

Part 6: Historic Urban Character Appraisal



6.1 The historic urban character of Beaminster

The topographic position of Beaminster has a profound effect on the location, form and character of the town. The pattern of streets reflects the underlying pattern of streams draining into the headwaters of the river Brit. The town's location in a natural bowl means that the surrounding landscape provides a backdrop to many of the views within the town.

The plan layout is a typical nucleated form, focused on the central market place, with radial roads running out from it following water-courses and historic routes from the downs to the north and down the Brit valley to the south. The position of the church on the edge of the town is unusual and undoubtedly reflects its origins as a Saxon minster church. The historic core of the town is still tightly defined by its plan shape, plot shape and the high concentration of historic buildings, as very little development took place beyond the boundaries of the medieval town until the 20th century (Figure 32). The town developed around the market place and as ribbon development along the major roads, with small areas of historic suburban development along some routes, particularly along North Street, the Broadwindsor

Road and at Newtown, which have formed the kernel for the 20th century suburban development. The property boundaries form rectangular and rectilinear plots of varying sizes (but generally small and compact), which suggests they were developed piecemeal rather than as a planned layout. These plots are probably medieval in origin but with later subdivision and amalgamation. The relatively small plots along the street frontages have a series of larger paddocks and gardens behind. These are particularly evident along the north side of Hogshill Street and on Fleet Street and may reflect a medieval arrangement. The north side of East Street has distinctive regular long plots, which suggests a degree of deliberate planning.

The historic buildings form a major element of the historic character of Beaminster. There are a large number of 18th and 19th century buildings in the historic core, forming a dense almost unbroken street frontage punctuated by a number of larger gentry town houses set back from the road in their own gardens. The streets are generally fairly narrow with subtle curves along their length and rise and fall with the topography, which, together with a range of different historic buildings, gives each street its own individual character. In the southeast part

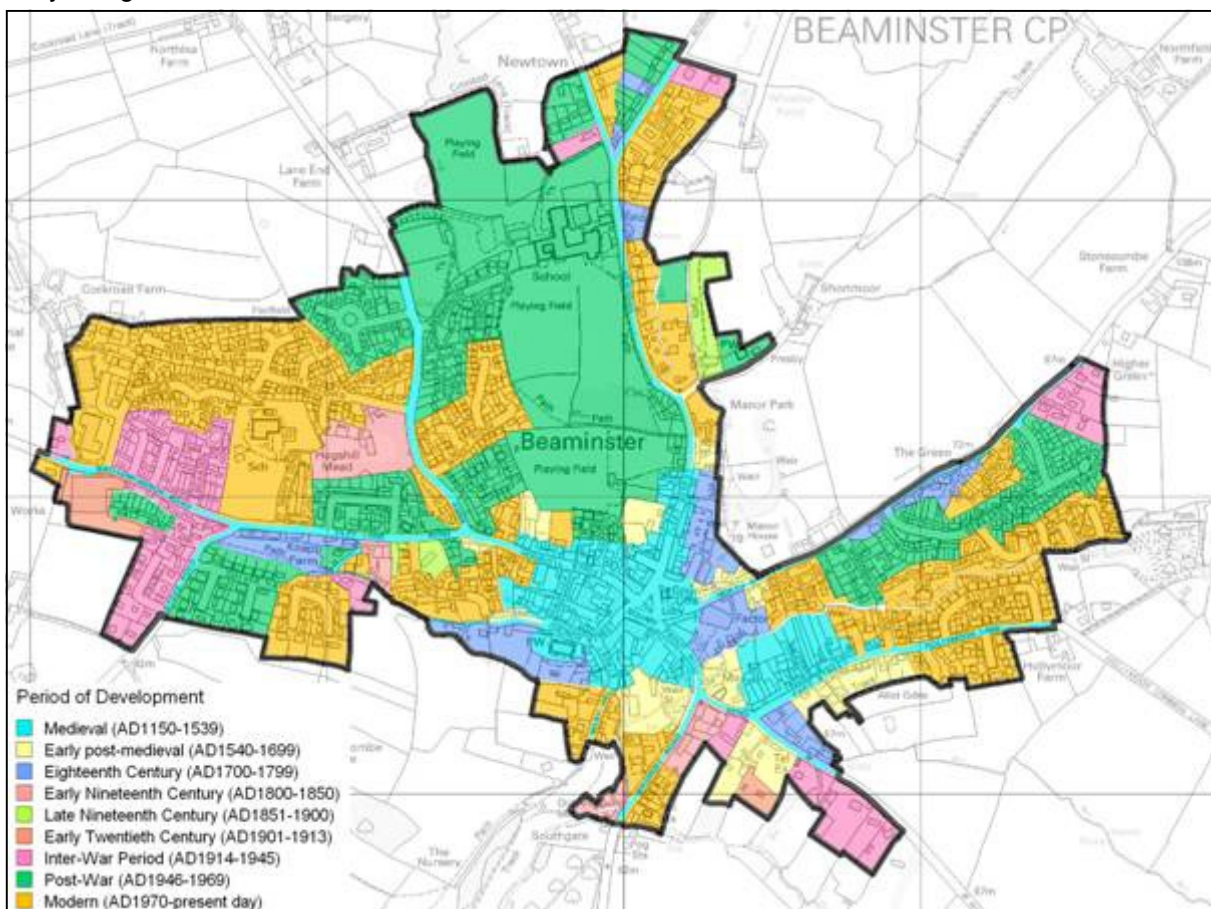


Figure 32: Map showing the major periods of development of Beaminster.

