

Part 6: Historic Urban Character Appraisal



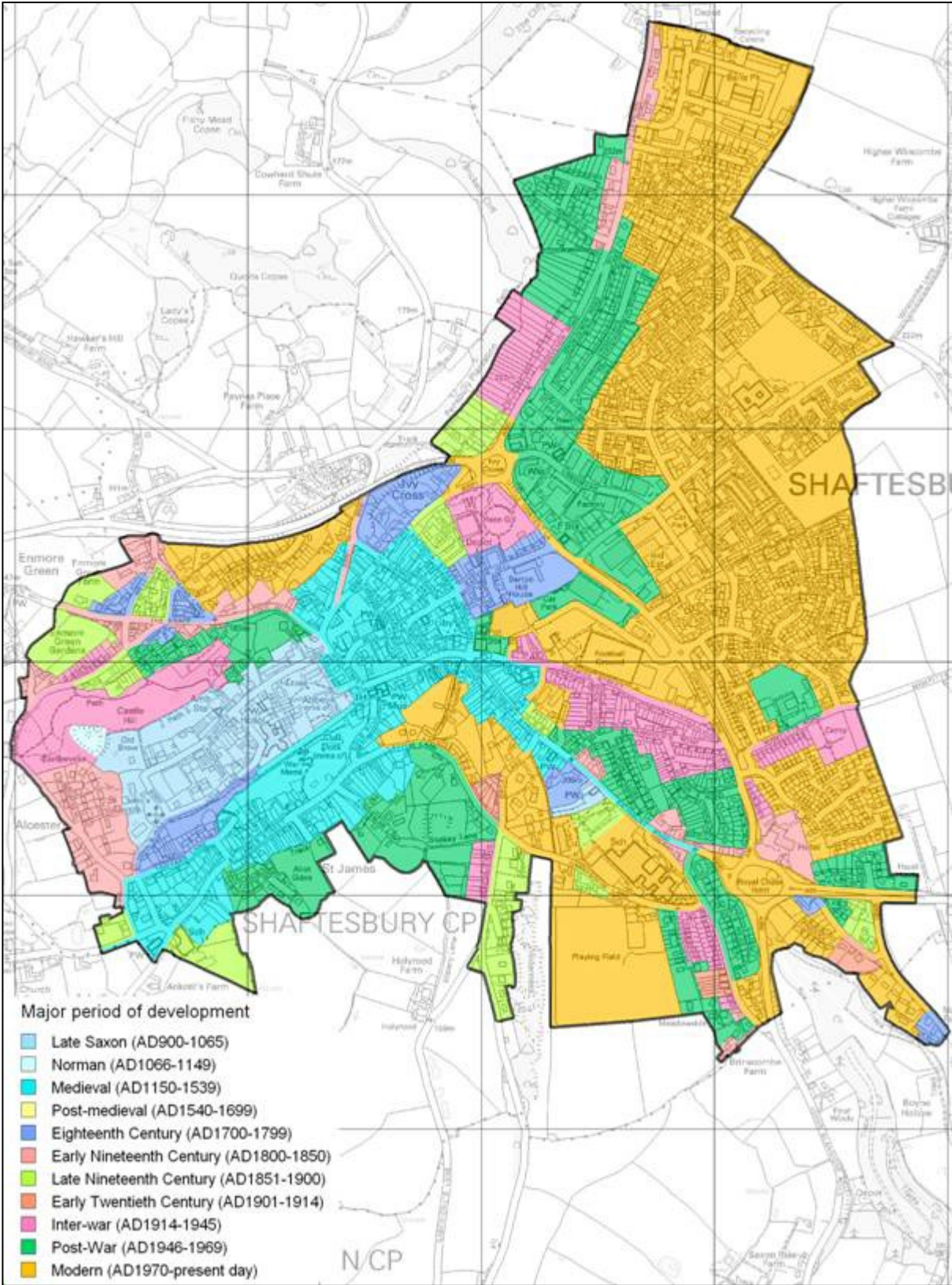


Figure 53: Map showing the major periods of development of Shaftesbury.

