

**EXTENSIVE URBAN SURVEY  
FOR  
BEDFORDSHIRE**

**SHEFFORD ARCHAEOLOGICAL ASSESSMENT**

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## ***Contents***

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List of Tables .....	3
List of Figures .....	3
Preface .....	4
<b>1 INTRODUCTION .....</b>	<b>5</b>
1.1 Background to the Project .....	5
1.2 Structure of this Document.....	5
<b>2 LOCATION AND TOPOGRAPHY .....</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>3 THE NATURE OF THE EVIDENCE .....</b>	<b>7</b>
3.1 Previous Archaeological Investigations .....	7
3.2 Historical Evidence.....	8
<b>4 HISTORICAL SUMMARY.....</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>5 ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT .....</b>	<b>12</b>
5.1 The Prehistoric Period (c10,000BC - AD43).....	12
5.2 The Roman Period (AD43 - AD410) .....	12
5.3 The Anglo-Saxon Period (AD410 - AD1066).....	12
5.4 The Medieval Period (AD1066 - AD1550) .....	13
5.5 The Post-Medieval Period (AD1550 - AD1850).....	15
5.6 The Industrial Period (AD1850 - AD1914).....	19
5.7 The Modern period (AD1914 - present) .....	20
<b>6 ASSESSMENT OF SHEFFORD'S CHARACTER, IMPORTANCE AND POTENTIAL .....</b>	<b>21</b>
6.1 Character of the Present Town .....	21
6.2 Archaeological Potential .....	21
6.3 Archaeological Components .....	22
<b>7 REFERENCES .....</b>	<b>24</b>



### **List of Tables**

1. Medieval buildings in Shefford
2. 17<sup>th</sup> century buildings in Shefford
3. 18<sup>th</sup> century buildings in Shefford
4. 19<sup>th</sup> century buildings in Shefford
5. Late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century buildings in Shefford

### **List of Figures**

1. Location map
2. Archaeological excavations in Shefford
3. Historic buildings in Shefford
4. Extent of late 18<sup>th</sup> century development, based on the Inclosure map of 1799
5. Extent of mid-19<sup>th</sup> century development, based on the 1<sup>st</sup> edition OS map, 1884
6. Extent of late 19<sup>th</sup> century development, based on the 2<sup>nd</sup> edition OS map, 1902
7. Schematic development of Shefford
8. Conservation Area
9. Shefford's main streets
10. Archaeological components



## **Preface**

*All statements and opinions in this document are offered in good faith. Albion Archaeology cannot accept responsibility for errors of fact or opinion resulting from data supplied by a third party, or for any loss or other consequence arising from decisions or actions made upon the basis of facts or opinions expressed in this document.*

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# 1 INTRODUCTION

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## 1.1 *Background to the Project*

English Heritage has initiated a national series of Extensive Urban Surveys. This report is an archaeological assessment of Shefford and forms part of the Extensive Urban Survey (EUS) for Bedfordshire. The survey of the 12 historic towns of Bedfordshire is funded by English Heritage (EH) and managed by the County Archaeological Officer (CAO) of Bedfordshire County Council (BCC). It is a joint project undertaken by staff of Albion Archaeology and the Heritage and Environment Group of BCC.

The EUS comprises three stages, Data Compilation, Assessment and Strategy. The first stage, Data Compilation, draws together the accessible history of the town, known archaeological sites and historic buildings data. The Assessment presents this evidence in the form of a report which provides a history of the town, an account of its buried and standing archaeology, together with an assessment of archaeological potential. The Strategy stage will draw on the Assessment to develop a strategic framework for the management of the archaeological resource for each town.

The chronological framework used in the Assessment reports to describe each town's development (normally section 5) reflects the periodisation used in the Bedfordshire Historic Environment Record (HER). Any broad dating system of this kind has limitations in the face of the mass of detailed evidence that exists for each town. It has, therefore, occasionally (*e.g.* Bedford in the Saxon and Saxo-Norman periods, or Luton in the early industrial period) been necessary to use slightly different chronological divisions. In addition, the town of Sandy is exceptional in its own right because only the Roman town has been included in the Bedfordshire EUS.

## 1.2 *Structure of this Document*

This report has been compiled using a number of sources including the Bedfordshire Historic Environment Record (HER), the Bedfordshire and Luton Archives and Records Service (BLARS) and the Albion Archaeology (formerly BCAS) Project Database.

The location and topography of Shefford is described in Section 2. The nature of the evidence is discussed in Section 3 and a historical summary of the town is presented in Section 4. The archaeological and historical development of the town is described by chronological period in Section 5. Section 6 comprises an assessment of Shefford's character, importance and potential. The historical development of the town and areas of archaeological potential are presented in plan form at the end of this report.



## 2 LOCATION AND TOPOGRAPHY

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Shefford is a small market town in central Bedfordshire. It is located 11.3 km to the north-east of Ampthill and 13.5 km to the south-east of Bedford. The village of Campton, which is closely connected to the history and development of Shefford, is situated 1.74 km to the south-west (Fig 1).

Two tributaries of the River Ivel (the northernmost one is the River Flit, the southernmost one is the River Hit or Hiz) flow through the centre of Shefford. These branches converge just to the east of the town, from which point the canalised watercourse (formerly sometimes known as the Ivel Navigation) runs north-eastwards towards Langford and Biggleswade and ultimately into the River Great Ouse at Tempsford. Two bridges, Northbridge and Southbridge, mark the points where the main road from Bedford to Hitchin crosses the river. To the north of the rivers, a road from Stanford comes in from the north-east. To the south, other roads enter the town from Clifton in the east and Meppershall in the south. Running between the fork of the tributary rivers from the west is Ampthill Road, which is joined by a smaller road from Campton. The main streets of Shefford are shown in Fig 9.

The underlying geology comprises Lower Greensand with Valley Gravels and alluvium associated with the River Flit and local deposits of Boulder Clay and wind blown sediments.

The Agricultural Land Classification of England and Wales, sheet 147, shows the area of the town to be mainly in urban use, with the surrounding land predominantly classified as Grade III. A small area to the north-west is classified as Grade II. Another small area located to the north-east of the town is classified as Grade I.



### 3 THE NATURE OF THE EVIDENCE

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#### 3.1 *Previous Archaeological Investigations*

There have been a number of small archaeological investigations within Shefford in recent times. These are shown in Fig 2.

A watching brief (WB52) carried out during redevelopment near the Roman Catholic Church of St. Francis in 1986, revealed late 18th century building foundations.

An evaluation (WB150) at number 3 Northbridge Street in 1991 revealed undated pits and postholes below post-medieval wall footings.

An excavation undertaken in 1998 at Shefford playground (SP537) revealed a late 19<sup>th</sup> century rubble layers.

All these excavations were carried out by the former Bedfordshire County Archaeology Service. Note that BCAS changed its name to Albion Archaeology in 2001. Albion retains the database and many of the records and finds of BCAS excavations, although some have been archived in Bedford Museum.

##### 3.1.1 **Excavations on Roman Shefford**

A focus of Roman settlement seems to have existed to the west of the historic core of the town. Because of the known archaeological significance of this part of Shefford most developments that have taken place in the area since the advent of PPG16 have been subject to archaeological investigations. The following account of these excavations is based on a summary by Mark Phillips.

During gravel extraction in 1826 a local antiquarian known as Thomas Inskip identified what he believed to be a rectangular walled Roman cemetery. The location of his investigations has been estimated, based on his sketch maps, to be in the vicinity of the garden of 95 Ampthill Road which lies 150m to the north-west of Shefford Lower School. The cemetery included cremation burials, some buried with grave goods including pottery vessels such as samian and amphora, as well as coins and other metal objects. Some are illustrated in the VCH (Page 1908) and kept by Bedford, Cambridge and British Museums.

In the 1830s Inskip examined an area some 220m south-east of the cemetery. Here he located a possibly rectangular Roman building, interpreted at the time as a temple. An assessment of his description of the location of his finds would place this building under or in the immediate vicinity of the original Robert Bloomfield Primary School.



Artefacts continued to be found in this area of Shefford. There are unconfirmed reports of the discovery of Roman armour during the construction of the new school to the south in 1872.

Later, in the summer of 1940, Edgar Gray excavated two trenches during levelling of the school field (Page 1908). Behind the garden of 77a Ampthill Road he located the remains of a Roman building which included a hypocausted room. Simco believed this building was the same as that previously claimed by Inskip as a temple (Simco 1984). The site is now recorded as a Roman villa (HER 379).

More recently, in 1976, artefacts and material of Roman date were found during the construction of a school extension.

With the implementation of PPG16 all subsequent development in the vicinity of HER 379 has been subject to archaeological evaluation. These evaluations comprise Albion project numbers 244, 365, 412, 583, 665, 694 773 and 893. Three of these, projects 244, 694 and 773 proceeded to detailed investigations. Project 365 comprised trial trenching and test pitting, undertaken in 1993 in advance of construction of the new school access road and car park. Roman features including ditches, pits and postholes were identified. The recovered artefacts included a wide range of pottery and metal objects. Although no Roman buildings were clearly identified, the recovery of tile, brick, *opus signinum*, mortar and painted wall plaster suggests that Roman buildings existed in the vicinity and were of a “high status”. A subsequent watching brief (Project 445), carried out during construction of the car park, located a 4m wide Roman ditch.

In 2002, an excavation on land immediately to the north of the school (Project 773) revealed substantial Roman remains. These included an aisled building, cobbled surfaces and a substantial boundary ditch. Artefacts included painted plaster and hypocaust flue tile. This was the most spectacular Roman site to have been excavated in Bedfordshire in recent years.

The most recent investigation consisted of several evaluation trenches located within the school grounds (Project 893). These picked up several Roman features, including a continuation of the enclosure ditch that was shown (in Project 773) to surround the aisled building/villa complex. Most artefacts found dated from the 1<sup>st</sup>- 4<sup>th</sup> century AD.

