



WEST OXFORDSHIRE
DISTRICT COUNCIL

Conservation Area Character Appraisal

Alvescot

What are Conservation Areas?

Conservation Areas are places of special architectural or historic interest, which have a particular character or appearance worthy of preservation or enhancement. Groups of buildings, walls, trees and hedges, open spaces, views, and the historic settlement patterns all combine to create an individual sense of place. It is this character, rather than individual buildings, that Conservation Area status seeks to protect. The first Conservation Areas in the District were identified in the late 1960s. Since then, there has been a rolling programme of designations. Recent Conservation Areas are designated under the provisions of Section 69 of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990. Alvescot Conservation Area was designated in 1988, following a process of public consultation.

The purpose of this document

This Conservation Area Character Appraisal describes the main aspects of character or appearance which contribute to the special interest and quality of the area. This document is intended to complement the approved policies for Conservation Areas contained in the West Oxfordshire Local Plan. In Conservation Areas there are controls over the demolition and minor alterations of unlisted buildings, and on works to trees. Full details can be obtained from the Planning Service. The Preservation and Enhancement document for Alvescot accompanies this Character Appraisal and describes strategies for the future maintenance and improvement of Alvescot, as well as providing development advice and guidance on conversions, extensions and the design of new buildings within the Conservation Area.



Location and setting

The village of Alvescot is located in the south-western corner of the District, close to the village of Kencot and six miles south-west of Witney. The settlement occupies a peaceful and relatively unspoilt semi-rural setting in the flattish expanse of the Bampton Vale, four miles north of the river Thames.

In terms of its form, Alvescot comprises both linear and dispersed elements. The village developed alongside the Black Bourton to Kencot road and lost the associated settlements of Alwoldsbury, Bromscott, Pemscoth and Putts in the Middle Ages.

The abandonment of parts of the original settlement has left a number of distinctive 'islands' adrift from the main concentrations, including the church of St. Peter and the mill. These features, together with numerous mature trees and areas of open land, have given parts of Alvescot a fragmented quality, and the village as a whole a noticeably varied rural character.

Alvescot lies in an area of semi-enclosed flat and rolling vale farmland. This part of the District is low-lying and expansive, and most of Alvescot is situated between the 80 and 85 metre contours.

The village lies in an area of transitional geology: one in which the broad expanse of oolitic limestone to the north gives way to a seam of cornbrash limestone, then to Oxford clay and river gravels to the south. The northern part of the village sits on cornbrash limestone and forest marble; the rest of the village on river gravels and clays.



Historical development

Neolithic, Bronze-Age and Romano-British pottery finds indicate sporadic early settlement in the area. While there is little evidence of Anglo-Saxon habitation, by 1086, 28 tenants in total were recorded, scattered throughout small settlements at Alvescot, Alwoldsbury, Bromscott and Pemscoth. These may have formed small satellite communities to the large royal manor at nearby Bampton. The 'cot' suffix common to the area possibly refers to a low-status settlement associated with the manor (Alvescot's name derives from 'Aelfheah's cot', or cottage. Kencot close by derives its name from 'Coena's cot').

Ironically (given its later pre-eminence) Alvescot was the smallest of the four settlements recorded in 1086 (the largest was Alwoldsbury, which had 13 tenants to Alvescot's six). The plague in the 14th century probably accounted for the disappearance of three of the four communities here. The continued existence of the fourth, Alvescot (which also suffered plague losses), was largely due to the establishment of a church on the manor in the early-12th century.

By the mid-14th century, the manors at Alvescot, Alwoldsbury, and at Bromscott and Pemscoth, had been merged into a single manor at Alvescot. In 1377, 56 inhabitants over the age of 14 are recorded as paying poll tax, and the population did not increase noticeably again until the 16th century.

For most of its history Alvescot has remained a small, farming community. The open fields lay predominantly north of the Kencot to Black Bourton road, and covered a large part of the parish's central and north-western areas. The largest of these open fields were called 'East' and 'West' field. The land supported mixed use, and Burford and Witney provided local markets for the produce.

During the 17th and 18th centuries the village took on the form and built character recognisable today. By the later-18th century there were 40 houses in the village, and today Alvescot retains an unusually high proportion of 18th-century houses and cottages. By 1801 the population stood at 339, rising to a high-point of 407 in 1861.

