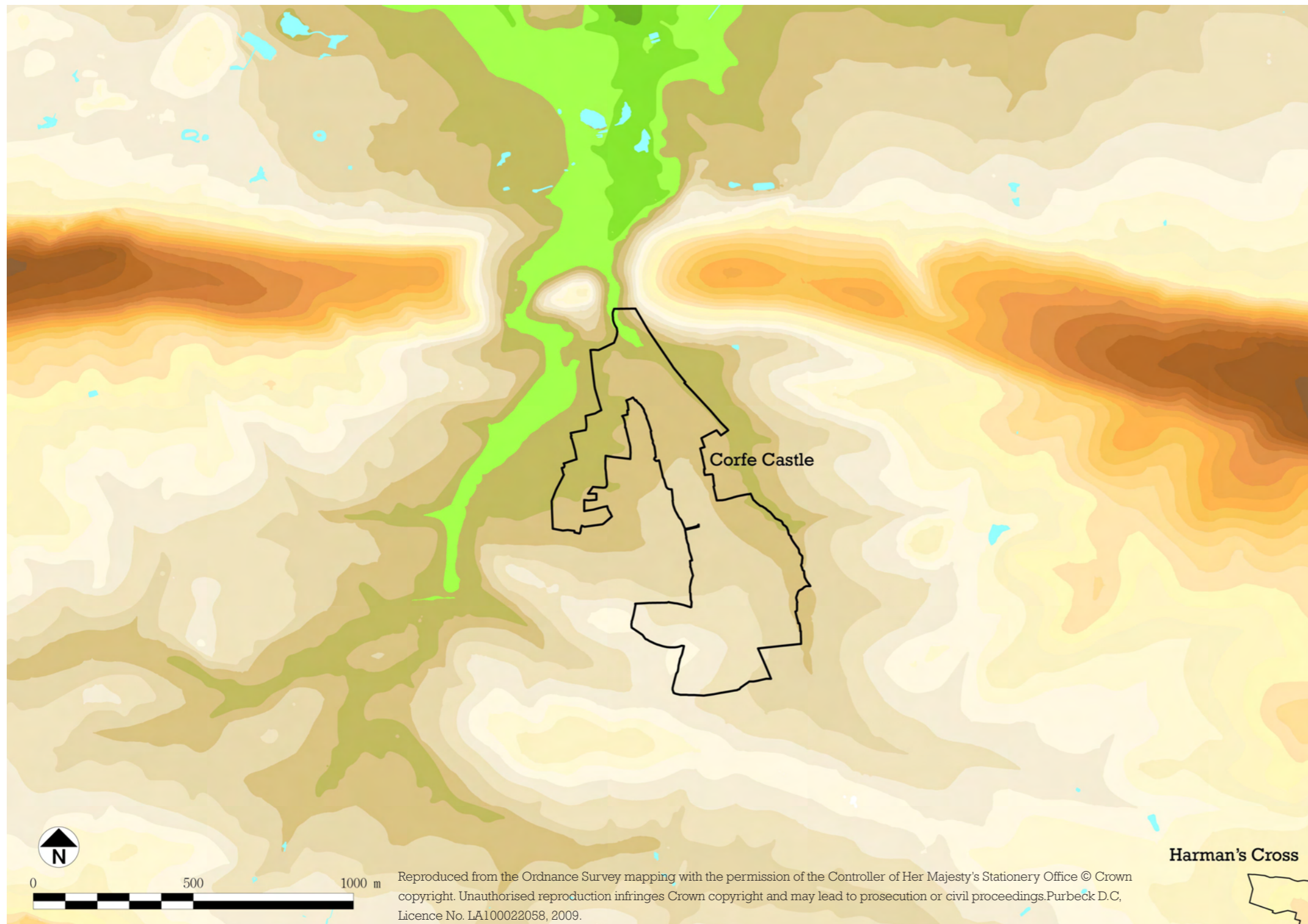




Corfe Castle
Village context
02.1
Geographical context



2.1.1 The geographical context map shows the topography of landscape around Corfe Castle.

The pronounced line of the Purbeck Hills can be seen running east to west, interrupted by the valley that drains the clay value to the south into Poole Harbour.

