

Part 6: Historic Urban Character Appraisal



6.1 The historic urban character of Charmouth

The historic urban character of Charmouth, in common with all towns, is a product of many factors including its topographic position, history of estate ownership and management, geographical relationship with other towns and resources, and other historical and economic events.

The topographic position of Charmouth on the hillslopes on the west side of the River Char valley has exerted some influence on the location of the town, but has had only relatively minor influence on its subsequent development. Its position adjacent to a crossing of the River Char and the relatively easy access to the coast alongside the valley was probably a major factor in the initial location of the town. Rather more important, however, is the fact

that it lay on a one of the major routes through Dorset. It is this that provided a major impetus for the foundation of the town and has influenced its layout and subsequent development.

The town has a typical linear plan form comprising a series of regular plots laid out along both sides of the main road. The regularity of the major plan elements reflect its origins as a planned town. The original regular long narrow burgage plots still form a major element in the modern town and have influenced the shape of development right through to the present day, although more recent development has tended to erode the original burgage plot boundaries. Much of the suburban development to the south of the historic core has also taken place within the remains of what may have been enclosed medieval strip fields, probably laid out at the time of the town's foundation.

Historic buildings form a major element of the

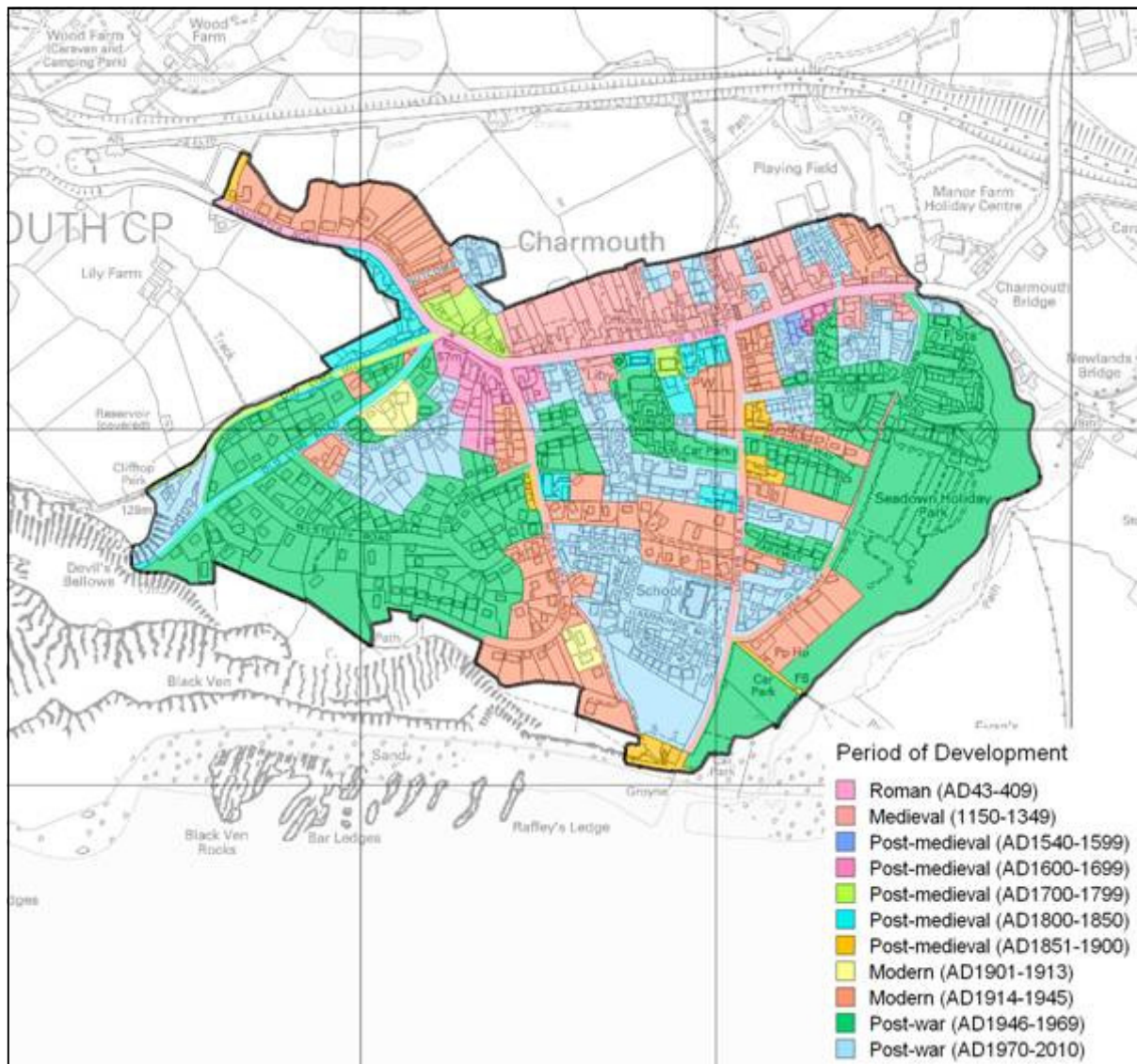


Figure 24: Map showing the major periods of development in Charmouth.