### **3.2 Historical Evidence**

Volume II of the VCH, published in 1908, gives a history of the parish of Campton-cum-Shefford. Annette Edwards produced a small Shefford Town Survey in 1974, and Jonathan Edis wrote a short two-page ‘Historical Survey of Shefford’ in 1992 (both these are Bedfordshire County Council documents and can be found in the HER). More useful than either of these is Paul Harwood’s booklet ‘*The Story of Shefford*’ (1975). Joyce Godber’s ‘History of Bedfordshire’ (Godber 1984) provides a general background to all of the above.



There are various antiquarian papers by Thomas Inskip and others on the 19<sup>th</sup> century Roman finds at Shefford (Inskip 1844, Dryden 1845). The spectacular artefacts are illustrated in the VCH (Page 1908) and distributed between numerous museums (including Bedford Museum, the Fitzwilliam in Cambridge and the British Museum).

The County Record Office holds large amounts of material about the parish of Campton-cum-Shefford, but most of this relates to the post-medieval period. There is an extensive series of parish registers, dating from the 17<sup>th</sup> century. Census returns from 1801-1991 are also held here.

The map evidence for the town of Shefford is not as good as that for many other Bedfordshire towns. The earliest map to show the town is the pre-enclosure Survey of the Estate of the Hon. Admiral John Byng, surveyed by Joseph Cole in 1754 (CRO W2/9). The road layout of the town is clearly shown but there is little detail of buildings. The Inclosure map of 1799 (CRO MA9A) shows the buildings and building plots with some degree of accuracy, although at a small scale. The 1st edition OS map was surveyed in 1882 and the 2<sup>nd</sup> edition in 1902.

The Historic Environment Record (HER) maintained by Bedfordshire County Council maintains records on archaeological sites and findspots of artefacts dating from prehistoric to post-medieval. It also gives available, as well as historic buildings ranging in date from the 15th century parish church of St Michael's (HER 5395) to Shefford Methodist church (HER 13210), which dates to the early 20<sup>th</sup> century.



## 4 HISTORICAL SUMMARY

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At least as early as the tenth century, Shefford was situated in the Clifton hundred on the border of the Wixamtree hundred. Although there is a record of “Sheep-ford”, the name by which the crossing was known, in AD1000 (Mawer and Stenton 1926), there is no mention of Shefford in Domesday Book. Further mention of the town was made in 1220 in the form of “Sepford”, with a change in the name in 1276 to “Sheford” and in 1307 the town is referred to as “Schepeford” (Mawer and Stenton 1926).

The Lordship of the manor of Campton-cum-Shefford belonged to Walter Gifford in the 12<sup>th</sup> century and was subsequently passed to Walter Marshall, Earl of Pembroke. At this time it seems that there was no clearly defined place of Shefford (in the sense of settlement, manor or parish) distinct from other places nearby. It seems likely that it only became a place in its own right, as opposed to merely a shepherd’s ford or river-crossing linking other places, in about the 12<sup>th</sup> century.

The development of Shefford may have been partly influenced by its proximity to Chicksands Priory, situated 2km to the west. The Gilbertine priory was built in 1154 and flourished until the dissolution in 1538.

The right to hold a weekly market at Shefford was granted to Henry, son of the Earl’s under tenant, Gerrold, in 1225. Edwards suggests that, in common with other historic towns in Bedfordshire, the market was already being held prior to the grant (Edwards 1974). In 1221, the sheriff held an enquiry on the orders of the King, Henry III, into complaints that a market at Shefford would be harmful to the market at Bedford. During the reign of Edward I, in the later 13<sup>th</sup> century, the right to free warren for the manor was confirmed. The right to an annual fair was granted to Robert de Lisle in 1312.

The church of St Michael and All Saints was built in the 14<sup>th</sup> century as a chapel of ease to Campton parish church.

In 1543 the manor was annexed to the Honour of Ampthill. Records dating to 1614 mention the Royal manor of Campton-cum-Shefford with regard to the holding of a Court Leet and Court Baron. A parliamentary survey of 1649 states that the Court Baron was held at Shefford.

In 1560, Robert Lucas left money and properties in feoffee trust to keep bridges, causeways and highways in good repair.

The market continued until the 18<sup>th</sup> century and, although it declined, the market charter was renewed in 1713 (Edwards 1974). In the early nineteenth century the market was revived. By 1877, it was held primarily for the sale of straw plait.

Shefford remained small. Godber estimates the population of Shefford in 1770 at 400 (Godber 1984). The first census in 1801 records 474 residents



and by 1851 the population of the town had climbed to 1,052. Up until the late 19<sup>th</sup> century Shefford was divided into the parishes of Campton, Meppershall, Southill and Clifton. Only in 1903 was Shefford made into an ecclesiastical parish in its own right.



## **5 ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT**

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### **5.1 The Prehistoric Period (c10,000BC - AD43)**

There are no known prehistoric finds from the town of Shefford itself. Two Bronze Age barrows (HER14721) situated near Shefford were recorded in 1925 (BHRS 1925) and in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century Bronze Age pottery was found near to Shefford (Edwards 1974). In 1904, W G Smith reported the find of a Celtic coin near Shefford. A watching brief at Shefford bypass revealed two complete Belgic pots and two pits (HER 373) which are possibly contemporary.

There is a general distribution of crop marks visible on aerial photos of the area around Shefford, indicating a general background of prehistoric and later activity in the vicinity of the town (HER 11766, 3525, 2862, 602). It is possible, therefore that evidence of rural settlement, which existed prior to the development of the town, could be found almost anywhere in Shefford.

### **5.2 The Roman Period (AD43 - AD410)**

The discoveries made by Thomas Inskip in the 19<sup>th</sup> century (both structural and cemetery evidence) suggest that the site of an important Roman settlement is located to the west of the historic core of Shefford, centred roughly on the present site of Robert Bloomfield School (HER 379). A significant Roman presence has been confirmed by subsequent excavations. Although the area has been badly damaged by 19<sup>th</sup> century gravel quarries, the recent excavation of an aisled building within a large ditched enclosure demonstrates that parts of the supposed villa complex first identified by Inskip (though he called it a temple) do survive. The location of Inskip's findings, however, may not be exactly as marked on Simco's HER plan. The wider extent of the settlement area is also not known with any degree of precision, but the negative results of excavations at New Street (NS 412) indicate that this land to the south is outside of the main area of settlement. However, sherds of Roman grey ware found at the junction of the Rivers Flit and Hit (HER 16021) suggest that Roman activity took place elsewhere in the vicinity. A ford across the river could easily have existed here in Roman times, providing a loose focus for settlement. The river(s) no doubt played an important part in the economy of the villa, and may well have been navigable to small craft.

In sum, the excavated evidence indicates the presence of a substantial villa estate, occupied from the 1<sup>st</sup> to 4<sup>th</sup> centuries AD, with an associated cemetery situated to the west of the present town. There is no evidence to suggest a Roman origin for the town itself.

### **5.3 The Anglo-Saxon Period (AD410 - AD1066)**

There are no known Anglo-Saxon sites within the historic core of Shefford. A small number of Anglo-Saxon artefacts, including two saucer brooches, were found by Inskip during the excavation of the Roman burial site to the south of Amphill Road (Page 1908). This would fit in with the general pattern of early Saxon artefacts in cemeteries close to Roman settlements, as at Kempston,



Sandy and Luton. Such artefacts may indicate some continuation of use of the Roman cemetery (with some settlement nearby) into the early Saxon period, but should not be taken to suggest an early Saxon origin - any more than a Roman one - for the town itself. There is, therefore, potential for finding evidence of the Roman-Saxon transitional period, which is increasingly being seen as an important area of research (Esmonde Cleary 2001)

#### **5.4 The Medieval Period (AD1066 - AD1550)**

Shefford is not mentioned in Domesday Book, though an early manor and mill here could be represented by the entry for *Cudessane*. Edwards suggests that either Shefford was not considered worthy of an entry, or that the settlement was overlooked (Edwards 1974). One possibility is that Shefford (not at that time a parish in its own right) was included within the entries for Campton, Meppershall and Clifton. Another is that Shefford is essentially a post-Conquest settlement, and simply did not exist as a quantifiable entity to be recorded in 1086.

There are no medieval maps and little or no documentary evidence survives for the early layout of the town. There are only a few traces of medieval settlement within the modern town. Its focus, as suggested by the surviving buildings (Table 1), would have been the area of the High Street, Northbridge Street and Southbridge Street. It is assumed that boundaries shown on the Inclosure map of 1799 roughly reflect the medieval layout.

The 1799 map shows Shefford to be no bigger in size than the nearby village of Campton. The relationship between these two settlements is interesting. Clearly symbiotic in some ways (e.g. combined in the parish of Campton-cum-Shefford), there are some senses in which Campton is the more important (e.g. the church at Shefford was a chapel of ease to the church at Campton, and the principal manor of the parish was also at Campton). It is, therefore, an interesting question as to why Shefford developed urban characteristics in the medieval period and Campton did not.

The answer will probably have much to do with Shefford's location at fording point(s) near the confluence of two rivers. One theory for its origin is that its growth and prosperity were tied to the nearby Gilbertine priory at Chicksands. Shefford would in this sense be roughly comparable to the town of Woburn, which also originated in about the 12<sup>th</sup> century in association with a nearby abbey. The town may have been the nearest point to the priory for bringing goods from afar by water transport.

##### **5.4.1 Fords/Bridges**

There is no mention of bridges in Shefford until 1560, though it is safe to assume that bridges existed at both Northbridge and Southbridge (probably alongside fords) much earlier than this. These early bridges, like other bridges nearby, may have been built of local sandstone. They were demolished and replaced in the 19<sup>th</sup> century (Simco and McKeague 1997).



