

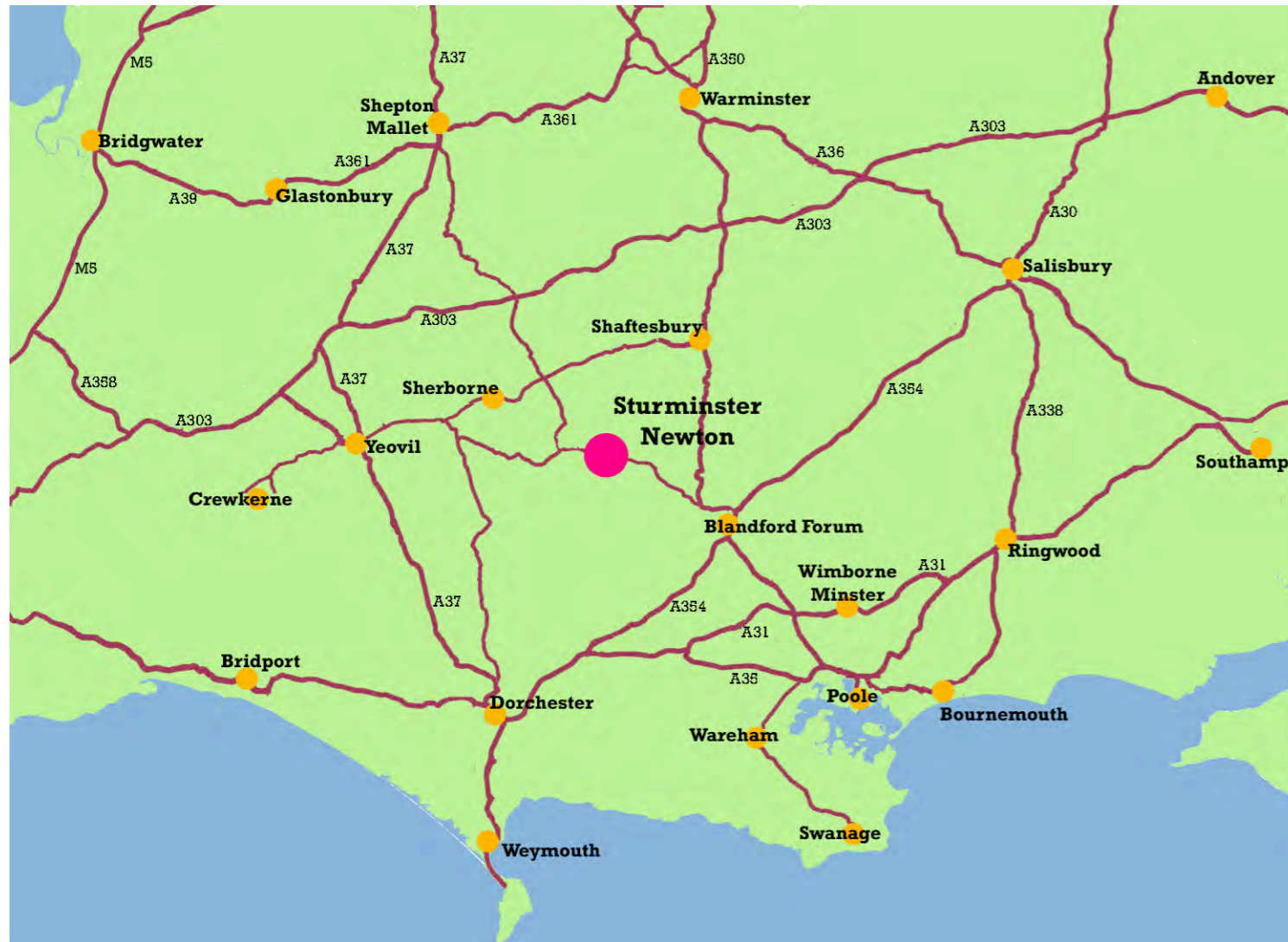
01 Introduction



Introduction

01.01

Background



Location Plan

Sturminster Newton (population 3,520 in mid-2004) is situated in the heart of rural Dorset, midway between Yeovil and Blandford Forum.

Historically the town has been the social and economic focus for the local rural community and economy, but the massive technological and social changes of the 20th Century, and indeed of the 21st Century, have had a radical effect on rural communities such as Sturminster Newton. Amongst the most obvious recent changes has been the loss of local agricultural services, such as the closure of Sturminster Newton's renowned cattle market in 1997 and the closure of the creamery in 2000, together with a substantial increase in the physical extent of the town to the north. Also noteworthy has been the rise of commercial and private mobility, which has led to the erosion of local industries through wider competition and which has allowed local people and incomers to work much further afield in regional centres such as Poole and Bournemouth.

