



Alrewas Conservation Area Appraisal

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1 Introduction

1.1 The purpose of this conservation area appraisal is to provide a good basis for development control and for developing proposals and initiatives for the area in the future. The appraisal should inform, through a consultation process, the production of a management plan for the area and help to inform the future of the conservation area. In addition, the appraisal will be used to help develop locally distinctive policies within the Local Development Framework and to update Lichfield District Council's historic resource.

1.2 In accordance with the English Heritage document 'Guidance on conservation area appraisals' it is important to note that no appraisal can ever be completely comprehensive. If a building, feature or space is not mentioned this should not be taken to imply that it is of no interest.

1.3 Additional, more detailed historic and archaeological information on the area can be obtained from the Historic Environment Record (HER) held at Staffordshire County Council.



2 Location & Historical Context

2.1 Alrewas lies within the level plain of the River Trent, approximately halfway between Lichfield and Burton-upon-Trent and the name may mean Alder marsh /swamp (originating from the large number of Alder trees in the marshy area). The earliest settlers stayed in this area as it was ideally suited to support them, with dense upland forests, rivers and streams, and wide river meadows, giving them a variety of food, with timber for their homes and fuel for their fires, rushes for bedding and thatch, clay for pottery and level areas of light land for grazing and growing their crops.

2.2 Salt was the one of most widely needed commodities in years gone by, and Salters' Ways threaded the country from the salt springs and mines of Cheshire and the Stafford area and one such track passed through Alrewas near the present day Salter's bridge. The Roman road Ryknield Street (A38) also passes through the village and the main road from King's Bromley to Tamworth is named Main Street in the centre of the village.

2.3 In ancient times Alrewas was famous for its eel fishery, in 1086 it produced 1,500 eels, and basket weaving was a thriving cottage industry, using osiers that grew plentifully on the banks of the River Trent.

2.4 Analysis of the area has revealed evidence of medieval development in two main phases. The earliest phase is the area centred on All Saints Church, while the later phase is a grid of streets and associated linear plots to the east of this area which appears to have been an attempt to create a medieval borough some time in the 13th or early 14th Centuries. This was when the de Somerville family owned the manor of Alrewas along with the adjacent manor of Wychnor.

2.5 The village was subsequently sold by Francis Boynton to John and Philip Turton in 1660 and a descendent of theirs sold the village again in 1752 to the First Lord Anson, Earl of Lichfield. Alrewas Manor survived until 1953 when the final group of farms, houses and cottages were sold at auction.

2.6 The area around the village itself provides one the of best examples of the open field system in Staffordshire.

2.7 The building of the canals had an important influence on Alrewas. It contributed to the provision of housing and facilities for those working on canal and barge maintenance and in related trades. Along the canal banks, warehouses and new industries grew up and in particular a new cotton spinning mill was built in 1784 to take advantage of the new canal network.



Picture 2.1 View north out of Conservation Area by the canal

2.8 The area around Alrewas contains two Scheduled Monuments and a number of sites of archaeological interest. These include structures associated with the canal – including locks and bridges, crop marks showing linear features, enclosures and ring ditches, the remains of ridge and furrow from ploughing, reaching from Norman times through until the post medieval period, and the site of the early medieval settlement in the centre of the village.



3 The Conservation Area Boundary

3.1 The conservation area boundary has been designated to enclose the full extent of the historic settlement pattern of the village as set out on the tithe map of c.1840. It includes the original plots of the village in the east and south of Main Street. North of the village the boundary runs just north of the River Trent and extends beyond where the river, the mill stream and the canal join together until they split into two to the north east of the village. The rest of the boundary to the north and west picks up the plot edges of the original settlement.



4 Spatial Character & Townscape Quality

4.1 Alrewas is an important village settlement dating from the late Saxon period, and its medieval origins and development can be discerned in its historic topographic framework of streets and spaces.

4.2 The character of the Conservation Area is not uniform throughout and there are two main areas of different character. One lies to the south and east of the Trent and Mersey canal with Main Street as its spine. The other area is Mill End to the north and west of the canal.



Picture 4.1 Listed building, Mill End Lane

4.3 Main Street is the central spine of the first area and has a winding alignment which ensures that only small sections of the street are seen at any one time. This characteristic, along with the irregularity of pattern and spacing of the buildings, gives the street interest which is reinforced by the high proportion of timber frame buildings and general unity of scale, proportion and materials in the built form. The spacing is relatively dense and properties range in date from the 15th Century through to present day. Older properties predominate, mostly 18th and 19th Century and mainly set close to, or on, the back of the footpaths.