#### 5.4.2 Mill

A water mill located on land belonging to Walter Giffard, the Lord of the Manor of Campton, is mentioned in the Domesday survey. This is likely to have been on the River Hit at Campton itself, though there is a possibility it was in Shefford. Whether mentioned in Domesday or not, it does seem very probable that Shefford had at least one if not several watermills, and the mill built by Henry Haynes in 1835 to the north-east of town could be the site of one of these (Edwards 1974).

#### 5.4.3 Church

There are no documentary references to the establishment of the medieval church at Shefford. Part of the chapel within the modern day church of St Michael dates to the 15<sup>th</sup> century (HER 5395), but the extent of the remains has been obscured by rebuilding in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century. The right to hold a fair on the feast day of St Michael was granted in 1312 which suggests that the church was already in existence at that time. St Michael's was constructed as a chapel of ease to Campton church and was almost certainly administered by the monks at Chicksands priory (Edwards 1974). Chicksands Priory was founded in 1154, which might suggest that the church was established during the 12<sup>th</sup> century or earlier.

#### 5.4.4 Market

The right to hold a market at Shefford was granted to Henry, son of Gerrold, the lord of the manor's under tenant, by the king in 1225. Edwards suggests that this grant merely legitimised an existing market (Edwards 1974), though there is evidence to suggest it was introduced at that time. Just a few years earlier, in 1221, an enquiry was held on the orders of the Henry III into complaints that a market at Shefford would be harmful to the market at Bedford.

Some of the roads coming in to Shefford were probably originally drove-roads, making use of the fords over the rivers (as the name 'Sheep-ford' suggests) – a natural place to have a market. In this sense Shefford has much in common with nearby towns such as Biggleswade.

The market was established in front of St Michael's Church on the High Street (Rayner 1962). It is likely that it extended along the entire length of the High Street and along the southern part of Northbridge Street. The widened out parts of these streets (partly encroached upon by later buildings, especially at the crossroads) reflects the former position of the market.

#### 5.4.5 Streets

Early maps suggest that the street plan of the town centre has essentially remained unchanged (Edwards 1974). The three roads of High Street, Northbridge Street and Southbridge Street appear to have been the main medieval streets, their configuration conditioned to a large degree by the positions of the river crossing points. Certainly, the only surviving medieval buildings in the town are located within this area (Table 1). Ampthill Road, a



continuation of the High Street, led to the priory at Chicksands. It was straightened in the post-medieval period.

#### 5.4.6 Buildings

The earliest surviving medieval building in Shefford is the Church of St Michael, parts of which date to the 15<sup>th</sup> century (Edwards 1974, Harwood 1975). Other early buildings can be found in the High Street and Northbridge Street ( see Table 1 and Figure 3)

The HER sheet assigns a 16<sup>th</sup> century date to 6 - 8 Northbridge Street (HER 2154), formerly a timber framed building, which was restored with brick infilling (Rayner 1962).

There are also remnants of medieval buildings on High Street. Analysis of the front of 2 - 4 High Street (HER 13209) suggests that it was a 2 bay building which jettied onto the High Street, dating to the 16<sup>th</sup> century. The building was remodelled in the 17<sup>th</sup> century with further alterations undertaken in the 19<sup>th</sup> century but substantial evidence for medieval timber framing and part of the original front of the building survives.

Numbers 19 - 21 High Street (HER 2166) were timber framed shops in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, which were partially rebuilt in the 17<sup>th</sup> century.

HER No.	Address	Comments
2166	19 and 21 High Street	16 <sup>th</sup> century (rebuilt in the 17 <sup>th</sup> century)
2154	6 and 8 Northbridge Street	16 <sup>th</sup> century
5395	Parish church of St Michael	15 <sup>th</sup> century partially rebuilt in the 19 <sup>th</sup> and 20 <sup>th</sup> century. Probably on the site of an earlier church.
13209	2 and 4 High Street	16 <sup>th</sup> century. Rebuilt in the 17 <sup>th</sup> century and 19 <sup>th</sup> century

**Table 1. Medieval buildings in Shefford**

#### 5.4.7 Trades

Documentary evidence for occupations and trades is limited for the medieval period. The majority of occupations would have been agricultural. In the 16<sup>th</sup> century the leather trade had become Shefford's most prominent industry, as shown by records of several tanners within the parish of Campton-cum-Shefford. Tanneries would probably have been situated alongside the River Hit at Southbridge (Harwood 1975).

### 5.5 The Post-Medieval Period (AD1550 - AD1850)

The population of Shefford in 1770 was estimated to be 400 (CRO QSM II p57-8). This increased to 471 by 1801, with significant growth between 1801 and 1851, when the total was 1,052 (Kelly's Directory 1854). This increase was primarily due to the influence of the new canal system, built in 1821. The growth in population is reflected in the appearance of a number of houses and public buildings. The phases of expansion of the town during the post-medieval period are shown in Figures 4, 5 and 6.



### 5.5.1 Mill

Henry Haynes constructed a cone-shaped brick tower combined wind and water mill (HER 2633) in 1835. Part of the water mill survives and is located to the north-east of Shefford (TL 1475 3945). The mill was an important economic resource for the town in the post-medieval period, but was demolished in 1967.

### 5.5.2 St Michael's Church

During the post-medieval period St Michael's Church (HER 5395) continued to play a dominant role within the town, but it remained a chapel of ease to Campton Church until the formation of a new ecclesiastical parish in 1903. In 1850 improvements to the chapel were made along with the construction of the second nave, which was joined to the original by a shared roof, supported by iron pillars. The church saw a significant amount of alteration in the post-medieval period. In 1822 the chapel was restored. It was extended in 1850, and substantially altered in 1907 (Edwards 1974).

### 5.5.3 St Francis' Church

The Roman Catholic Church of St Francis (HER 5394) was built in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century. It replaced an earlier small chapel dedicated to St George dating to the 1780s. This was the first post-Reformation Catholic church in Bedfordshire. It was deliberately built behind shops, approached by a small alleyway, to make it hidden from passers-by, following the wrecking of churches elsewhere in the country in the aftermath of the 1778 Catholic Relief Bill. This chapel was probably roughly where the sacristy of the present church is now. A little complex of buildings - a school, seminary, convent, etc - were associated with the church.

### 5.5.4 Baptist Chapel

The Baptist Church (HER 2147) was built in 1825 on the junction of the Bedford and Stanford roads. It was enlarged in 1862 (Edwards 1974).

### 5.5.5 Market

The tolls of the market were granted to Lawrence Sampson in 1614 (Edwards 1974). The market remained in roughly the same position as in medieval times. "The stalls used to stand in the high street from the crossroads to the King's Arms" (Rayner 1962). Much of the market business would have been carried out in inns such as the King's Arms and White Hart. As at Biggleswade and other nearby markets, cattle and sheep were principal commodities, and would have been driven in to be sold from the surrounding countryside. The market charter was renewed in 1713. Straw plait, the product of an important local cottage industry, was sold at the market throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

### 5.5.6 Roadways

The navigation works on the Ivel Canal, and the consequent creation of Shefford as a small inland port and distribution centre, led to the improvement of roads leading into and out of Shefford. Southbridge Street, for example,



became a Turnpike road in 1808 (Edwards 1974), greatly improving access to the market from the south.

### 5.5.7 Streets

The 1799 Inclosure map shows the main streets - Northbridge Street, High Street and Southbridge Street. To the western end of the High Street is a narrow lane that heads in a southerly direction. The lane is not named on the map, but was later known as Back Lane, later New Street.

### 5.5.8 Buildings

By the post-medieval period the importance of the town is reflected in the number of important public buildings that existed. These buildings included a workhouse (1725), a pest house (1756) and a number of public houses – of which the Black Swan (HER 15428) and the White Hart (HER 13213) are the oldest that survive (both are shown on the Inclosure map of 1799). Most of the surviving buildings from the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries are clustered around Northbridge Street and High Street (see Table 2 and Figure 3).

The so-called Tudor House or Old Bakery (until recently Barclays Bank) could be older than 17<sup>th</sup> century – the date given in the HER.

HER	Address	Comments
2153	8 High Street	17 <sup>th</sup> / 18 <sup>th</sup> century
2161	34 High Street	17 <sup>th</sup> century
2164	The Tudor House	17 <sup>th</sup> century and 18 <sup>th</sup> century
2165	40 and 40a High Street	17 <sup>th</sup> and 18 <sup>th</sup> century
2166	19 and 21 High Street	17 <sup>th</sup> century
2170	1 Amptill Road	17 <sup>th</sup> and 18 <sup>th</sup> century
13212	10 North Bridge Street	17 <sup>th</sup> Century
13213	White Hart Public House, Northbridge Street	1656

**Table 2. 17<sup>th</sup> century buildings in Shefford**

Within the town of Shefford there are a number of surviving 18<sup>th</sup> century buildings - again mainly focused around the High Street (see Table 3 and Figure 3). In the absence of detailed building surveys, there is considerable potential that some of these hide much earlier structural features.

HER	Address	Comments
2152	7 and 9 Northbridge Street	18 <sup>th</sup> century
2156	10 and 12 High Street	18 <sup>th</sup> century
2158	16,18,20 and 22 High street	18 <sup>th</sup> century
2162	32 High Street	18 <sup>th</sup> century
2163	28 and 30 High Street	18 <sup>th</sup> century
2171	39 and 43 High Street	18 <sup>th</sup> century
2172	37 High Street	18 <sup>th</sup> century
2173	33 High Street	18 <sup>th</sup> century
3381	Avondale House 35 High Street	18 <sup>th</sup> century
5394	Catholic Church of St Francis, High Street	1834
5927	29 High Street	18 <sup>th</sup> century
5928	31 High Street	18 <sup>th</sup> century
5931	5 and 7 Southbridge Street	18 <sup>th</sup> century
2148	White Swan Public House Northbridge Street	18 <sup>th</sup> century



2149	21 and 23 Northbridge Street	18 <sup>th</sup> century
2150	Northbridge street	18 <sup>th</sup> century
2151	11 Northbridge street	18 <sup>th</sup> century

**Table 3. 18<sup>th</sup> century surviving buildings in Shefford**

The addition of these early 19<sup>th</sup> century buildings reflects the growing population and prosperity of the town (Table 4).