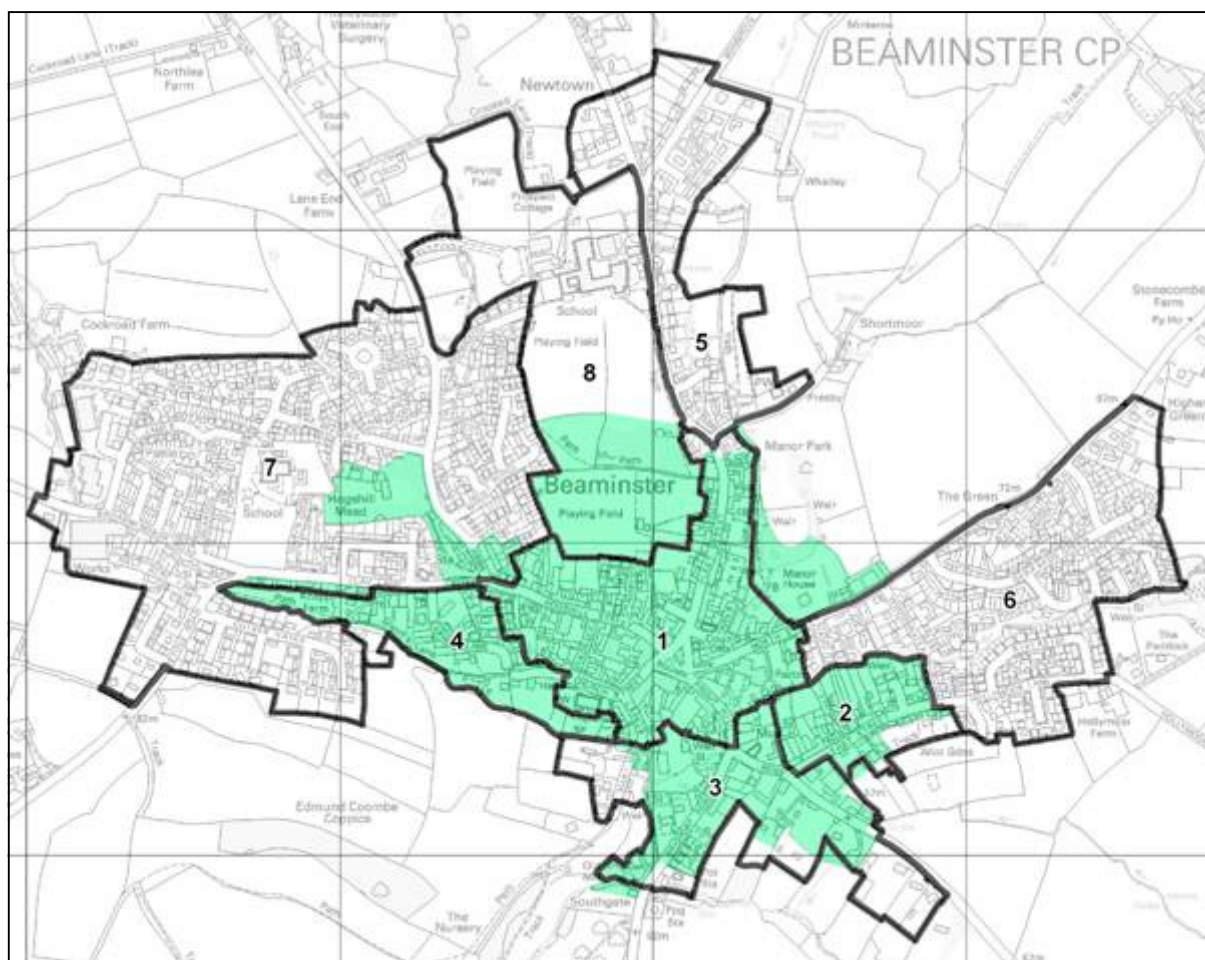


Figure 33: Beaminster Historic Urban Character Areas.

of the town there is a distinctive area containing a number of surviving good quality 17th century houses, mainly set in their own grounds.

Green spaces and trees form only a small component of the urban fabric, limited to a few gardens associated with the larger houses and the churchyard in the centre. However, beyond the centre, mature trees in the larger gardens and the glimpses of green paddocks and fields behind the street frontages have a much higher prominence in the urban environment. The well-defined edges between the rural and urban spaces, together with the rising topography beyond the town gives good views of green spaces. The grounds of Beaminster School and the Memorial Playing Fields form a green wedge running right in towards the centre of the town.

There has been substantial modern development, particularly to the north, east and west. This has been mainly private housing estates, with a small amount of social housing, two schools and an industrial estate. The private housing comprises a large number of bungalows as well as semi-detached houses, mainly

arranged in estates with a culs-de-sac road layout.

6.2 Historic Urban Character Areas of Beaminster

A total of eight Historic Urban Character Areas have been defined for Beaminster as shown on Figure 33. They comprise the historic core of the town (Character Area 1), areas of pre-19th century suburban growth (Areas 2-4), and later suburbs (Areas 5-8).

- 1 Beaminster Historic Core
- 2 East Street
- 3 Southgate and Whitcombe
- 4 Shorts Lane
- 5 Newtown
- 6 Gerrard's Green/Hollymoor
- 7 Clay Lane and Tunnel Road
- 8 Beaminster School/Memorial Playing Field