4.4 North of Main Street is an irregular pattern of narrow lanes, threaded through by the Trent and Mersey Canal and bounded by the mill stream with the River Trent beyond. The principal characteristic of this area is the informal siting of cottage properties, either red brick or timber frame, set within generous plots of land gathered around All Saints Church. The character is more open and rural than the alignment of Main Street, with the majority of properties in Mill End having large rear gardens or paddocks, some of which are very extensive indeed. These gardens provide a gradual transition between the historic village centre and the surrounding countryside.

4.5 South of Main Street the Conservation Area generally encloses the plots which front directly onto Main Street, most of which are quite deep and some of which have been filled with development. The eastern end of the village continues the characteristic irregularity of siting and spacing, although many spaces have been filled with modern infill housing. Many of the original burgage plots are evident in the spacing of the properties.

4.6 All Saints Church provides a focal point, both for the settlement to the north of Main Street and for views from the south and west. The War Memorial on Main Street provides a secondary, more local, focal point within the village.

4.7 Alrewas Conservation Area is also characterised by the remaining structure of spaces and landscaping within the settlement and all the water that runs through it. This is expanded within the section on Natural Elements below.



Picture 4.2 Looking into the Conservation Area from the west

4.8 A further characteristic of the village which is worthy is the formation of kerbs to the sides of the road. Along the main street some of the kerbs are formed by large blocks of stone while to the north of the village the kerbs are formed by small cobbles.



Picture 4.3 Traditional kerbstones



Picture 4.4 Traditional kerbstones



5 Quality & Character of Buildings

5.1 There are forty-six listed structures in the Alrewas Conservation Area, including unoccupied artefacts such as Gaskell's Bridge and a pair of tombs in the churchyard. The other forty-four structures comprise a variety of buildings scattered throughout the Conservation Area ranging from All Saints Church to small former workers cottages. In addition there are many other historic buildings which contribute to the character of the Conservation Area with their eclectic mix providing an intricate backcloth and definition to the streets and spaces of the village.

5.2 Many of the buildings are of exposed timber frame construction with brick infill panels or noggin as it is also known. These buildings are predominantly cottage-like in scale and of one and a half storeys in height, but they relate well to the remaining historic buildings which are predominantly two storey brick or brick faced.

5.3 While the exposed half timbered buildings attract special interest, the brick buildings are very important in that they are made from local clays and provide the majority of the small cottage properties in the village, offering an attractive contrast to the black and white cottages. They also represent a continuity of the Staffordshire red brick vernacular style. Unfortunately, many of the non-listed buildings have suffered through the installation of plastic windows and doors, but some retain or have reinstated timber windows.

5.4 Groups of modern infill housing that have been constructed in Alrewas and are discussed below have mostly been inconsistent with the typical character of the village. More recent developments have made more of an attempt to take into consideration the character of the Conservation Area. They have utilised more appropriate materials, such as brick that relates in colour and texture to the older, red brick of the housing, more appropriate styles, such as roofs of a steeper pitch, and sizes and shapes of buildings and plots that relate better to the predominant characteristics of the village.



6 Natural Elements

6.1 Natural elements provide a great deal of character to the Conservation Area. The greenery which includes trees, predominantly within private properties, and open spaces, such as the gardens and fields along the west side of Mill End Lane, the playing fields and the open space to the south west of the village, and the fields to the north of the village. Individual large trees, groups of trees, hedges around properties, small open spaces, such as the War Memorial



Picture 6.1 War Memorial, Main Street

and the plot next to 12 Park Road, and large open spaces, particularly to the north of the village within the Conservation Area boundary and to the west, north and north east just outside the boundary are all important.



Picture 6.2 Lychgate, All Saints Church

6.2 The churchyard provides a large green space and the allotments to the west of the churchyard are also an important open area, as is the space to the south of the canal on the southern boundary of the Conservation Area. The grounds and gardens of the dwellings throughout the village form part of this network of open space. Enclosure of sites is predominantly formed by brick walls or hedges.

6.3 Water is a dominant natural feature of the area with the River Trent, its associated floodplain and the mill stream dominating the north part of the village and the Trent and Mersey canal running right through the area.



7 Neutral Buildings

7.1 Many of the modern developments within the village could be considered neutral as, although they do not reflect or contribute to the character of the Conservation Area, they do not necessarily detract to a great extent either. While they could not be considered ideal within the village and would not be encouraged or repeated in reference to developed townscape analysis, they do exist and therefore need to be considered when assessing the overall character.