HER	Address	Comments
2147	Baptist church	1828
2153	8 High Street	19 <sup>th</sup> century
2157	14 High Street	19 <sup>th</sup> century
2159	24 and 26 High Street	19 <sup>th</sup> century
2167	The Old Vicarage, 10 Ampthill Road	19 <sup>th</sup> century
2171	39 and 43 High Street	19 <sup>th</sup> century
2172	37 High Street	19 <sup>th</sup> century
5395	Parish Church of St Michael and All Angels	19 <sup>th</sup> and 20 <sup>th</sup> century
5928	31 High Street	19 <sup>th</sup> century
5930	Pump, Northbridge Street	19 <sup>th</sup> century
10058	2 Clifton Rd	Early 19 <sup>th</sup> century
13206	3 and 5 Northbridge street	Mid 19 <sup>th</sup> century
13207	Presbytery 25 High Street	1884
13208	46 and 48 High Street	Mid 19 <sup>th</sup> century
13209	2 and 4 High Street	19 <sup>th</sup> century (building encasing the remains of a 16 <sup>th</sup> and 17 <sup>th</sup> century building)

**Table 4. 19<sup>th</sup> century buildings in Shefford**

### 5.5.9 Waterways

During the medieval and post-medieval periods the River Ivel provided an important alternative to the inadequate road system. In 1806 plans for a six-mile extension to the river and the construction of a canal were made, but it was not until 1822 that work was implemented by Francis Giles. A lock was built below the millrace at Shefford, which brought the level of the water up ten feet to the level immediately below Northbridge. The main wharf was on the south side of the river just downstream of Northbridge (HER 15426). Around this there grew and flourished a commercial centre covering about an acre. A smaller wharf was situated next to Southbridge, serving the tannery there. The river was widened below both bridges to provide space for boats to turn round. Apparently a swing-bridge was built at the point where the two rivers converge. The improved navigation system linked Shefford with the eastern port of Kings Lynn and other seaports of the east coast. Consequently, Shefford became a small but prominent inland port and distribution centre, bringing a certain amount of prosperity to the town.

Both the Northbridge and the Southbridge were replaced in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and again in the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

### 5.5.10 Trade

The chief trades mentioned in Kelly's directory (1785 – 1839) were in leather, corn, timber, coal, and iron. Straw plait, which employed many women and children, is also listed. From the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, many of these trades or



small industries were centred on the commercial centre next to Northbridge Wharf in Northbridge Street.

Developments around the wharves attracted increased numbers of trades people, especially tanners (Edwards 1974). The following trades are listed in the Kelly's directory: blacksmiths, boot and shoe makers, braziers, brewers, bricklayers, butchers, carpenters, dress-makers, linen and woollen drapers, maltsters, milliners, plumbers, wheel wrights, etc (Kelly's Directory 1854). Some of the trade may have been in coprolites – phosphatic nodules excavated from workings around Shefford, Sandy and Potton and exported all over the world for fertiliser

By the late 1850s, trade at Northbridge Wharf had started to decline due to the construction of the Bedford – Hitchin railway. The wharf was sold in 1870 and closed in 1876.

## **5.6 The Industrial Period (AD1850 - AD1914)**

Industrialisation of the town took a mild form, with the introduction of the railway in the 1850s. Large numbers of Irish labourers appear in the parish registers at about this time, no doubt employed on railway construction. Shefford Mill (HER 2633) was a combined water and wind mill which was also equipped with a steam engine. There were maltings to the rear of the High Street and brewery buildings on Clifton Road, as well as the tannery next to Southbridge. A gas works (HER 6805) was built in the south of the town in 1866. The Coke Company was opened next to Northbridge Wharf in the 1870s. Even so, Shefford remained a small market town in the heartland of the arable and market gardening country of mid Bedfordshire, its economy still primarily oriented towards agriculture.

Development took place along Ampthill Road and on Northbridge Street up to the junction of Bedford and Stanford Roads. Houses were also built on Back Lane (later New Street). A schematic plan of the development of the town through various phases of slight expansion, up to and including the industrial age, is provided in Fig 7.

### **5.6.1 Streets**

Expansion of the town continued during the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, especially along the Hitchin and Ampthill Roads. Victoria Terrace was built towards the western end of the High Street. Apart from this, there is little change in street layout from the 1799 Inclosure map to the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> edition OS maps.

### **5.6.2 Methodist Church**

The Methodist Church (HER 13210) was built on Ampthill Road in 1912.

### **5.6.3 Buildings**

Buildings of the industrial period are shown in Table 4 and Figure 3.



HER	Address	Comments
13210	Shefford Methodist Church Ampthill Road	1912
13212	10 Northbridge Street	19 <sup>th</sup> century
13214	23-29 Ampthill Road	19 <sup>th</sup> century
13998	Grapevine Public House, Northbridge Street	Early 19 <sup>th</sup> century
15338	The Brewery – Ivel Road	1860
15425	Bridge PH, High Street	19 <sup>th</sup> century
15428	The Swan Public House	19 <sup>th</sup> century
16378	The Woolpack Public House Hitchin Road	1838

**Table 5. Late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century buildings in Shefford**

#### 5.6.4 Railway

In the early 1850s the Midland Railway Company and the Great Northern Company were jointly working on the railway line between Bedford and Hitchin as part of a midlands to London route. The railway line ran north-west to south-east through the western part of the town and involved the construction of a large embankment, a station and viaduct at the western end of the High Street, and the re-routing of the western parts of both rivers. Material for building the embankment came from cuttings to the north and south of the town. The four-arched viaduct over High Street greatly altered the pre-industrial character of the town (Harwood 1975). The line was closed by Beeching in 1962. While the embankment survives to the north of the town, the station and viaduct and that part of the embankment within the town have since been demolished and disappeared under housing development.

#### 5.7 *The Modern period (AD1914 - present)*

More recently further construction took place beside the railway embankment north of the High Street. In the mid-twentieth century two large housing estates were built on Lucas Road and Riverside north of the River Flit. A smaller estate and school were built to the south of Ampthill Road at Bloomfield Drive (on the site of Roman occupation). The railway bridge was demolished in 1976, and this made space for further housing development. Even without a railway station Shefford has become a commuter town and there have been further massive expansions due to housing development, especially on its eastern side. A town centre supermarket and the Shefford bypass were constructed in 1990.



## 6 ASSESSMENT OF SHEFFORD'S CHARACTER, IMPORTANCE AND POTENTIAL

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### 6.1 *Character of the Present Town*

Shefford is a small rural town, which was briefly transformed into a little inland port and distribution centre during the late post-medieval and industrial period. Topographically the two rivers which meet here have strongly influenced the siting, layout and character of the town. It is known that a 'sheep's ford' existed here prior to the Norman conquest, but the urban origins of the town probably lie in about the 12<sup>th</sup> century. Its fortunes at that time may have been strongly connected to the nearby priory at Chicksands.

The oldest surviving feature of Shefford is St Michael's Church, parts of which date to the 15<sup>th</sup> century. Historic buildings, dating from the 16<sup>th</sup> to the 18<sup>th</sup> century, survive around the junction of the High Street and Northbridge Street. The High Street is dominated by the Roman Catholic church of St Francis.

There is little indication today that Shefford was actually a thriving inland port during the industrial period. The Northbridge Wharf has been extensively redeveloped and the demolition of the railway viaduct across the High Street together with part of the embankment has removed much of the industrial character of the town.

The association of the poet Robert Bloomfield with the town is commemorated by a plaque on a building in Northbridge Street, where he once lived, and by the name of Robert Bloomfield School.

In 1971 the historic core of Shefford was designated a Conservation Area due to increasing pressure from redevelopment within the town centre. The aim was to conserve the historic buildings and preserve the elements of enclosure in Northbridge Street and High Street (Fig 8).

### 6.2 *Archaeological Potential*

Few archaeological investigations have been undertaken within the historic core itself, although several have taken place in the area of Roman settlement to the west of the town. In most parts of town, the likelihood of survival of archaeological deposits is high. Most modern development appears to have occurred to the rear of the historic street frontage. A rapid cellar survey suggests that few of the buildings in the historic core of the town are cellared.

There is great potential for archaeology of the Roman period to be found in Shefford, even though the town itself is not of Roman origin. The main area of settlement in the Roman period was to the west of the historic core (but within the present limits of the town) on land south of Ampthill Road. Some of the most spectacular archaeology of Roman Bedfordshire has come from here, not only in the form of 19<sup>th</sup> century discoveries by Inskip but also the recent excavation of an aisled building by Albion Archaeology. It is not yet



possible to define the extent of the settlement area, but the fact that finds of Roman date have been recorded as far east as the confluence of the two rivers indicates that potential exists throughout the town for further discoveries.

The location of the earliest river crossing or crossings is not known with any certainty, though it is likely they were in the vicinity of the present bridges. The greatest potential for medieval archaeology exists throughout the historic core of the town, in a triangle between Northbridge and Southbridge and the western end of the High Street. The area around the church is of particular interest. Several late medieval buildings are known in the historic core of the town and there are almost certainly more surviving structures of this date, hidden behind the Georgian facades and Victorian shop fronts. To date no systematic building survey has been undertaken. Some of the old burghage boundaries survive in the layout of building plots along the three main roads.

