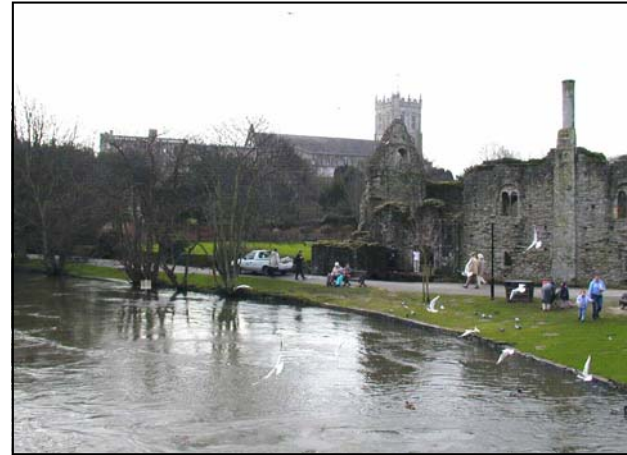**5.0 The Built Up Area**

5.0 The Built Up Area

5.1 General Description

5.1.1 Christchurch has expanded from an historic Saxon 'burh' into a series of suburban neighbourhoods that stretch along the coastal frontage. The historic centre was strategically positioned within the natural haven and defences of harbour and rivers. The historic settlement of the area was guided by constraints such as flooding and the location of high ground and encouraged by opportunities for agriculture and fishing. As illustrated by the 1898 survey map the settlement pattern up until that time was limited to small scale scattered communities. The expansion started with the arrival of rail links in the 1860's. A station and later junction to the north of the town provided an initial focus for 'urban' expansion. At the same time, the attractions of the coast encouraged the growth of the hamlets such as Highcliffe and Mudeford into small local villages.

5.1.2 The development of the Borough included military infrastructure with the Christchurch airfield and Artillery Barracks. Between and following the first and second world wars, the Borough continued to expand initially around these facilities, and subsequently the sites themselves have been redeveloped.

5.1.3 The progression of development from the late 1800s through to the 20th century has been relentless. Evidence of development from each decade can be found in all the main neighbourhoods. The development pattern has expanded out to clear physical limits on practically every boundary. The pattern has also joined the earlier villages together so that some areas are now difficult to differentiate from one another.

5.1.4 The identity of the once separate areas is also reduced by the general conformity of the post-war development within the Borough. The outlines of the earlier scatter of settlements are still present within the area. These stand out as pockets of the more traditional streets or terraces within the general pattern. As the original settlement pattern was very sparse these areas are now a rare commodity within the urban area. Many of these areas have been protect by Conservation Area status. **Figure 5.1** illustrates how the distribution of modern Conservation Areas relates to the Ordnance Survey of 1898.

5.1.5 The Conservation Areas have not prevented any change, but these areas still stand out as distinctive elements that help bring some legibility to the Townscape. Much of the post-war expansion has been residential development. This has led to a townscape that does not contain a wide diversity of land uses. There are local pockets of light industry and retail uses, but there is an overall impression of a townscape dominated by residential development.

5.1.6 With the attraction of the south coast as a high quality environment particularly for retirement, much of this residential development is good quality, moderate density and low rise. While there is a lack of legibility and diversity in parts of the residential townscape, the general impression is of an essentially pleasant residential environment.

5.1.7 Some of the earliest phases of expansion development dating from the early 1900s was in the form of small estates, these now provide areas with a very mature and well established environment. Throughout the built up area there is also a strong presence of mature trees. Many are found in the large gardens of older developments. Some can be traced back to hedgelines that pre-date development. While there is a general lack of open green space within the area, the extensive tree cover makes a very significant contribution to the character of the built up area as a whole.

5.1.8 Local, often subtle variations in the housing patterns provides some variety in the expanded areas. The variations in layout styles is related to different fashions and building layout preferences of developers. These styles vary within individual areas, but are often repeated in other parts of the Borough.

5.1.9 With the Green Belt constraints on continual outward expansion and high residential land values, there has been significant pressure for infill development. Individual large houses have made way for a number of smaller properties. In some areas groups of individual gardens have been amalgamated to allow for small infill developments. This has helped increase the density of the urban area but at the same time has had an impact on the character and vegetation structure of the townscape.

5.2 Townscape, Neighbourhoods and Character Areas

5.2.1 The overall pattern of development has joined earlier settlements together. Passing through these areas the similarities of housing types can make it difficult to differentiate. However, at a local level physical boundary features can be found that allow individual areas to be separated into neighbourhoods. In some locations this is created by the presence of the railway or major roads. In others it is the poor level of permeability between areas

CONSERVATION AREA BOUNDARY

CHRISTCHURCH BOROUGH BOUNDARY

Figure 5.1 - Conservation Areas Overlaid 1989 Survey Map

Macgregor · Smith
Landscape Architecture