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The view from the castle northwards looks over an extensive area of sands and gravels that slopes gently towards Poole Harbour.



The castle itself is situated on a natural mound in a break in the Purbeck Hills.



The break in the hills at Corfe Castle is an inevitable focus for communications, seen here from the castle mound.

2.1.2 The village of Corfe Castle is situated in a magnificent gateway position that commands the entrance to the Isle of Purbeck south of the Purbeck Hills on the principal route to Swanage. Situated in a dramatic break in the hills, the location and morphology of the village is clearly governed by its geological context.

2.1.3 The linear form of the Purbeck Hills runs from the coast at Lulworth and Worbarrow in the west to Ballard Point in the east. To the north are the sands and gravels that slope gently down to Poole Harbour, whilst to the south of the hills there is a clay vale that runs east towards the sea at Swanage Bay and limestone downs that end in dramatic cliffs along the coast.

2.1.4 Purbeck is renowned for its geological variety, and in contrast to the sands, clays and limestones elsewhere, the Purbeck Hills are composed of chalk. The hills themselves stand out sharply from the sands to the north and clays to the south forming an abrupt and prominent feature.

2.1.5 At Corfe Castle there is a natural break in the hills eroded by the Corfe River that drains part of the clay vale to the south of the village towards Poole Harbour to the north. This sudden break in the hills has inevitably become a focus for communications passing through the hills and a defensible gateway now famous for its dramatic castle ruins situated on a natural knoll that dominate the gap in the hills.

KEY POINTS

- Corfe Castle commands the entrance to the southern part of the Isle of Purbeck
- The village is situated in a dramatic break in the Purbeck Hills
- The village is substantially defined by its geological context
- The Purbeck Hills are composed of chalk
- To the north are sands and gravels sloping to Poole harbour
- To the south is a clay vale with limestone downs beyond
- The break in the hills is a focus for communications



Corfe Castle

Village context

02.2

Landscape setting



Aerial photograph courtesy of Purbeck District Council - Getmapping.com

2.2.1 Given the strategic importance of the gap in the Purbeck Hills, there is clearly a very strong relationship between the village and the surrounding landscape. The ruins of the castle itself, standing high above the village, dominate the landscape over a wide area. They are a focal feature in many views from the surrounding area and they have become something of an iconic image of the Isle of Purbeck and even for the county.

2.2.2 The village itself is situated exclusively to the south of the castle, perhaps because it was protected by the castle from incursion from the north and in close proximity to the castle entrance. The main square is located immediately opposite the castle gateway, and the view of the square with its huddle of vernacular stone buildings set against the ruins of the castle beyond is another classic scene. It can readily appreciated why the village has become such a popular tourist destination.

2.2.3 From the main square, the village extends principally south-east for about 1 km in a long ribbon-like extension either side of the A351 Wareham to Swanage road. Judging from the age of buildings along the road, it is apparent that, over the years, the village has progressively extended south along the road until it now reaches the junction of the B3069 to Kingston. Some infilling behind the main road frontage has also taken place, particularly to the east, to the point that most of the land between the road and the railway is now developed.

2.2.4 In addition to the development that extends along the A351 Swanage road, a secondary extension of ribbon development extends south-west along West Street, branching off the at the square. Although also ribbon development, its character is quite different from that along the A351, since it is situated on a no through road and is of a generally lower density that consequently makes it more rural in character.