### 6.3 Archaeological Components

Excluding evidence for Roman occupation, the main archaeological components of the historical development of the town are shown in Fig 10 and have been identified as:-

- **Components 1 and 2** *Ford/Northbridge and Ford/Southbridge*  
The present bridges and their medieval predecessors were almost certainly sited close to the fords which gave Shefford its name. The fords are likely to be much older than the town, and to have influenced its siting. There is a possibility that the rivers (and the fords) moved around, especially in the prehistoric and Roman periods. Palaeo-channels may exist within the town. However, in the medieval period it seems clear that the position of the streets along with the fords/bridges solidified, and it is likely that the rivers' courses too stayed more or less the same, though much straightened and canalised. The principal river crossing was always the northern one over the deeper River Flit. Both later became important as the sites of wharves and associated industrial development in the post-medieval period (see Component 5).
- **Component 3** *Medieval town and street layout*  
The medieval town developed around Northbridge Street, Southbridge Street and High Street (where the church and market stood). This street layout in turn is greatly influenced by the siting of the two fords/bridges (Components 1 and 2). There is good potential for the survival of archaeological levels beneath existing buildings within the historic core.

Shefford is unusual in not having a market square as such. The market has been held in Shefford since at least the 13<sup>th</sup> century, when its charter was granted, but was probably in existence some time before that. It may have come into being in connection with the economic stimulus provided by the nearby Chicksands Priory. At any rate, it was held outside St Michael's Church and extended along the broad thoroughfare of the High Street up to the crossroads – possibly along the southern part of Northbridge Street too.



- **Component 4** *Church and churchyard*

The oldest surviving parts of St Michael's Church are 15<sup>th</sup> or 16<sup>th</sup> century, but there are indications it was in existence long before that date. A chapel of ease to Campton Church, it may have had strong links to Chicksands Priory. The churchyard is small because, right up to the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, people from Shefford were generally buried in Campton churchyard. Situated close to the crossroads, St Michael's would have served as a focus for settlement, commercial and social activity – so the area around is of great interest from an archaeological point of view.

- **Component 5** *Post-medieval wharves*

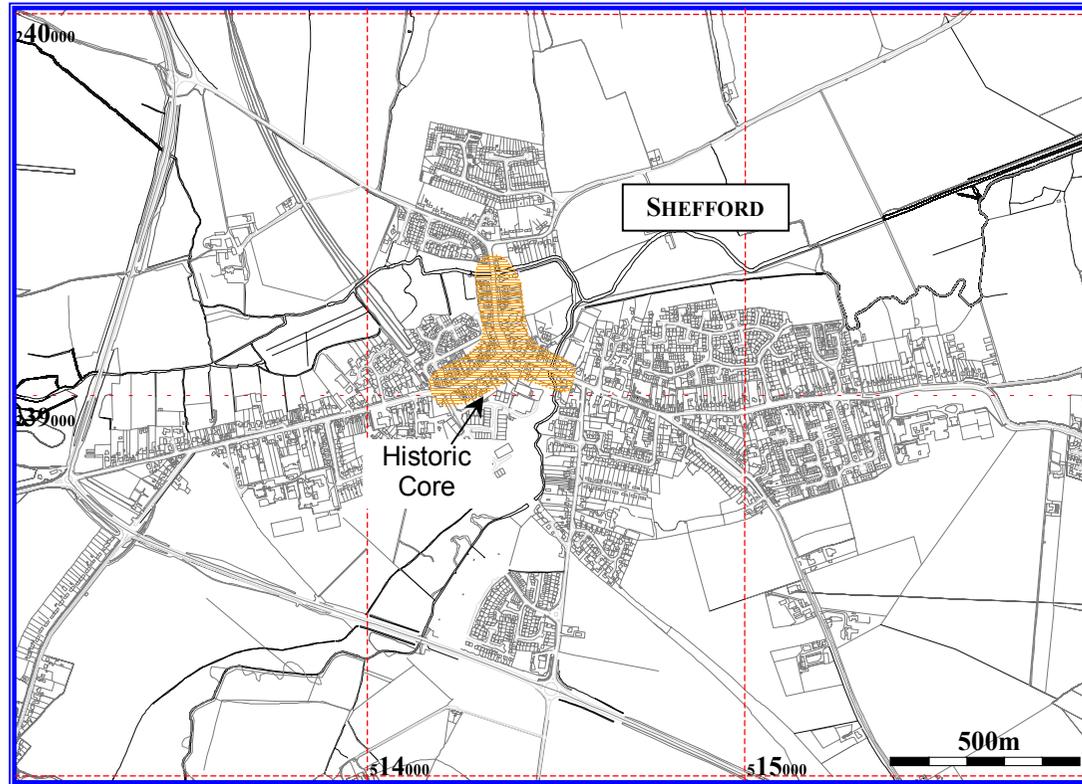
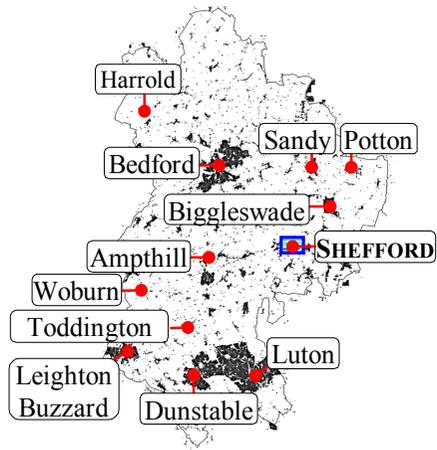
As the furthest points inland on the Ivel Navigation, Northbridge and Southbridge both had wharves located next to the bridges, and both were associated with industrial development in the early and mid-19<sup>th</sup> century. Southbridge had an adjacent tannery and Northbridge a larger and more varied industrial complex / distribution centre, with trade in coal, iron, leather, corn, fertiliser and many other goods. Both sections of river were canalised up to the bridges. Large pools were dug in the vicinity of the bridges to allow barges to turn around. Elsewhere on the river(s), other structures were built as part of the navigation scheme (e.g. a swing-bridge at the point where the rivers converge). Vestiges of this short-lived industrial landscape await re-discovery.



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**Figure 1: Location map**

Base map reproduced from the Ordnance Survey Map with the permission of the Controller of Her Majesty's Stationery Office, by Bedfordshire County Council, County Hall, Bedford. OS Licence No. 076465(LA). © Crown Copyright.