All these and other trends have resulted in some considerable changes in the physical form and character of the town. Although the old town retains much of its original character (no doubt substantially protected through its Conservation Area status), the later 20th Century enlargements to the town generally demonstrate a marked departure in form and character from its earlier, more traditional, part. In these areas, the constraints of pre-industrial economics that were responsible for giving the old town so much of its character have no longer applied, whereas new factors, such as the predominance of the motor car with its various demands and associated regulations, have prevailed. The result has been a marked break in the town's connection with its rural roots and the loss of local distinctiveness and character.

The effects of such substantial change have resulted in an increased national awareness of the damaging effects that such a radical break with tradition can have on the form and appearance of settlements, and although the negative effects of change are not so profound in Sturminster Newton as in many other places, there is nonetheless a marked division in character between the older southern part of the town and the newer northern part.

Currently, at the time of writing, the redevelopment on the former cattle market site is nearing completion, but the future of the now derelict creamery site has yet to be defined. Elsewhere other recent developments have raised issues of form, height, scale, massing, style etc., and with an

increasing awareness of the importance and value of quality urban environments, and with the pressures for change likely to continue, both within the town and around its edges, the debate remains highly relevant.

In response to these concerns, the study and application of what makes quality, enjoyable and sustainable urban environments has grown significantly in recent years. There is a new appreciation that an understanding of what makes each place unique and distinctive is fundamental to the process of creating quality urban environments. This is clearly the case in Sturminster Newton that demonstrates quite starkly a distinction between a characterful and attractive old town and a somewhat bland recent extension and other recent infilling that is largely lacking in quality and any obvious sense of place or local distinctiveness.

Whilst it must be acknowledged that some recent developments in Sturminster Newton have shown a marked improvement in their response to issues of local character and distinctiveness, there is nonetheless continued concern on this issue, particularly with further change inevitable.

In order to achieve a more sensitive and responsive approach to future development, it is important to look anew at Sturminster Newton, to identify its different features and character areas, and to look particularly at the old town, to identify just what qualities and features make this part of the town unique and attractive. It is through an understanding of these issues, but not necessarily through slavishly emulating them, that successful and appropriate change can take place in the town. This is what the Town Design Statement seeks to achieve.

Introduction

01.02

Purpose - What is a Town Design Statement?

A Town Design Statement is a document that identifies what makes the town special and distinctive. It is produced in consultation with local people.

Its purpose is to safeguard local character and to encourage sensitive, high quality design where new development occurs.

It does this through guidance on such matters as scale of development, building lines, building frontage and development density. As such, it will provide a tool for development guidance and control.

It does not determine whether or where new development takes place, but it will influence specific design proposals.

The Town Design Statement, which has been commissioned by Sturquest, the Sturminster Newton Community Company, will form part of the Sturminster Newton Action Plan regeneration strategy, and has been adopted by North Dorset District Council as a Supplementary Planning Document. Anyone applying for planning permission will be obliged to give it due consideration.

The overall aim of the Town Design Statement is to achieve a coherent and consulted approach to future design and planning to enhance the townscape and to encourage further regeneration of the town and surrounding area as a local centre for employment, retail and service activities.

By enhancing and encouraging sensitive development it will:

Add value to the building stock

Add value to the quality of the environment

Add value to the experience of living in, working in, or visiting Sturminster Newton.

01.03

Terminology

A very obvious feature of Sturminster Newton is the division of the main town into two largely distinct and clearly defined parts.

The southern part of the town contains, almost exclusively, all development up to WWI. Although there is a degree of later development, the character of this part of the town is substantially defined by its historic layout and buildings.

In marked contrast, the northern part of the town contains almost exclusively development undertaken since WWI and very few older buildings.

In essence, the division between the two parts of the town lies in the difference between the vernacular and local traditions that formed the old town, and the external influences of the post-industrial age (apparent in such matters as planning and estate development, standard methodologies, mass-produced materials, the requirements of the motor car and the like) that define the new part of town. It is the influences of these two very different worlds that give rise to the fundamental differences of form and character that distinguish the old and new parts of the town.

Although old and new town features can be identified across most of the town, the general distinction is clear, and therefore for ease of reference in this study the southern part of the town is loosely referred to as the 'old town' and the northern part of the town is referred to as the 'new town'.

As will be noted in this study, the division between the 'old town' and the 'new town' is clearly demarcated by the course of the former railway.

01.04

Report Structure

The report is divided into six principal parts, namely:

Part 01, Introduction

This explains the background and context to the study, the report structure and methodology.

Part 02, Context

This examines the context of the town in terms of its geography, landscape setting and historic growth and background.

Part 03, Map-based analysis

This part presents a series of plans that analyses the town under several different topics that influence its overall character including features such as building height, urban grain and trees and open spaces.