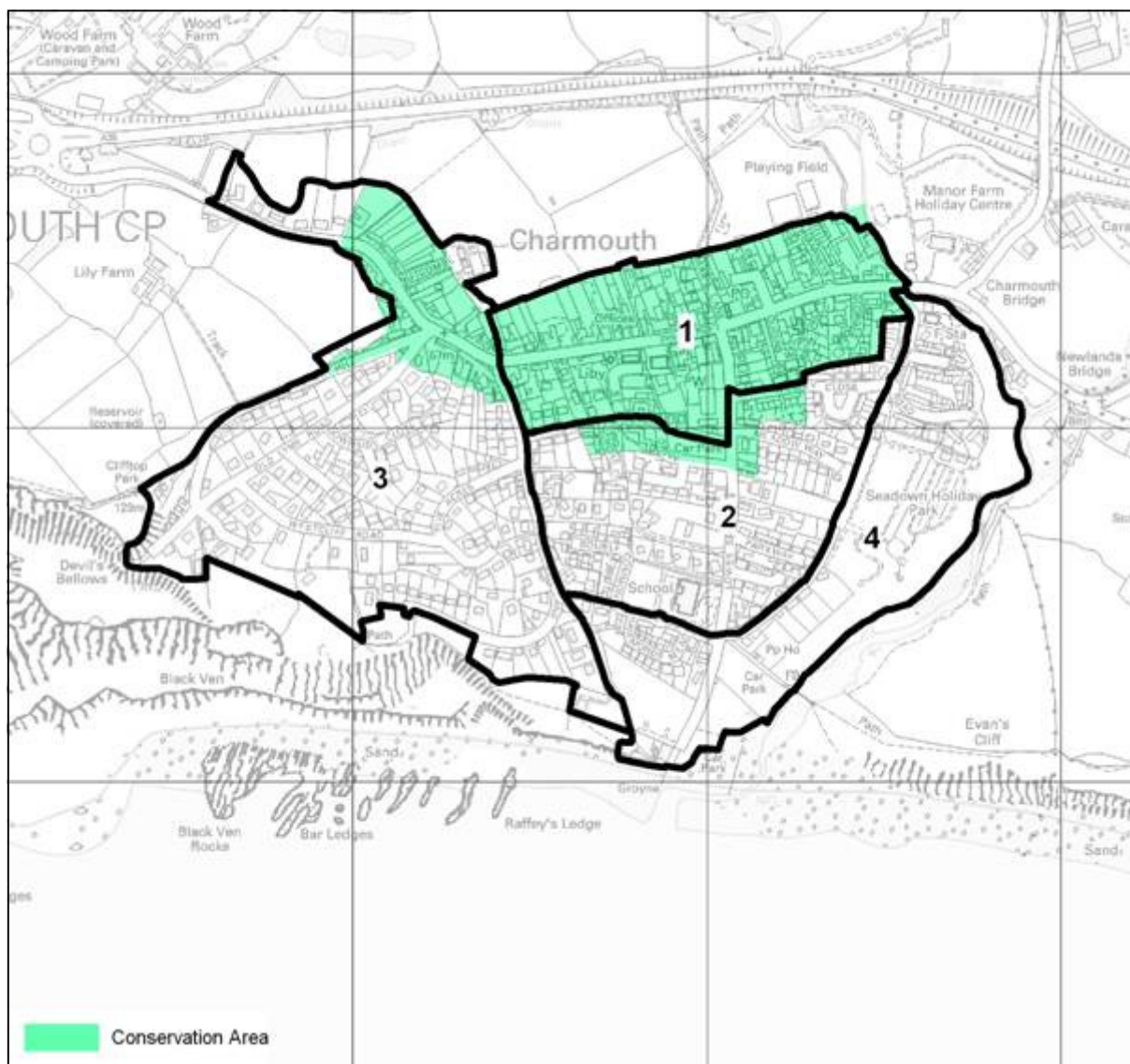


Figure 25: Charmouth Historic Urban Character Areas in relationship to the Conservation Area.

historic character of the centre of Charmouth. These are mainly along The Street and its extensions up Axminster Road and Old Lyme Hill. The Street is dominated by a good collection of late Regency and early Victorian houses and cottages, with some prominent earlier houses and cottages dating from the 16th-17th century, which add additional interest and variety and underscore its historic depth.

The position of the town on a hillslope exerts a strong visual influence on the town, adding variety to the visual experience of the town and providing good views over the town and the surrounding landscape, particularly from higher up on the western side of Charmouth. Green spaces and trees form an important element in the urban fabric with many prominent mature trees within the centre of the town and many trees and mature planting in the suburban development to the south, obscuring much of the housing and softening the boundaries with the

surrounding countryside.

Modern development has taken place mainly to the south of the historic core and has tended to be mainly small scale development. There has also been significant infill behind the historic frontages along The Street.

6.2 Historic Urban Character Areas of Charmouth

A total of four Historic Urban Character Areas have been defined for Charmouth as shown on Figure 25. They comprise the historic core of the town (Area 1) and areas of largely 20th century suburban growth (Areas 2-4).

- 1 The Street
- 2 Lower Sea Lane
- 3 West Charmouth
- 4 East Charmouth