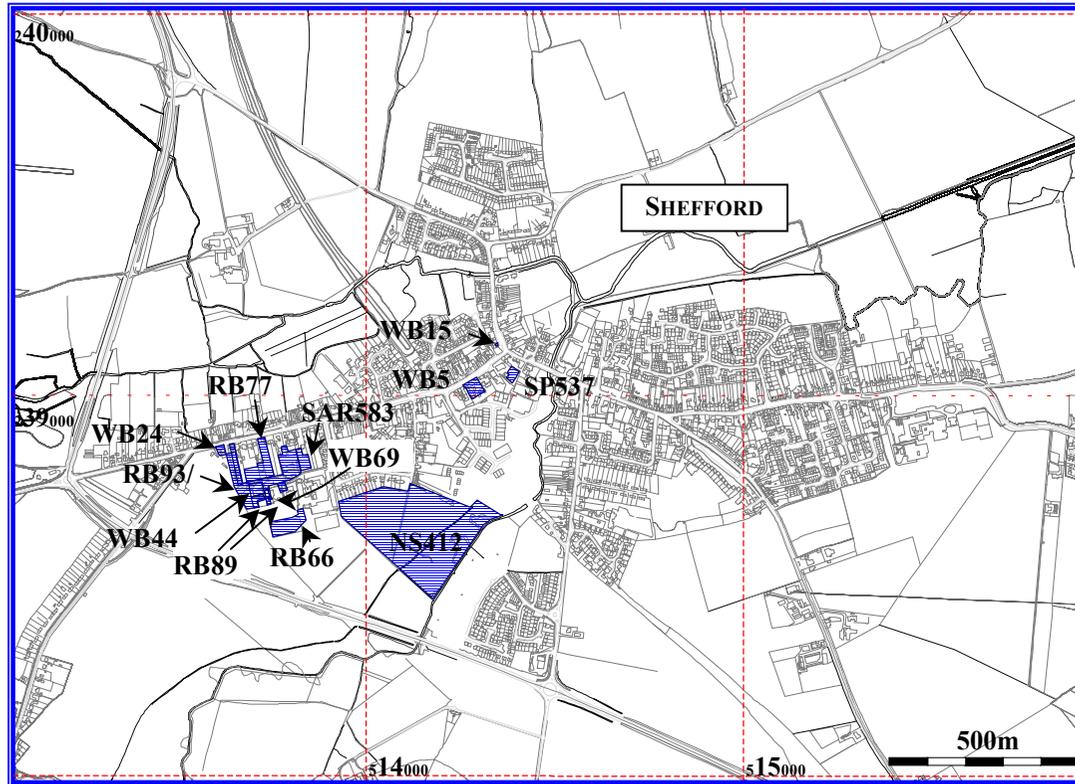


Figure 2: Archaeological excavations in Sheffield

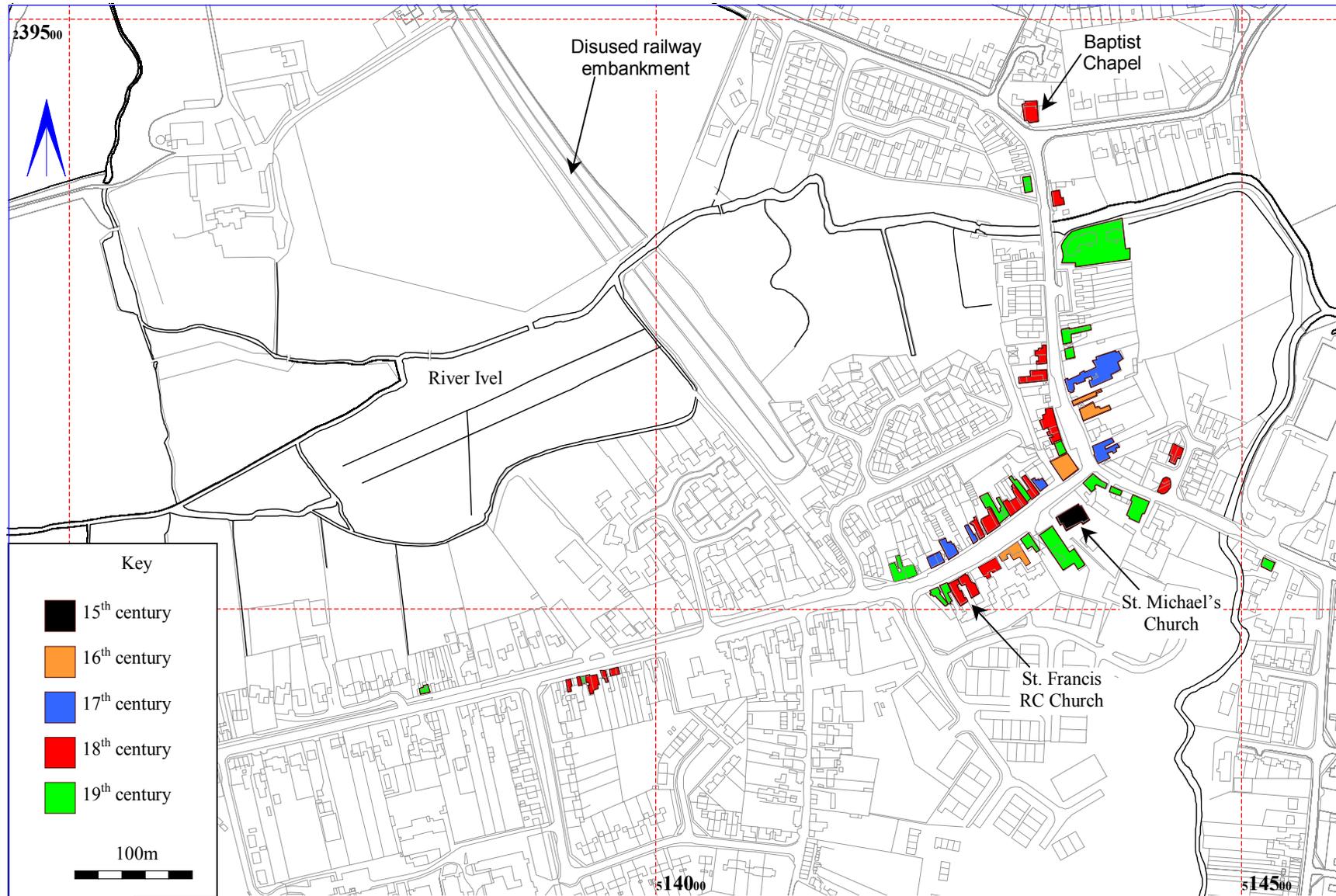
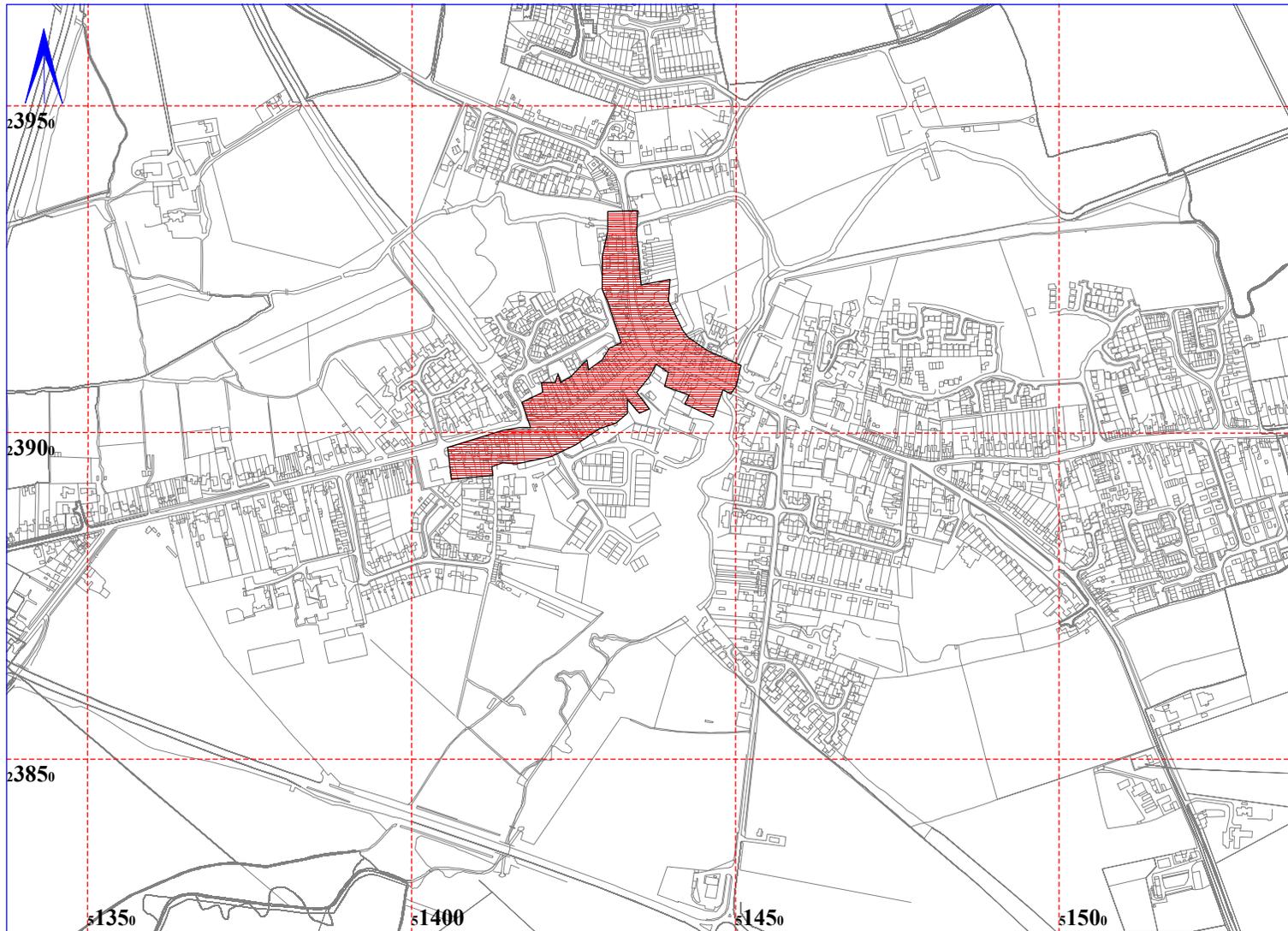
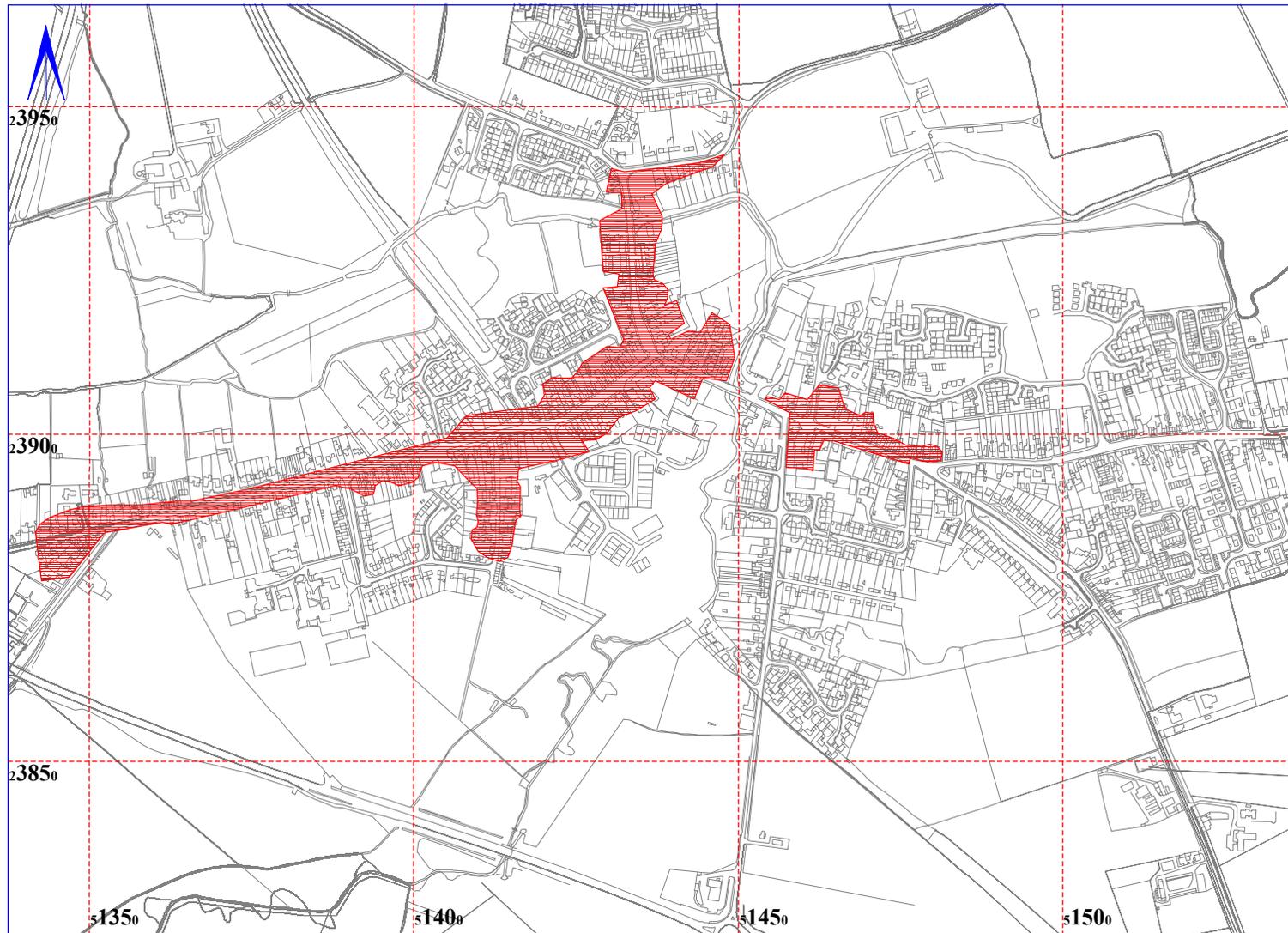