6.1 The historic urban character of Shaftesbury

The urban character of Shaftesbury, like any town, is a product of many factors including topographic position, history of estate ownership and management, geographical relationship with other towns and resources, and other historical events. The topographic position of Shaftesbury, on a projecting spur of Upper Greensand overlooking the Blackmore Vale, has had a profound effect on the location, form, economy and character of the town. The pattern of streets, running parallel with and cutting across the Greensand ridge, reflects the underlying pattern of the geology. The position of the town itself, on the tip of the Greensand ridge, was largely the result of the defensive potential of the topography, which formed an important aspect of the siting of the original Alfredian burh in the late ninth century.

The character of Sherborne has been shaped by its history: from its origins as an Alfredian burh, through the rise and fall of the abbey, its importance as a place of pilgrimage and a refuge for travellers on the Great West Road, and its long history as a successful market town from the late Saxon and medieval periods onwards.

The plan layout of the town consists of several major elements. The historic core comprises the rectangular area of the former Saxon burh lying along the spur, with its single main street and perpendicular parallel lanes, and the Late Saxon or medieval market town to the east, which has an irregular grid of streets and lanes and the vestiges of regular burgage plots. The location of the medieval market place is still evident in the width of the High Street and The Commons.

A radial pattern of roads connect the town to Salisbury, Sherborne, Gillingham, Warminster, Blandford and further afield. These roads are likely to have their origins in the Saxon period or earlier. Linear development along Salisbury Street may mark a medieval historic suburb. The limits of the medieval town to the east is marked by the fringe-belt of Barton Hill and Cockram's Field, with its large scale recreational and commercial developments.

Below the hilltop is the linear development of St James, an early suburb of the town, as well as more dispersed rural settlements at Cann, Enmore Green and along Layton Lane and at Little Down. Modern suburban development is largely concentrated to the east of the historic town on the east side of Christy's Lane, though

there are smaller areas of modern housing on the edges of Enmore Green, St James and Cann (Figure 53).

Historic buildings form a major part of the character of Shaftesbury. The majority date from the early 19th century rebuilding of the town, but there is a very small number of medieval and early post-medieval structures and rather more 18th century houses. The market place and High Street retain their 19th century façade and large buildings that reflect the town's prosperity as a market town. Gold Hill and St James contain some of the best preserved historic streetscapes in the town. The extensive use of local Greensand for walling is a strong contribution to the distinctive historic character of Shaftesbury.

Modern suburban development in Shaftesbury is typical of its period and has little local distinctiveness, either in estate layout or house style. However, as this development has largely avoided the historic core, it has not detracted significantly from the historic character of the town centre.

Open green spaces and panoramic views across the Blackmore Vale to the north, west and south contribute significantly to the character of Shaftesbury. Green spaces are concentrated on the steep slopes around the historic town and include Abbey Park and Castle Hill, both historic sites. Other more minor open spaces are found on Snakey Lane (the former Abbey fishponds), Roll Millennium Green in St James, Enmore Green, and the Recreation Ground on Barton Hill.

6.2 Historic Urban Character Areas of Shaftesbury

A total of eight Historic Urban Character Areas have been defined for Shaftesbury as shown on Figure 54 and listed below.

They comprise the area of the Greensand promontory comprising the area of the Saxon burh and abbey (Character Area 1), the medieval town centre and market place (Area 2), the historic suburb of St James (Area 3), the peripheral, mainly commercial and recreational development at Barton Hill (Area 4), the rural semi-suburban area below the town along Layton Lane (Area 5), the historic rural settlements of Cann (Area 6) and Enmore Green (Area 7) and the modern housing and industrial estates on the eastern edge of Shaftesbury (Area 8).