7.2 These areas are areas such as Cotton Close, Butts Croft, The Moorings, Essington Close, Dark Lane, Audley Close, infill housing within Mill End Lane, the Manor Fields development, some individual later 20th Century houses along Main Street and the housing on the south of Kings Bromley Road.

7.3 All these developments are residential. Many are alien to the character of the area, having inappropriate plot size and shape, materials and design, but as they do not encroach too much on the basic pattern and form of the designated Conservation Area they can be regarded as neutral. Care will be taken to ensure that future works round these sites do not further detract from the area.



8 Areas for Improvement

8.1 There are two main sites which provide opportunities for change and improvement in the future, along Main Street. These are the group of 1960s buildings from 94a to 98b and the modern shops on the corner of Exchange Road. The shops particularly do not contribute to the special character of the area, with their large forecourt, problems with parking, inappropriate modern building design and infill and very open storage areas to the rear.

8.2 In addition the garage site on the south of Kings Bromley Road, the row of modern houses ranging from 22 to 32 Furlong Lane and the site on the opposite side of the footpath from 8 Furlong Lane need addressing because they do not fit with the pattern and grain of the village. The garage site particularly stands out as having buildings of an inappropriate scale and design.

8.3 All of these sites offer future opportunities for improving the character of the Conservation Area and re-establishing the grain of development in the village. In addition the streetscape and public realm could benefit from a synthesis in design of street furniture including items such as street lighting (which varies from concrete and metal to historic Edwardian type lanterns) and rubbish bins which vary in style and design. The mixtures of style and design do not always complement the streetscape and the character of the area.



9 Opportunities & Constraints

9.1 An Article 4(2) directive will be introduced to tighten controls over important historic buildings that are not protected as listed buildings.

9.2 There are a number of positive buildings in the area which are not listed and would not be eligible for Article 4(2) status, but which contribute to the special character of the Conservation Area. These are marked on the map that is part of this appraisal and should be given special consideration when making decisions that may affect them.

9.3 Appropriate traditional materials should be used when extending/developing within the Conservation Area such as, but not exclusively, brick, clay tiles, painted timber windows and doors. Timber frame structures may also be appropriate.

9.4 Important individual trees, groups of trees and open green spaces should be retained, such as those noted on the map that is part of this appraisal and those mentioned above.

9.5 Any future development in the Conservation Area needs to preserve or enhance its character and appearance. The pattern and grain of the area is part of its character and appearance and this needs to be respected. As stated in section 3, these characteristics differ within parts of the area.

9.6 The open fields outside the Conservation Area boundary contribute to the setting of the Conservation Area as they are part of its character and reflect the village's agricultural background. They also provide a definitive boundary, views in and out of the Conservation Area and contain sites of archaeological interest.

9.7 Traffic management needs to be considered and a solution to parking issues in Main Street should be sought along with a solution to problems with traffic, particularly with regard to the HGVs that use Main Street.

9.8 A co-ordinated approach to street furniture would benefit the Conservation Area.

9.9 The immediate environment around the group of modern shops would benefit from improvements to parking, the open space in front of the shops, the shop fronts themselves and the area to the rear of the shops.

9.10 Improvements to the public open space/playing fields south of the canal at the west end of the village could be made through community led ideas.



10 The Effect of Conservation Area Designation

10.1 The important, overriding policy regarding a Conservation Area is that new development should pay special regard to the character or appearance of the conservation area and should 'preserve or enhance it. Additional controls also exist to protect existing buildings and features from adverse change.

1. It is necessary to obtain Conservation Area Consent for the demolition of all structures over 115m³
2. There are stricter controls on permitted development - that is minor works that are normally automatically permitted.
3. Notice must be given to the Council before works to trees are carried out.
4. Special consideration is given to maintaining the qualities which give the area its particular character by;
 - a. carefully considering new development proposals;
 - b. permitting the demolition of buildings or the removal of trees only in fully justified circumstances and where appropriate redevelopment is proposed;
 - c. advising owners, occupiers and other interested individuals and organisations on the care and maintenance of trees and property (including alterations to doors, windows, providing advice on the siting of satellite dishes and other antennae apparatus, boundary and other walls, as well as gateways), however minor in nature;
 - d. preparing proposals for enhancement of the Conservation Area where appropriate;
 - e. co-operating with other authorities and conservation organisations in activities designed to promote conservation generally or to assist conservation projects within the Borough, for example through exhibitions, town schemes or facelift proposals;
 - f. respecting the aims of conservation within the Local Authority's own activities and development projects; and
 - g. through monitoring change and developments assess how best to retain the special character of conservation areas for the future.



Alrewas Conservation Area Appraisal Map