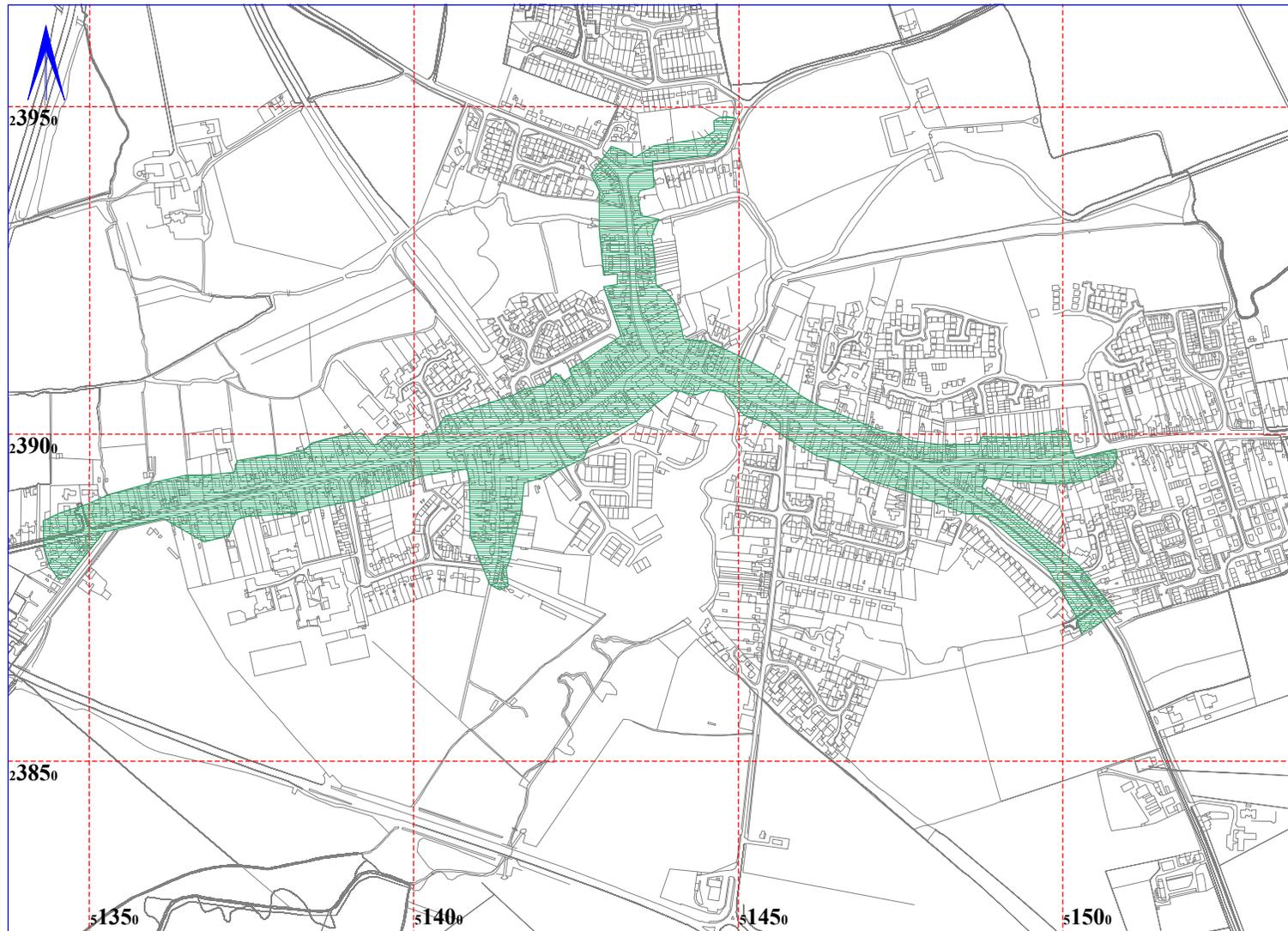
Figure 3: Historic buildings in Sheffield