- 1 Bimport
- 2 Shaftesbury Town Centre

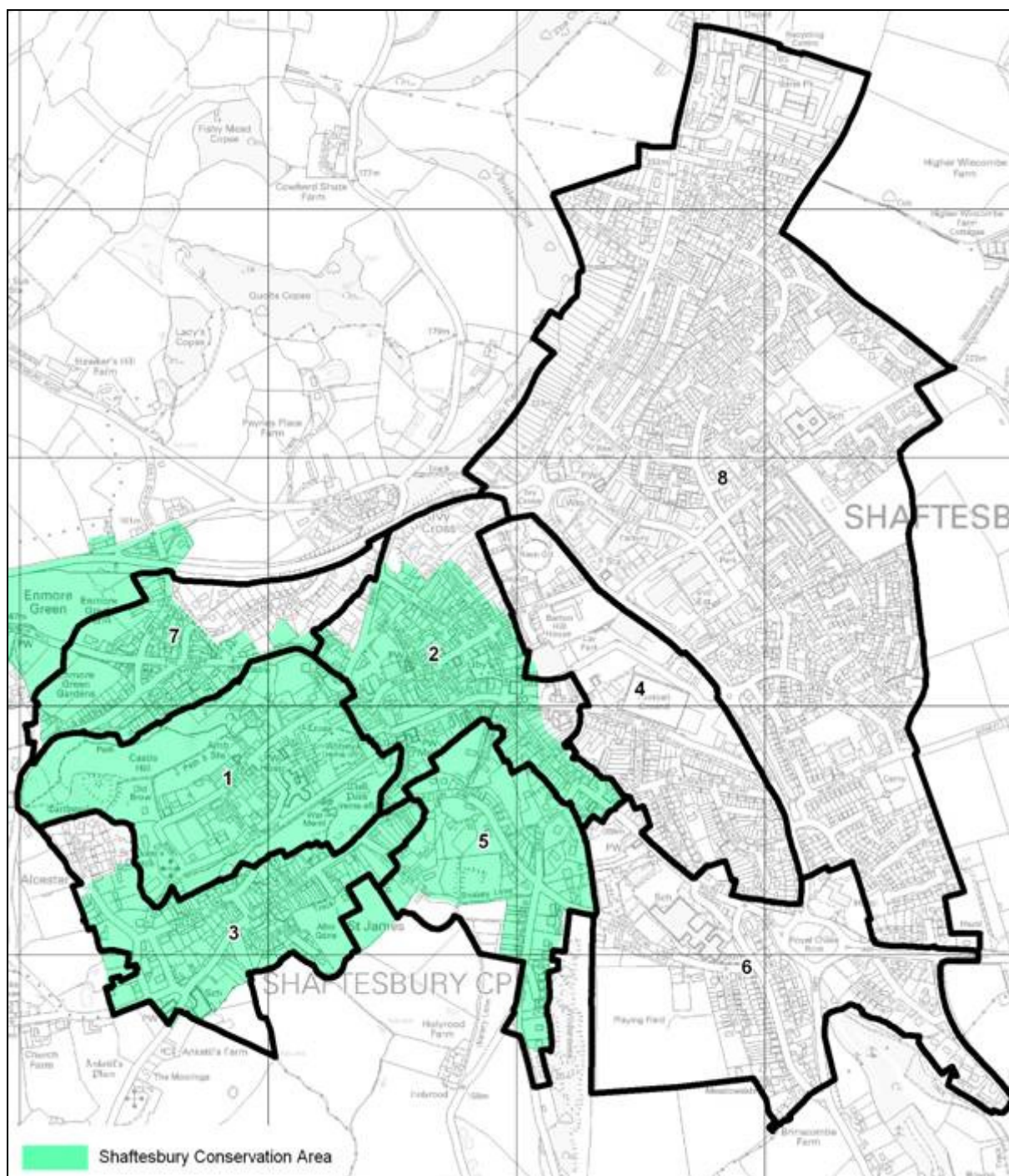


Figure 54: Shaftesbury Historic Urban Character Areas and Conservation Area.

- 3 St James
- 4 Barton Hill and Cockram's Field
- 5 Layton Lane
- 6 Cann
- 7 Enmore Green
- 8 East of Christy's Lane