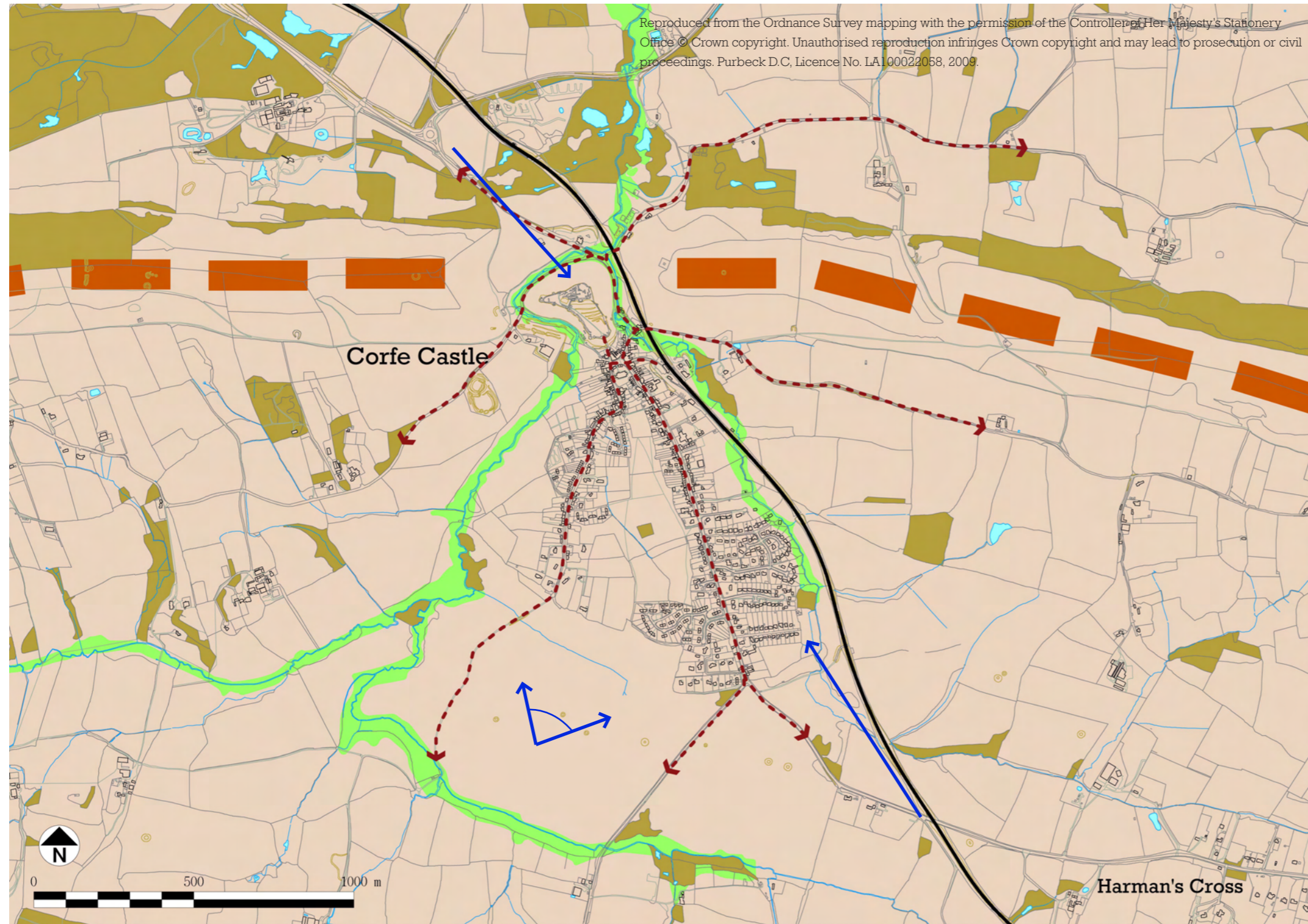
2.2.5 Contained between these two arms of development, there is a broadly triangular area of open, undeveloped land that extends as a wedge towards the church and the centre of the village. For an area of open space that extends so close to the village centre, this is a surprisingly quiet area. Access is obtained through some discrete and narrow paths that are not readily apparent to the casual visitor. However this area of small irregular fields is obviously

valued by local residents as a place of quiet recreation within easy reach of home.

