

## **Complex Historic Town Cores Zone**

### ***Areas within this Zone***

*'Bawtry Historic Town Core', 'Conisbrough Historic Town Core', 'Doncaster Historic Town Core', 'Mexborough Historic Town Core', 'Thorne Historic Town Core', 'Tickhill Historic Town Core'*

Each character area listed above has been described and mapped individually in separate 'Plan Form Analysis' documents. In the case of Doncaster, the area of settlement in 1851-4 included most of the 'Replanned Town Core' area. As a result, these two documents should be read together to gain a complete overview of the character of the historic town. This zone description will concentrate on a brief overview only. For full details of the development of each of these towns please consult the individual 'Complex Historic Town Cores Plan Form Analyses' documents.

### ***Summary of Dominant Character***

Character areas within this zone include those areas of historic settlement identifiable on the 1<sup>st</sup> edition 6 inch to the mile OS survey plans of Doncaster (1851-1854) which display a more complex urban form than settlements within the 'Nucleated Rural Settlements' zone. This complexity generally involves the presence of market places, castles, and complex multi-phase planned layouts, all of which constitute evidence for deliberate acts of medieval planning which continue to be legible in their plan form today (in addition to those elements characteristic of lesser historic settlements). As a result 'plan form analyses' has been undertaken for each settlement accompanied by a description of the characteristics and developmental sequence of each resulting plan form element.

### ***Inherited Character***

The earliest element of these settlements relates to the course of Roman roads identifiable in the contemporary townscapes of Bawtry and Doncaster. This road was part of the alternative course of Ermine Street- (the major Roman road linking Lincoln and York). The detour through the Doncaster area avoided a ferry crossing across the Humber Estuary which would not always have been passable in poor weather conditions (Ordnance Survey 1978). In Doncaster this road is generally believed to be represented in the current town plan by High Street, Frenchgate and Hall Gate, whilst its route to the north has been obscured by 20th century re-routing of North Bridge Road (Buckland and Magilton 1986, 23-30). In Bawtry the same road is almost certain to be represented by Top Street (Collis 1996, 184; Buckland 1986, 32) with traffic thought to have been diverted away from its historic route and into the market place in the medieval period.

Archaeological excavations at Doncaster and Conisborough (Buckland *et al* 1989, 72; O'Neill 2004) have shown evidence of Saxon settlement activity. Pre-conquest building phases have also been argued for in the churches at Conisbrough (Ryder 1982, 45) and Thorne (SMR 318 undated), and the church at Mexborough incorporates a pre-conquest cross shaft in the construction of the walls (Ryder 1982, 95). Documentary and place name evidence reinforces the pre-conquest origins of Mexborough and Conisbrough, both of which are mentioned in the Domesday survey (1086). The place name element '-burgh' has a pre-conquest origin generally accepted to mean 'fortified settlement'. The string of local settlements around the banks of the Don and Dearne with 'burh' placenames may be indicative of a line of fortified sites along an important pre-conquest frontier region (Magilton 1977, 28). These settlements include Conisbrough, whose name means "the king's stronghold" (Smith 1969, 125). Despite this evidence of early settlement activity, without further archaeological investigation of ditches marking plot boundaries, it is difficult to demonstrate a pre-conquest origin for many features within these settlements.

By contrast, strong evidence exists at all these settlements of major capital works in the years following the Norman Conquest. Castles of 'motte and bailey' form were constructed at all these places with the exception of Bawtry. Their central mounds and defensive circuits have influenced the location of later urban forms. At Doncaster, Mexborough and Conisbrough it seems likely that these fortifications were built to either protect or dominate the existing settlement, the castle site being close to known sites of pre-conquest settlement activity. At Tickhill the castle was placed almost a kilometre from the pre-conquest church and presumed settlement of Dadesley.

Bawtry and Doncaster both have clear evidence for the comprehensive planning of 'burgage plots' in the 12<sup>th</sup> centuries. Burgage plots are long narrow enclosures set at right angles to a main street. Typically the 'head' of the plot (with the main street frontage) is occupied by the principal buildings, whilst the 'tail' (at the opposite end) might adjoin a lesser street or 'back lane'. Each plot was available to rent from the overall landlord rather than given in exchange for feudal service. This allowed a degree of independence, and increased the bargaining power to the tenants or 'burghers'. In Doncaster the longest burgage plots front onto Frenchgate and High Street; the placename French Gate has been taken as evidence that this (re)planning was undertaken on behalf of Norman settlers (Magilton 1977, 35; Buckland *et al* 1989, 32). This street name can be traced back to 1159 (Smith 1969, 30).

In Bawtry the most regular burgage plots are associated with the town's High Street and central market place. The plot series' associated with the market place are more regular and longer on historic maps than the plots fronting to the possibly older Church Street, and the grid pattern formed by the subsidiary streets set at right angles to High Street is typical of town plantations made during this period (Hey 1980, 105; Butler 1976, 32-48). Most writers have concluded that Bawtry represents a Norman plantation

town, probably sponsored by Robert de Vipont lord of the manor in the late 12th to early 13th century (Collis 1996, 184; Magilton 1977, 13). Indications of the growing urban status of the settlement include the confirmation of plots given to free burgesses of the town by Vipont's widow in 1292 (Hunter 1829, 70) and a market charter dated 1293 (Collis 1996, 184).

Whilst the clearest evidence for deliberate planning can be ascribed to Doncaster and Bawtry, possible burgage plot series and potentially planned layouts can be traced in Thorne, and Tickhill. In both cases the clearest regular burgage series are in areas set slightly apart from the castles, outside the circuits of putative outer bailey or castle green areas.

### ***Later Characteristics***

At all these settlements, later development has generally fitted within what the urban historical geographer MRG Conzen termed the “morphological frame” (Whitehand 2001, 106). This refers to the concept that pre-existing property boundaries exercise a significant influence on subsequent development either by direct reuse of established plots or by the subsequent continuation of their alignments by later development. Applied to the narrow planned plots characteristic of these character areas, this concept suggests that whilst the styles of buildings within individual plots has evolved over the 80 years or so since their laying out, the pattern of plots has remained more stable. Plot amalgamation and erosion of the original pattern can only happen when adjacent plots become available to new tenants or owners simultaneously. Map evidence suggests that until the 20<sup>th</sup> century, development within areas of burgage tenure in these settlements has been largely piecemeal in character. This has resulted in areas where timber framed medieval or early post-medieval buildings stand alongside brick built enclosure period townhouses and 20<sup>th</sup> century retail units, all siting within the medieval plan form.

Where this pattern has been broken, most notably in Mexborough and Doncaster, it is likely to have been chiefly as a result of deliberate institutionally led infrastructure projects or regeneration initiatives, often involving legally enforceable compulsory purchase orders. In both Mexborough and Doncaster, the present ‘complex historic core’ character area has been reduced and truncated in size from its medieval size by large late 20<sup>th</sup> century road schemes and accompanying retail developments.

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