Settlement pattern

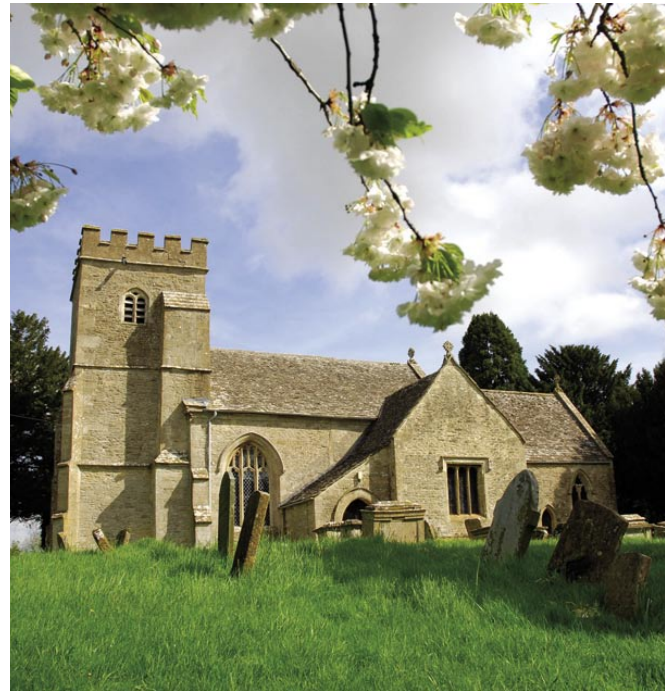
For its earliest settlers the site at Alvescot possessed a number of obvious attractions. It occupies the flat and fertile floodplain of the river Thames and thus is well suited to agriculture. From an early date it was also well served by a number of important routes. A pre-Conquest (and possibly Roman) route passed close to Alvescot on its way from Witney to Lechlade via Brize Norton. Alvescot was also served by a medieval (or earlier) route that continued east through Black Bourton and Bampton, and a minor but probably ancient route (Calcroft Lane) that ran by to the east on a north-south axis.

The available evidence suggests that an area in the south-west of modern-day Alvescot was the location of the earliest settlement. Crop marks, a long barrow and many of the early pottery finds were all discovered here, much of them in or near to Blagraves Close.

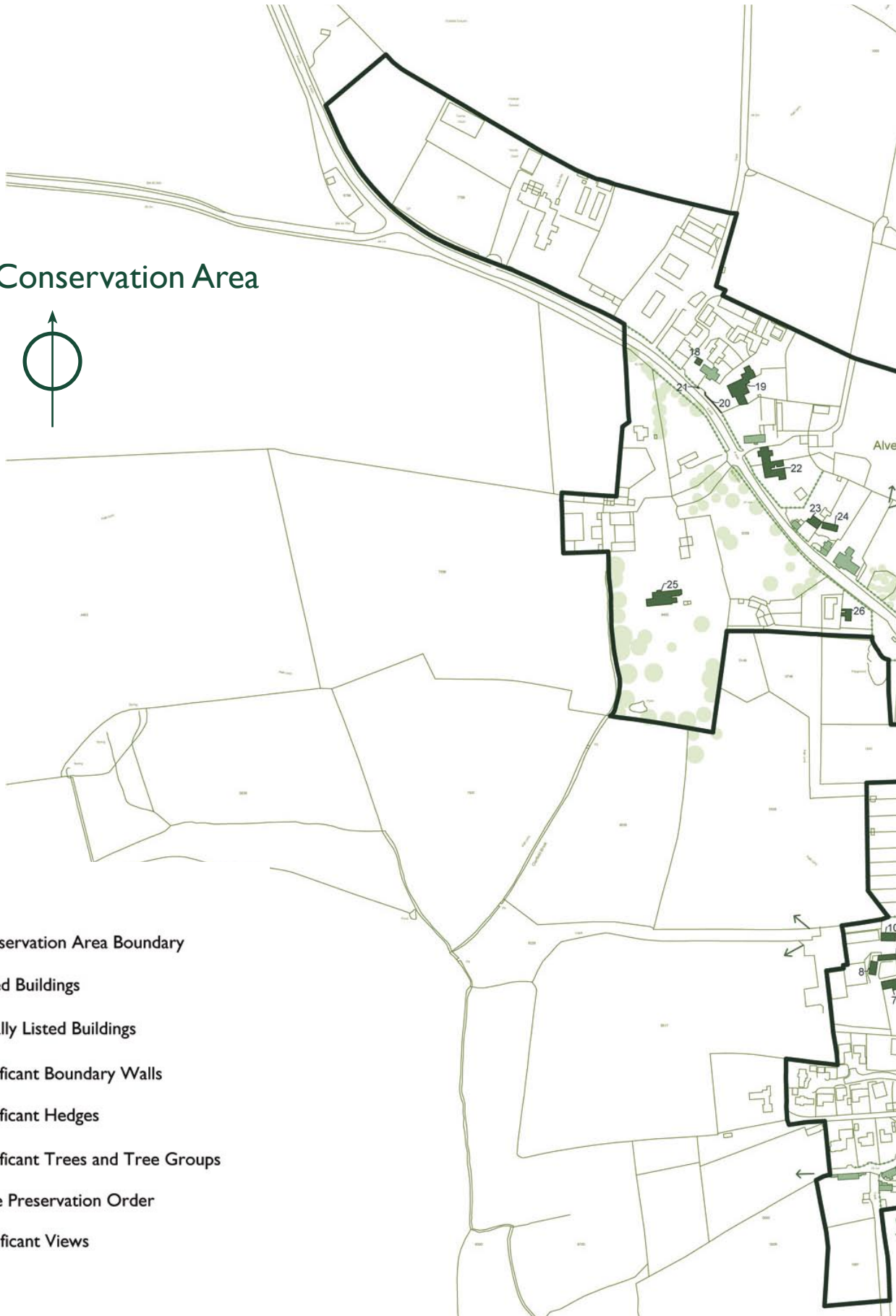
Of the four settlements that comprised the parish in 1086, three seem to have disappeared as a result of the plague in the 14th century. The establishment of a church on the manor of the fourth – Alvescot – ensured this settlement’s survival. The church and manor then also formed the hub about which later development was to concentrate.