2.2.6 The Isle of Purbeck is noted for its outstanding scenic qualities and is therefore extremely popular for outdoor pursuits, mostly walking. Around Corfe Castle itself there is a notable range of scenery including high open ground with extensive views along the Purbeck Hills to east and west, and heathland, forest and harbour shore to the north. To the south there is another important feature and resource. This is Corfe Common, an extensive area of common land with open access adjoining the village. Subject only to rough grazing, the common has a wild and remote character, rich in flora and fauna and clearly much enjoyed by residents and visitors alike.

KEY POINTS

- The ruins of the castle dominate the surrounding landscape
- The village is situated exclusively to the south of the castle
- Ribbon development extends south-east along the A351 road to Swanage
- Some later infilling has taken place behind the frontage onto the main road
- Other ribbon development extends south-west along West Street
- A quiet area of undeveloped land is situated between the two main arms of development
- Corfe Castle is situated in an area of outstanding scenic quality and variety



- River/water feature
- Floodplain
- Raised land above floodplains
- Mixed and deciduous woodland
- Visually exposed ridge
- Swanage railway line
- Historic route
- Principal views towards village from surrounding area



Corfe Castle
Village context
02.3
Landscape setting images



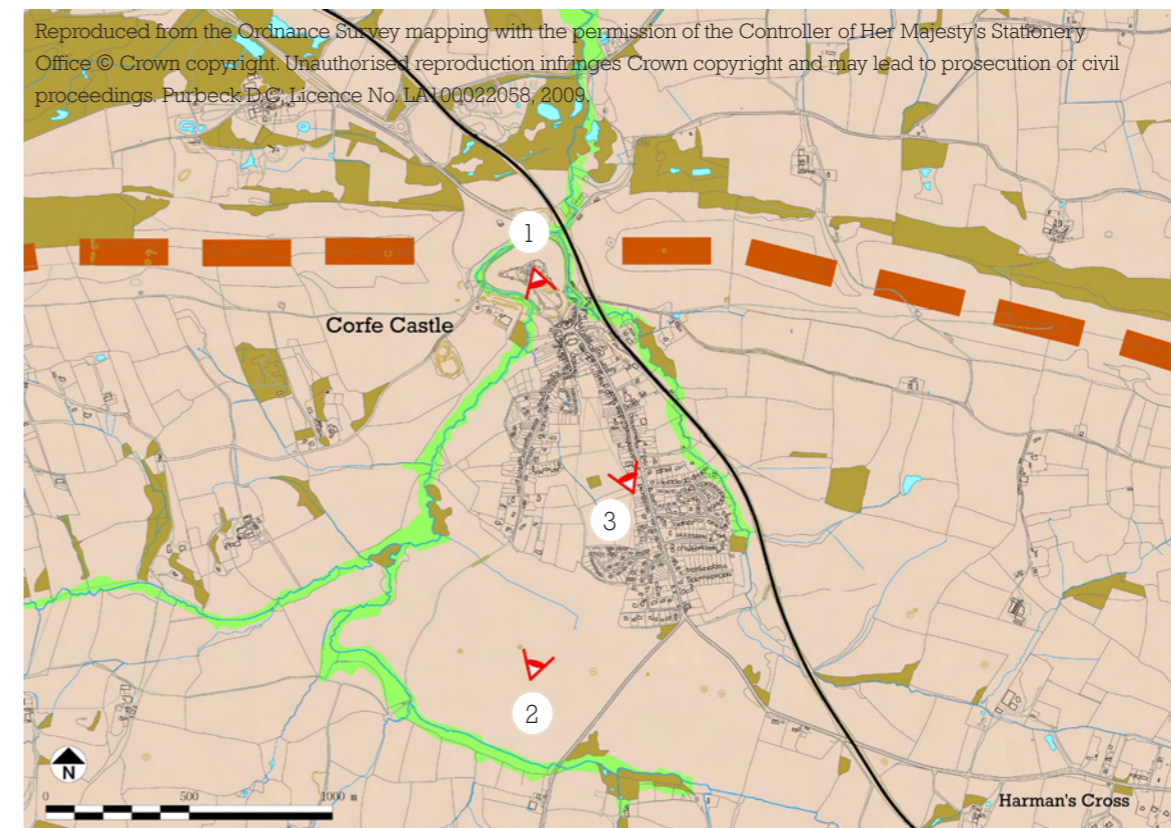
1. Looking south from the castle across the village towards Corfe Common and the limestone ridge in the distance. Note the green wedge beyond the church that is situated between the two arms of ribbon development.



