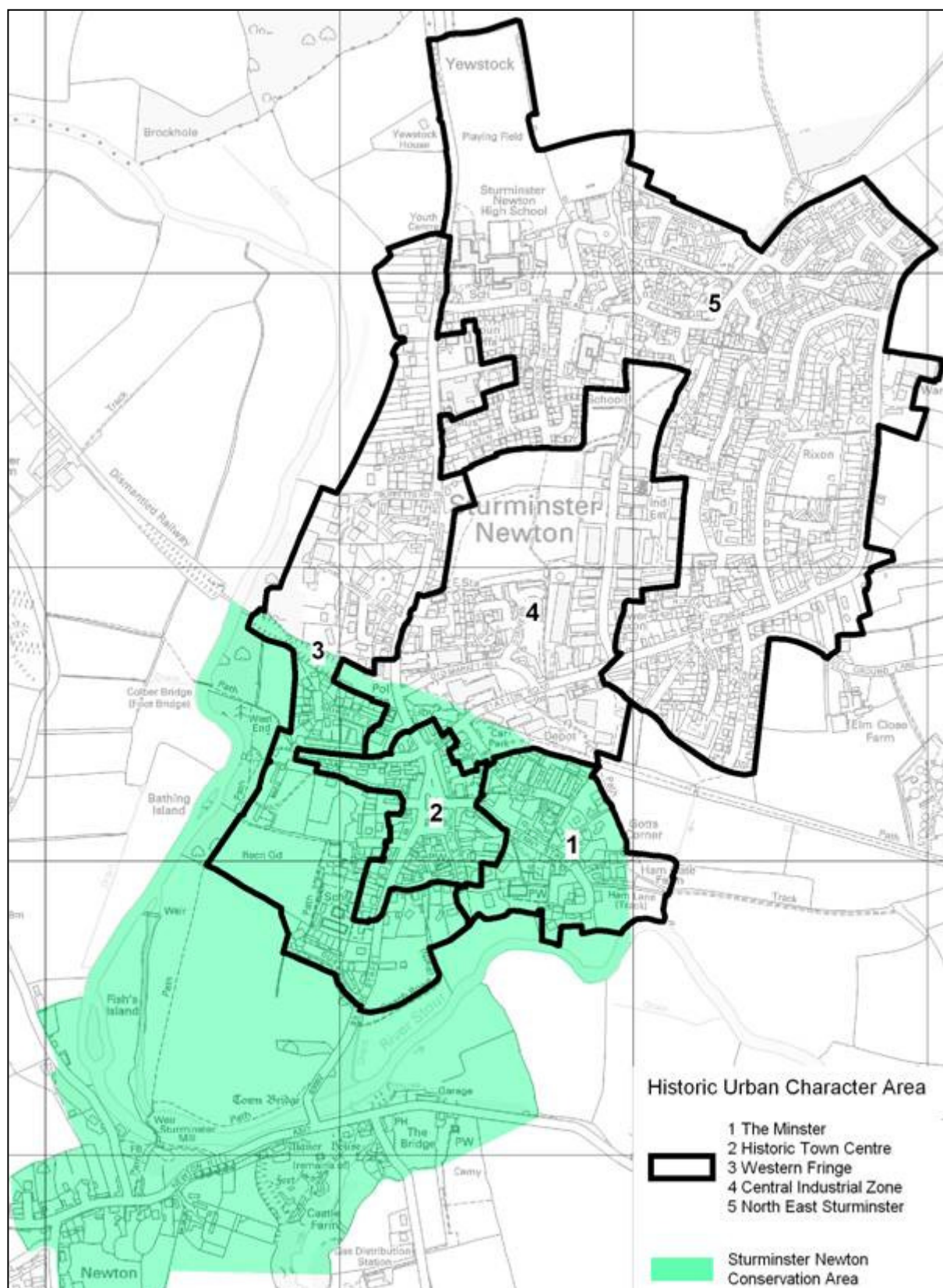


Figure 47: Sturminster Newton Historic Urban Character Areas and Conservation Area.