Following the shrinkage of the parish in the 14th century, later settlement began to concentrate alongside the Black Bourton to Kencot road (especially along its northern side); and around a large central green or common which extended from the church down to the parish’s southern boundary. The north-western part of Alvescot essentially has a linear form and includes two early farms – Home Farm and Manor Farm – and an outlier in the form of Butlers Court Farm to the south.









In the 20th century, most new development was concentrated around West View’s junction with the Black Bourton to Kencot road (specifically at Gassons Mead, The Green and Pemsco Close). These later developments have served to infill Lower End, between the main road and Park and Rectory Farms.



Alvescot Conservation Area



Key

-  Conservation Area Boundary
-  Listed Buildings
-  Locally Listed Buildings
-  Significant Boundary Walls
-  Significant Hedges
-  Significant Trees and Tree Groups
-  Tree Preservation Order
-  Significant Views



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Listed Buildings

There are 26 Listed structures of architectural or historic interest in the Conservation Area. Listed Buildings are classified in grades of relative importance.

Grade II* – Particularly special and important buildings (4% of Listed Buildings)

9/13 MILL LANE (East side) Church of St. Peter

Grade II – Buildings of special interest

- 9/1 LOWER END (North-east side) The Old Bakery
- 9/2 LOWER END (North-east side) Stone Cottage
- 9/3 LOWER END (North-east side) Stable 30m N of Stone Cottage
- 9/4 LOWER END (North-east side) Rectory Cottage
- 9/5 LOWER END (North-east side) The Old Rectory, with attached garden walls and piers to S
(Formerly listed as Rectory)
- 9/6 LOWER END (South-west side) Park Farmhouse (Formerly listed as Park House)
- 9/7 LOWER END (South-west side) Barn adjacent to west of Park Farmhouse
(Formerly listed as Barn and farm buildings at Park House)
- 9/8 LOWER END (South-west side) Stable 30m W of Park Farmhouse
(Formerly listed as Barn and farm buildings at Park House)
- 9/9 LOWER END (South-west side) Cattle shed 25m NW of Park Farmhouse
(Formerly listed as Barn and farm buildings at Park House)
- 9/10 LOWER END (South-west side) Cartshed 40m NW of Park Farmhouse
(Formerly listed as Barn and farm buildings at Park House)
- 9/11 LOWER END (South-west side) Old Rectory Farmhouse
- 9/12 MILL LANE (West side) Alvescot House
- 9/14 MILL LANE (East side) Group of 4 chest tombs in churchyard 5m SSE of south porch of Church of St. Peter
- 9/15 MILL LANE (East side) 2 chest tombs to Hall family, in churchyard of St. Peter, 5m to S of S transept
- 9/16 MILL LANE (East side) Pair of chest tombs to Kirby and Godwin families, in churchyard of St. Peter 7m to S of chancel
- 9/17 MILL LANE Alvescot Mill
- 9/18 STATION ROAD Granary adjacent to house known as The Granary, Home Farm (not included)
(Formerly listed as Granary, formerly with Stables, Dovecot and Farm buildings [no longer included] at Home Farm)
- 9/19 STATION ROAD (North-east side) Shill House (Formerly listed as Home Farmhouse)
- 9/20 STATION ROAD (North-east side) Gatepier, wall and railings 20m WSW of Shill House
(Formerly listed as under Home Farmhouse, *curtilage*)
- 9/21 STATION ROAD (North-east side) Gatepier, wall and railings 25m W of Shill House
(Formerly listed as under Home Farmhouse, *curtilage*)
- 9/22 STATION ROAD (North-east side) Manor Farmhouse with barn attached to N
(Formerly listed as Manor Farmhouse)
- 9/23 STATION ROAD (North-east side) Stonycroft
- 9/24 STATION ROAD (North-east side) Manor Cottage
- 9/25 STATION ROAD (South-west side) Butlers Court
- 9/26 STATION ROAD (South-west side) Baptist Chapel