2. Looking north towards the village from Corfe Common. The castle is dramatically situated on a natural mound in a break in the Purbeck Hills.



3. Looking north towards the village centre and castle from open land behind development that fronts onto the A351 Swanage Road. This field behind the main frontage forms a wedge of green space that extends close to the village centre and although it is an area of mostly passive recreation it is clearly much valued by local residents.



Landscape map indicating the positions where photographs were taken.



Corfe Castle Village context 02.4 Historic background



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OS 1901

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OS 1928

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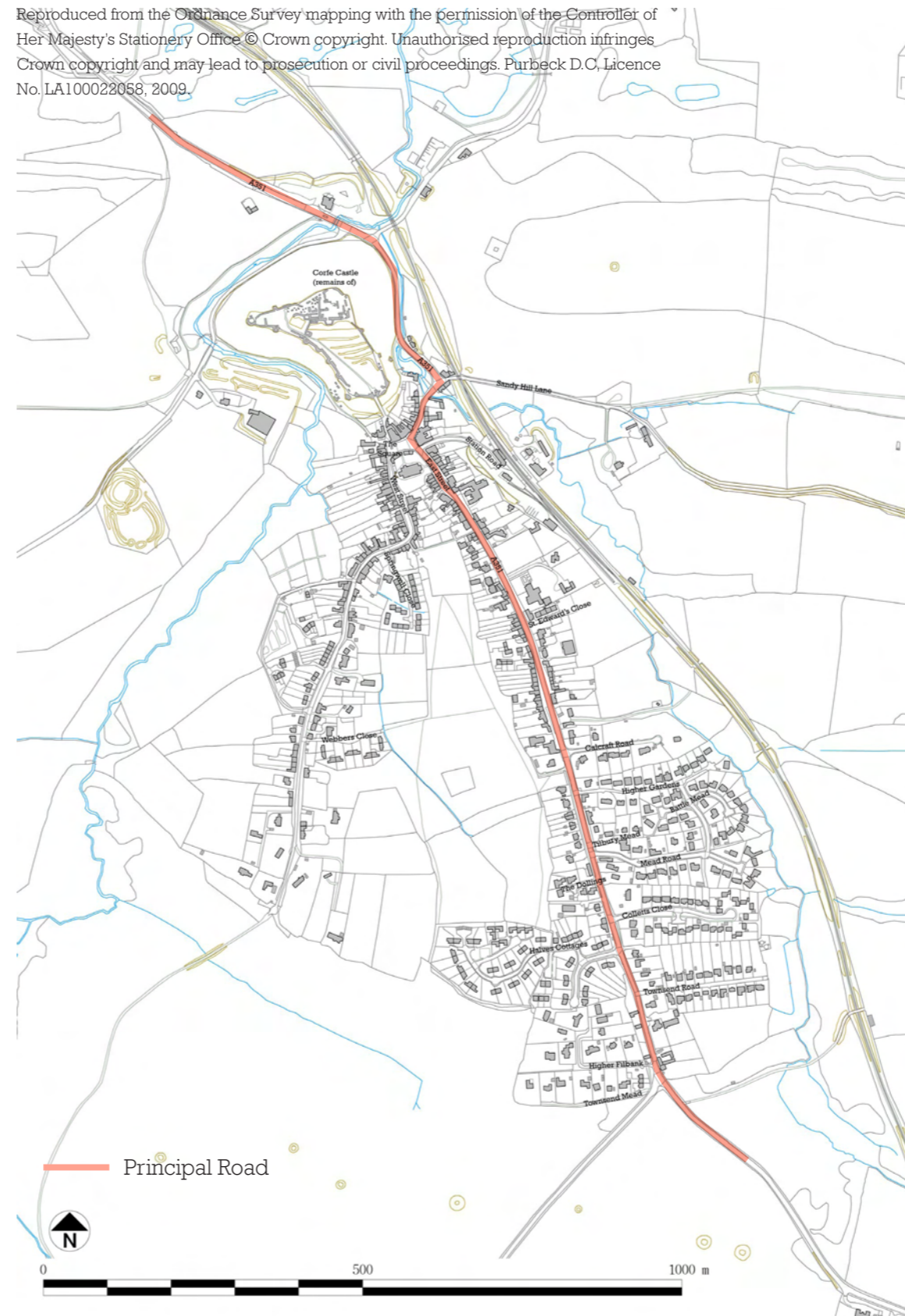
2.4.1 This selection of historic maps shows how the village of Corfe Castle developed during the 20th century. There is only a very slight expansion, limited to a few dwellings, between 1901 and 1928. Both early maps show that most buildings defined a tight frontage onto one of the two main roads, West Street and East Street, giving the village its linear form. The map below, although incomplete, shows the majority of the village and is useful in showing how, during the early 1950s, the village was beginning to expand behind the main frontage, notably with some cul-de-sacs branching off the southern end of East Street. The map to the right shows Corfe Castle in its contemporary form. The village has noticeably filled out in the south-east, with some typical latter-20th century estate road layouts.