**Figure 4:** Extent of late 18<sup>th</sup> century development, based on the Inclosure map of 1799



**Figure 5:** Extent of mid-19<sup>th</sup> century development, based on the 1<sup>st</sup> edition OS map, 1884



**Figure 6:** Extent of late 19<sup>th</sup> century development based on the 2<sup>nd</sup> edition OS map, 1902

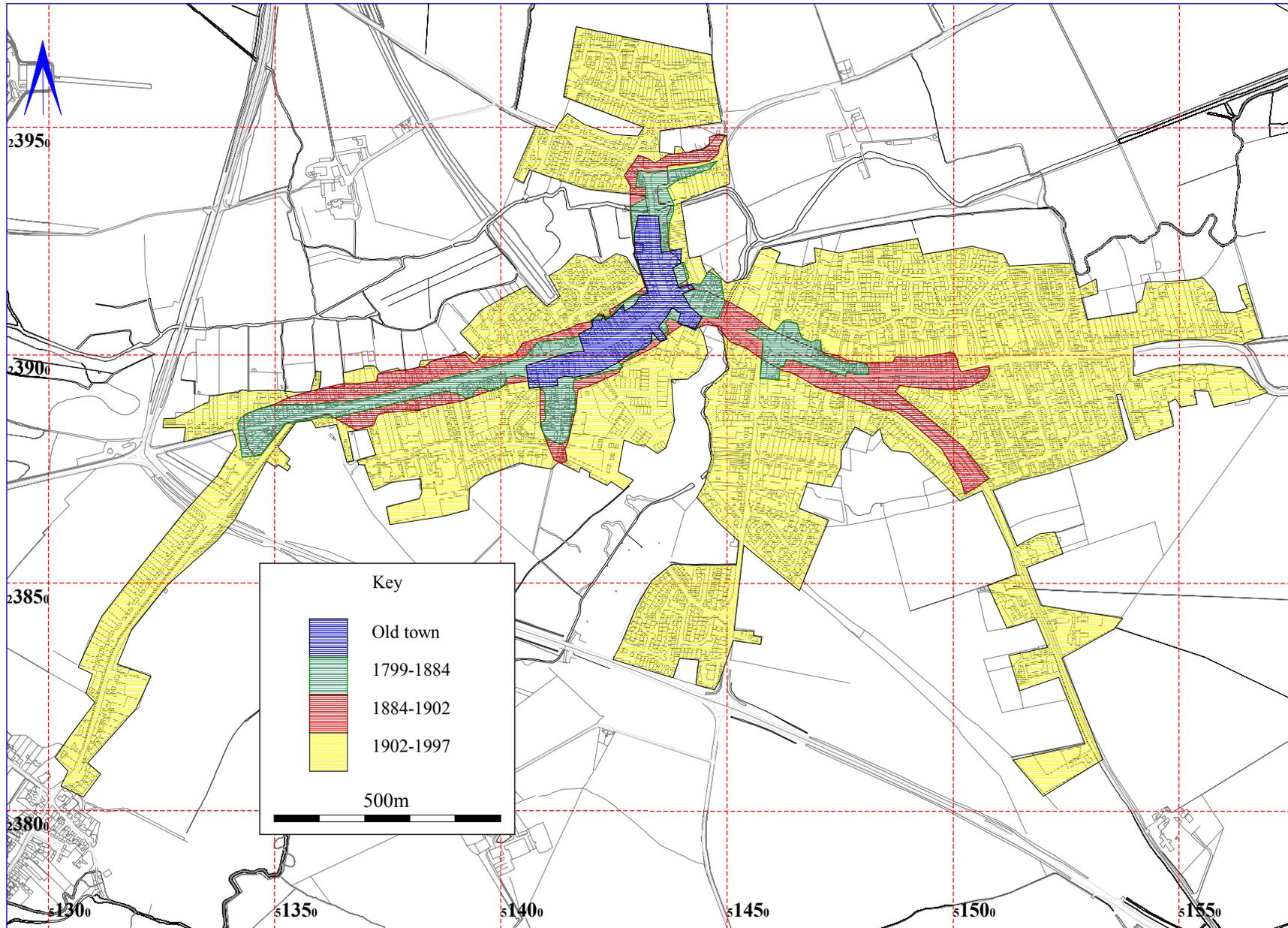


Figure 7: Schematic development of Sheffield

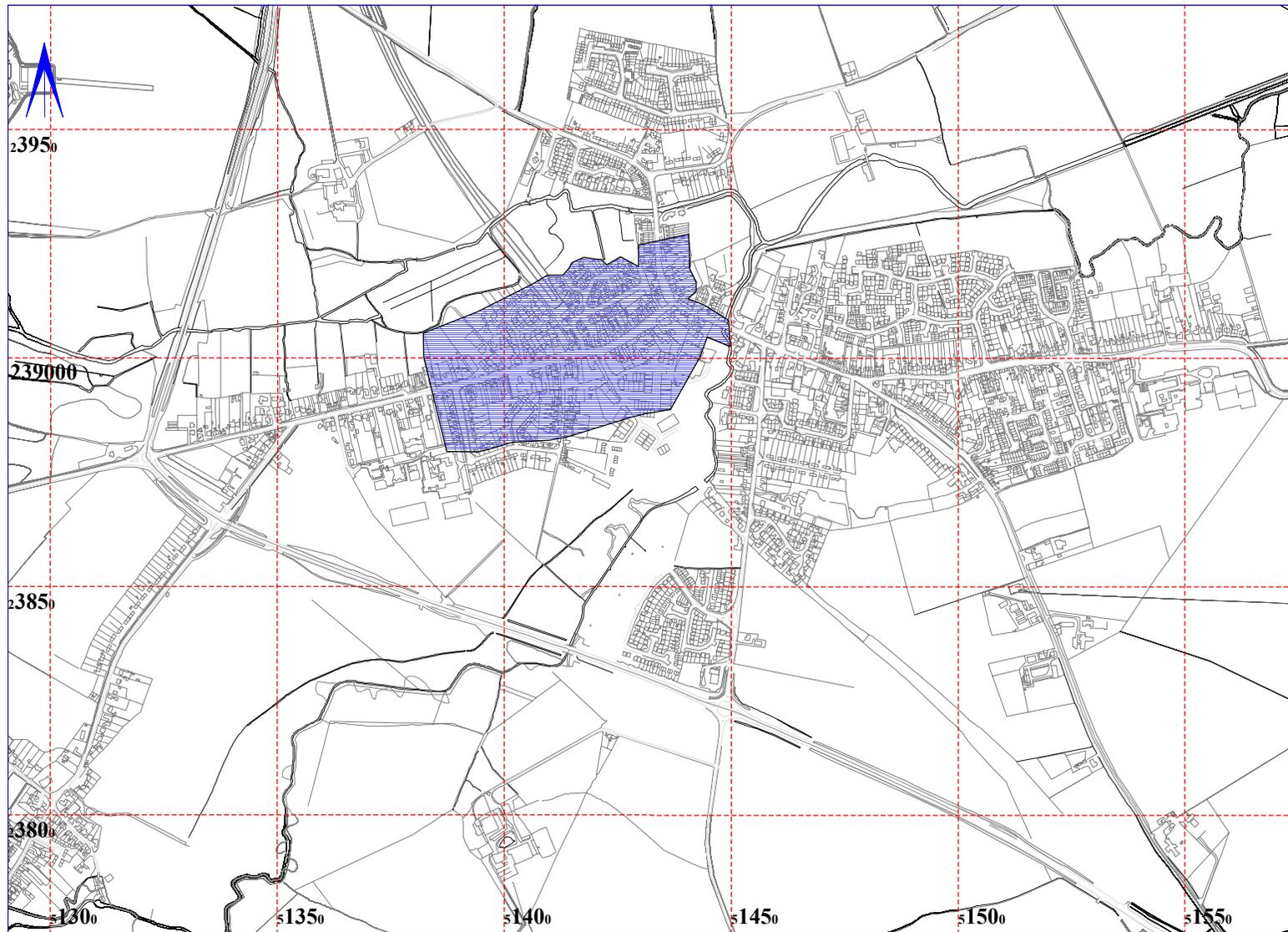


Figure 8: Conservation Area

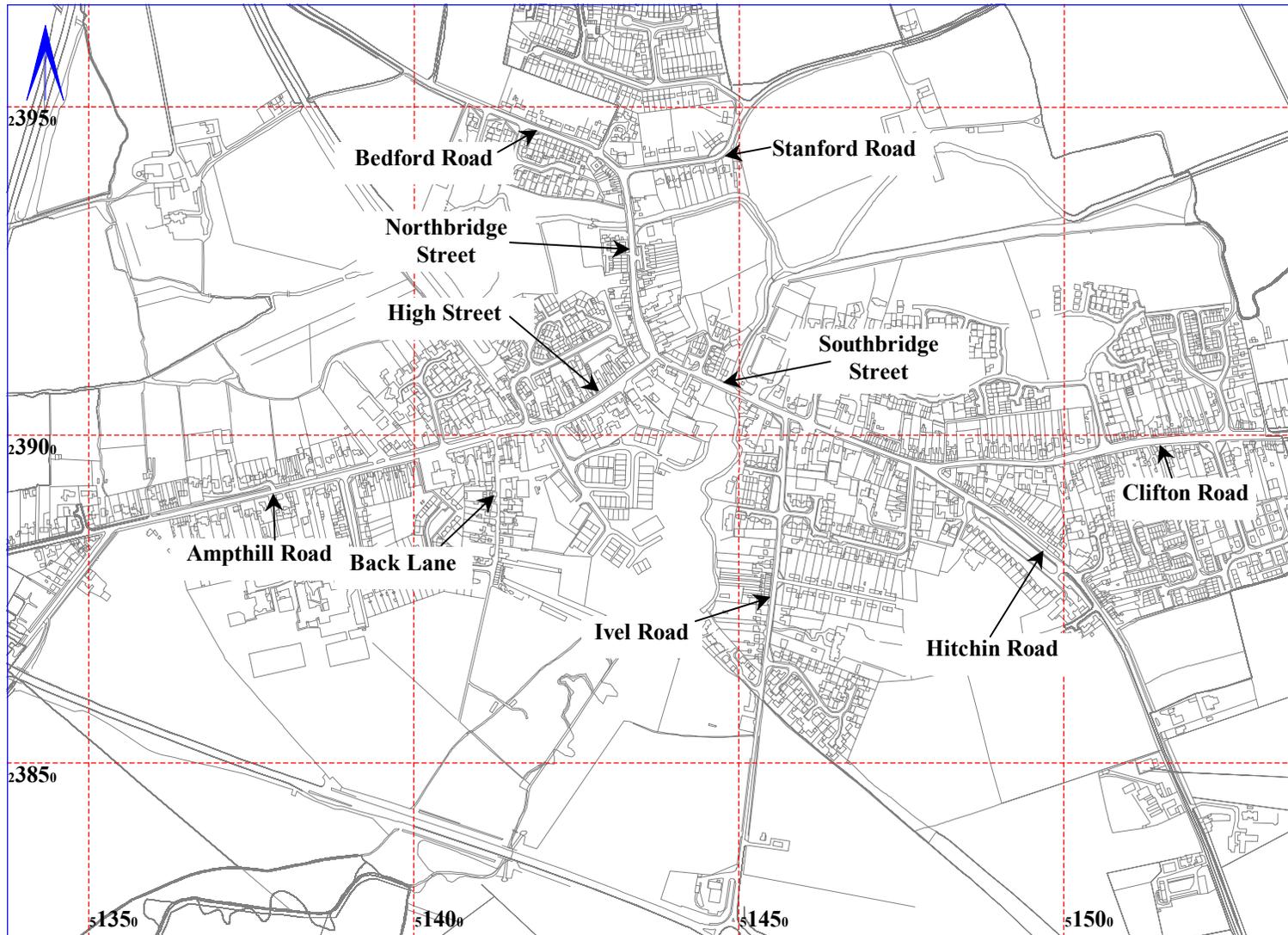


Figure 9: Shefford's main streets

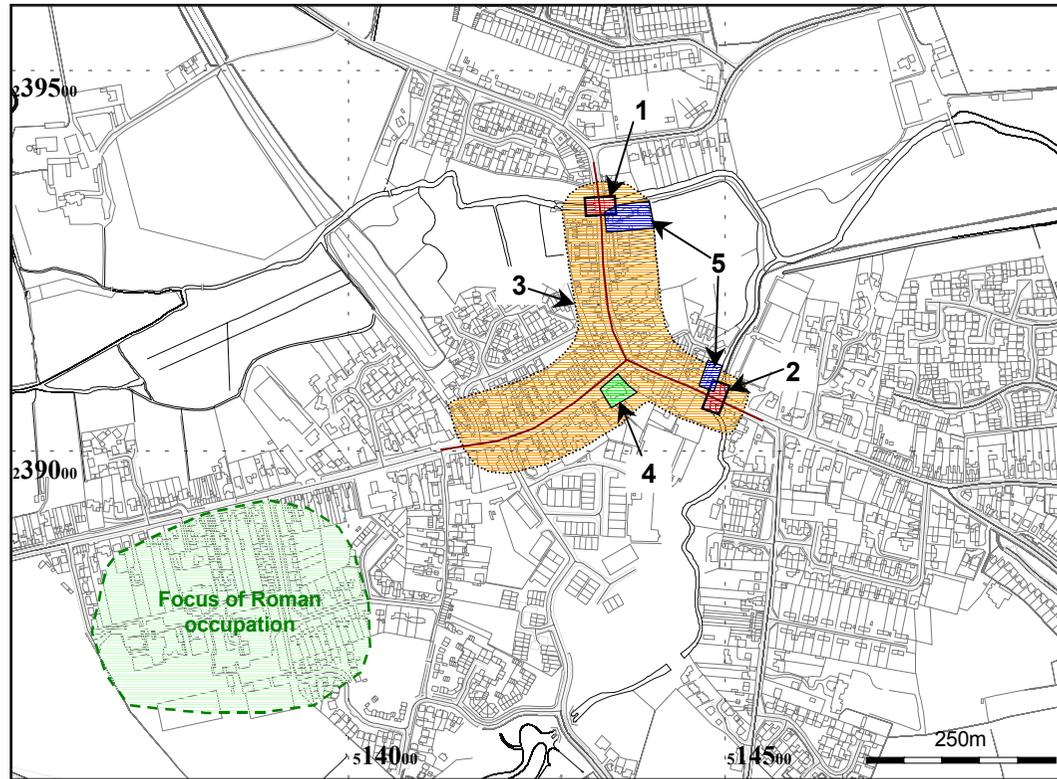


Figure 10: Archaeological components