Note: The numbers indicate the unique identification number by which Listed Buildings are referenced

Architectural character and quality of buildings

The houses and cottages of Alvescot are generally built from the local pale oolitic limestone (used in coursed rubble form) and are topped with stone slate roofs. Most properties are small in scale and vernacular in type and detailing. Simple plan forms, two- and three-bay ranges and timber casement or sash windows predominate. An unusually high proportion of the older properties belong to the 18th century, and the village also has numerous early agricultural buildings.

Elements from a more formal architectural vocabulary are not as conspicuous as they are in nearby Kencot. Two exceptions are Butlers Court and Home Farm. The former features semi-dressed stone quoins, chimneys with moulded string courses, and hollow-chamfered stone mullion windows with Tudor hood moulds. The main house at Home Farm has a door case with fluted half-columns and a pediment.

The house at Home Farm is also accompanied by a pleasing group of farm buildings, including a barn with pedimented clock turret; another with a dovecote of c. 1700 and gables with ball finials; and a granary on staddle stones with a half-hipped roof.

The 18th-century water mill and mill house lie at some distance from the main settlement. The church of St. Peter also lies apart from the bulk of the settlement, but this can be accounted for by changes to the form of the village as a result of the plague and other factors.

The church of St. Peter dates from the 13th century (font and north door) but most of the fabric belongs to the 15th century and later. The interior contains a number of notable 18th-century additions, including a pair of monuments and a rare hourglass stand next to the pulpit (the missing hourglass was used for the timing of sermons). In the late-19th century extensive restoration work to the church (including the rebuilding of the chancel) took place.

Boundary treatments

Alvescot has a loose-knit character and does not possess a strongly defined edge. Rather it seems to first form up and then disband alongside the Black Bourton to Kencot road. Many of the houses and cottages on the fringes of the village, together with some of the later properties within its core, stand back from the road behind deep verges, or further back still behind front gardens. Elsewhere, along the main road through the centre of the village and down to Lower End, cottages in short terraces front directly onto the pavement or road. Drystone walls of various heights can be seen throughout the village. A couple of properties, including Shill House and Park Farm, possess higher status boundary features, such as flat copings and square pillars topped by capping stones and ball finials.

Landscape, trees and views

Like nearby Kencot, Alvescot enjoys a marked degree of seclusion, thanks to mature trees and small variations in topography. However, its setting alongside a main road affords it a less isolated feel than that of its neighbour. Throughout Alvescot, small parcels of open land form valuable components of the character area, allowing a variety of attractive cross-views (a distinctive characteristic of a number of West Oxfordshire settlements). Varying intervisibility also contributes much to the diverse character of the village. Thus, while the sweeping vista of the main road gives to this part of the village an open, linear quality, the tight and twisting nature of the lane south of Lower End, and the shady, incised nature of Mill Lane to the north, have leant to each of these parts a more intimate and secretive character.



West Oxfordshire District Council - Planning Service
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General planning enquiries and application forms
List entries and grant enquiries
Trees and landscape enquiries
Architectural and technical enquiries

01993 861683
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