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OS 1954

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KEY POINTS

- Tight frontages and little change pre 1928
- Beginnings of expansion by mid-20th century, with development beginning to branch out from East Street.
- Substantial infilling in south east part of village between 1954 - present



Corfe Castle

Village context

02.5

Historic evolution

2.5.1 Whilst the present position of Corfe Castle village was not fixed until the 12th century AD, there is evidence of human habitation in the area dating back as far as 6000 BC in the form of barrows or tumuli to the south of the settlement on Corfe Common. Corfe Common has a good example of a Celtic field system, and archaeological discoveries include the remains of a Roman villa excavated near the western edge of the village. The Celts would have been predominantly farmers, potters and craftsmen by trade as well as warriors and it is likely they would have used the local cove of Kimmeridge as their port.

2.5.2 From the early 5th century, the Saxons settled in the area and were subsequently attacked by the Danes. A significant naval battle was fought off Peveril Point in 877 AD during which the Saxons, helped by a raging storm, sank 120 Viking Ships. The Saxon King, Alfred, built a castle at 'Corfe's Gate' with a view to preventing further similar attacks. The name of the village and castle originated in this period from the Anglo-Saxon word 'coerf' meaning 'cutting' clearly referring to the topographical nature of the site of the castle, set in a pass through the Purbeck Hills. There is evidence of a Anglo Saxon fortification, but in 1075, following the Norman conquest of Britain, William I began building the Norman Castle that still exists as a ruin today.

2.5.3 Prior to the Norman Conquest, the population of the royal manor of Kingston was spread out in scattered farmsteads. Once the castle was built at Corfe, however, a demand for skilled labourers and servants brought about the advent of Corfe village.

2.5.4 The castle became an important stronghold during the medieval period and in the early part of the 13th century it was extended considerably. It was home to the crown jewels, the state prison, a royal palace and important documents such as the Royal Charters. The castle's increasing importance would have greatly expanded the size of the village and the area would have seen more traffic and trading activity. The town became the hub of the local stone industry, trading in Purbeck stone, which was widely used as a building material, and Purbeck marble which was used in many churches and cathedrals.

2.5.5 Although the town lay on the more protected southern side of the castle, it was nonetheless badly damaged during sieges and only began to thrive

during a more peaceful era after 1240. Weekly markets were held as early as 1247 and continued until 1861. The market would have been held at the Cross of Corfe, or Market Cross, which is still the heart of the village today.

2.5.6 The Castle was attacked in two main sieges during the Civil War, the most famous of which, in 1645, saw Lady Bankes, wife of the owner of the castle, Sir John Bankes, overseeing its defence. The town and surrounding countryside also suffered badly at the hands of the attacking forces (the remains of the Paliamentarian artillery battery, known as The Rings, can still be seen to the west of the village). After the castle was finally captured by Parliamentary troops in March 1646, a vote was passed in the Commons ordering it to be destroyed. It was blown up, resulting in the ruin we see today. The extent to which the castle survived makes clear the quality of its construction. The Castle and village are largely built from local Purbeck stone, and following the destruction pf the castle, much of the stone from the castle was taken to rebuild houses in the village below. This gives Corfe its visual coherence.