Part 04, Elevation and section studies contrasts with the map-based nature of the proceeding part by examining several road frontages as a series of short elevations and sections that typify different areas of the town.

Part 05, Character Areas draws on the preceding drawings and other studies to identify a number of different Character Areas around the town. The features that give each area a local distinctiveness are listed in a brief summary.

Part 06, Design Guidelines, discusses some of the important issues that were raised during the analysis of the town, and it sets out a range of guidelines that will inform future change. The Design Guidelines are linked to existing national Planning Policy Statements, Local Plan policies, and the Character Area descriptions that will help to direct new development and other change towards the creation, conservation and protection of a high quality urban environment within the town.

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01.05

Methodology

The methodology used for the Town Design Statement is divided into four clearly-defined parts as follows:

A desk study
On-site survey
Public consultation
Design guidance

Desk study

The desk study sought to gather as much relevant information as possible from previous recorded work. This included:

North Dorset District Council's digital layered mapping (including items such as an up-to-date base map of the town, contours, Scheduled Ancient Monuments and Conservation Areas).

Reports such as the Sturminster Newton Community profile 2003.

The book *Stur: The Story of Sturminster Newton* published by the Sturminster Newton Museum Society, 2006 (including information on the history of the town, key industries, buildings etc.)

On-site survey

The on-site survey involved gathering fundamentally original information on those features not readily found in available sources that contribute to the make-up and character of Sturminster Newton. The study of the old town and walks to the river was undertaken exclusively on foot, such is the variety and richness of the area, whilst the new town was studied substantially by car, with periodic stops, which reflects the generally more homogeneous character of this part of the town.

In addition to a photographic record, information on topics such as land use, building height and building age was recorded onto base plans during visits and subsequently digitally mapped back in the office.

The on-site survey work considered both the broader, more strategic, aspects of the town, such as Character Areas, as well as more detailed aspects such as building form and architectural detail.

During the survey work, care was taken to give proper consideration to all parts of the town. There was clearly a danger in concentrating the study exclusively on the old town, perhaps understandably so, with its rich character, and unique local features that would rightly inform the Design Guidelines. However, the larger part of Sturminster Newton is now situated north of the former railway and it is important that this should be given due consideration, even though it subsequently provided little contribution to the Design Guidelines. Nonetheless its inclusion in the study is relevant, not least because it demonstrates some of the failings of modern development, as well as recent attempts to create more sensitive and higher density development, and because most future development is likely to take place in this area. There is therefore the important issue of context to consider, even though the context may be rather weak in design terms.

Features of particular concern in the on-site survey included edge of town centre areas that are subject to rapid change, town edges where development adjoins open countryside and the linking of spaces and routes in terms of transition from one Character Area to another.

At a more detailed level, building form, architectural and townscape details and the quality of modern recreations or interpretations of traditional materials and forms were also considered.

Public consultation

Another important aspect of information gathering that has informed this report was a consultation event with local residents. This was held at the newly opened Exchange Building on 17th July 2007, and covered both the Town Design Statement and the Development and Design Brief for the former creamery and other adjacent sites.

The first part of the event consisted of a presentation by Matrix Partnership that showed much of the desk study and on-site survey work and subsequent analysis that is incorporated into this report. (Another short presentation by Matrix also examined some of the issues affecting the creamery site and possible development options.) The second part of the evening event involved a number of workshops of about 5-10 people led by a facilitator. A range of issues and concerns was raised for discussion, and response forms were also issued for further written comment. Comments received were addressed more towards opinion about existing development, issues, such as car parking and preferences for future development, rather than towards providing information about existing character features.

It was found that the workshops and response forms threw up relatively few comments on the subject of the Town Design Statement, most being directed towards the Development and Design Brief for the creamery site. The key issues raised during this consultation event and at other informal consultation events are detailed in the separate 'Consultation Statement' that accompanies this document. A summary of the main issues raised during formal consultation on the draft Town Design Statement has also been produced.

The general consensus from this is that most of the features relevant to the Town Design Statement were covered in the Matrix presentation and that there was little additional relevant information to add, although some interesting background information was noted.

Design Guidelines

The final part of the study provides specific design guidance that identifies key issues relevant to the Town Design Statement, and is intended as a useful tool in controlling and directing future development in the town. The guidelines are identified in a clear and easily referenced layout with accompanying references to the relevant Local Plan policies and Character Area descriptions (in Part 05) that support them.

Newton village

Although Newton village has, historically, a long and close association with Sturminster Newton itself, it is well removed from the town on the south bank of the River Stour, it is not within the defined settlement boundary of Sturminster Newton and it was not therefore included within the Town Design Statement brief. The village could be subject to its own Village Design Statement if that should be considered appropriate.