1. Despite being slighted during the Civil War, the castle remains a massive and impressive structure.



2. The medieval origins of the village remain inescapable. Here the ruins of the castle dominate the square where the cross defines the location of the market



3. The outstanding qualities of both the village and surrounding landscape attract considerable numbers of visitors, making Purbeck a prime tourist attraction.

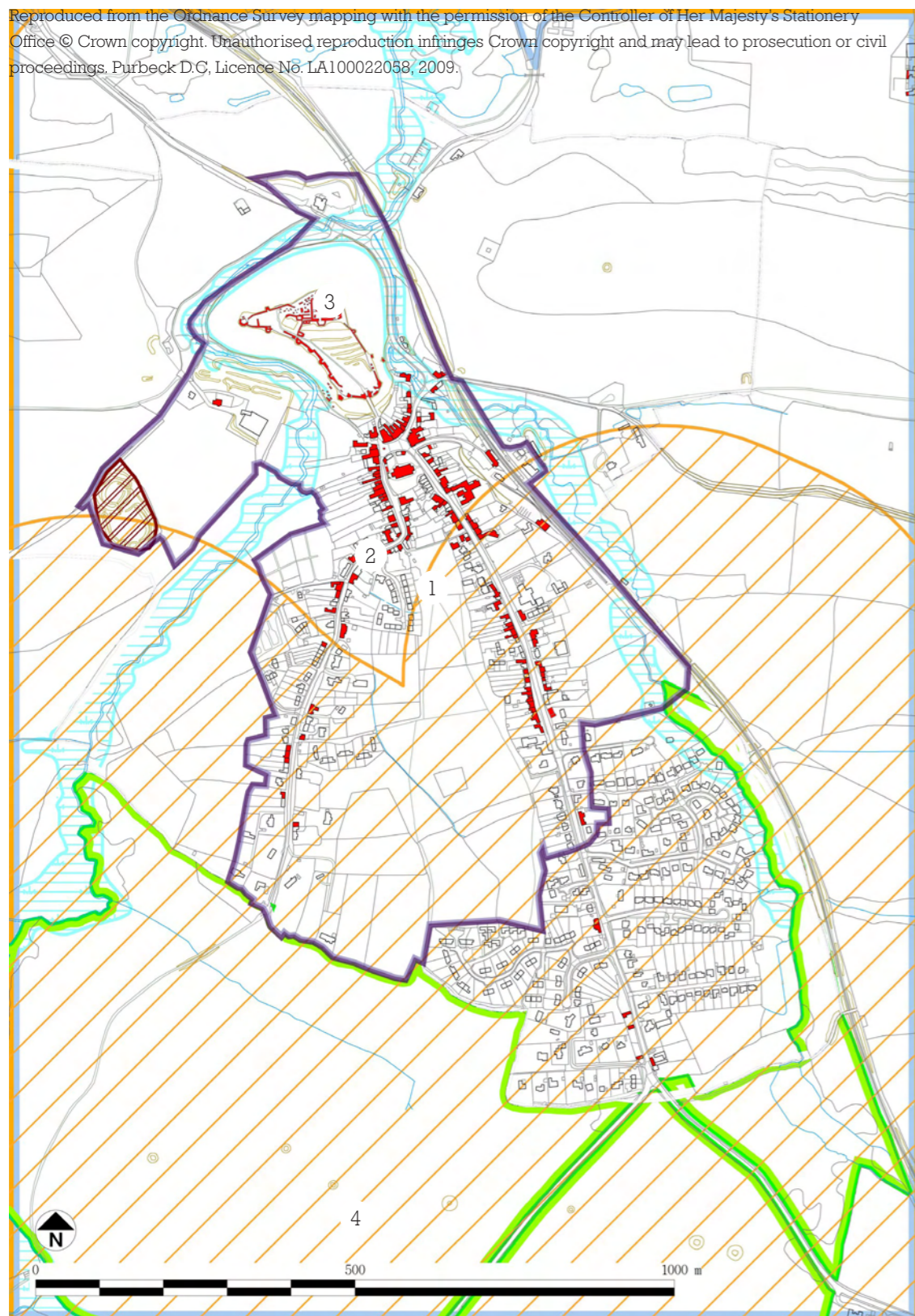


KEY POINTS

- Corfe Common contains remains of a Celtic field system and the site of a Roman villa was found close to the village
- King Alfred built a castle, but the earliest remains visible today date from the Norman period
- Markets were held in Corfe Castle from 1247 at the site of the Market Cross
- The castle was besieged twice during the Civil War and was subsequently blown up
- Stone quarried from the ruins of the castle was subsequently used for construction in the village



Corfe Castle Village context 02.6 Planning designations



-  **Listed Building**
-  **SAM**
-  **Conservation area**
-  **AONB - covers entire map area & beyond**
-  **Ecological buffer zone**
-  **SSSI**
-  **Floodplain**
-  **Purbeck heritage coast - covers majority of map area**

2.6.1 As an historic village situated in a highly sensitive landscape, Corfe Castle is protected by a range of designations.

2.6.2 The settlement is located within the Dorset Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) which is recognised for its significant landscape value. Corfe Castle also lies within an area defined as Heritage Coast (not to be confused with the nearby World Heritage Jurassic Coast). This is a non-statutory designation which aims to protect and enhance natural beauty, ecology and heritage and increase public enjoyment and appreciation.

2.6.3 To the south of the village are a number of areas of ecological importance that are protected for their value as habitats but which also contain important species. Sites immediately south and south-east of the village are designated as Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs). Overlapping these SSSIs are a number of ecological buffers that surround Special Protection Areas (SPAs). These contain important species and an ecological buffer zone of 400m extends from the edge of the SPAs covering surrounding areas, including two thirds of the village. However, unlike SPAs designated to protect lowland heathland (found elsewhere in Purbeck) the SPAs at Corfe protect grassland habitat and the buffer zones are not associated with the same restrictions on new residential development.

2.6.4 The village lies close to the confluence of several watercourses which pass alongside its eastern and western flanks and which loop around the northern side of the castle mount. Areas of land either side of these streams form areas of defined flood plains, within which development is unlikely to be acceptable.

2.6.5 The castle and associated village are both of historic importance and of very picturesque appearance. Consequently a large Conservation Area encompasses the entire village as well as its open spaces and farmland to the north and west which forms part of the setting to the castle which is a Grade I listed building. Historic parts of the village contain numerous other listed buildings in recognition of their architectural and historic significance.

2.6.6 West of the village is a Scheduled Ancient Monument (SAM) that is the remains of an earlier 'Ring- and-Bailey' Castle. This also contains later medieval siegeworks including a Civil War battery. In summary, the historic and cultural importance of Corfe Castle means that the village is highly protected whilst geographical, scenic and ecological value of the surrounding landscape is similarly protected.



1. The Castle is a Grade 1 listed building



2. The village has many Listed Buildings and is all contained within a Conservation Area. (West Street)



3. The landscape around Corfe Castle is of outstanding scenic quality, as well as of great geological interest, and is consequently well protected by relevant planning designations.



4. Corfe Common has SSSI protection.

KEY POINTS

- Corfe Castle lies within an AONB and the Purbeck Heritage Coast.
- The designation of parts of the landscape as SSSIs and SPAs are in recognition of areas of ecological significance.
- The entire village and farmland to the north and west of the castle is an area of special historic and architectural interest, designated as a Conservation Area.
- The Castle is a Grade I listed building and other listed buildings are located on East and West Streets, but are particularly concentrated around The Square and the northern part of the village.
- The streams around the village are situated within an associated area of floodplain.
- A SAM is located west of the Corfe Castle village.