



WEST OXFORDSHIRE
DISTRICT COUNCIL

Proposals for Preservation & Enhancement

Alvescot

Alvescot lies in the south-west of the District, close to Kencot and six miles south-west of Witney. It occupies a rural setting in the flattish expanse of the Bampton Vale. The village has both linear and dispersed elements: the legacy of its growth alongside the Black Bourton to Kencot Road, and the loss of nearby Alwoldsbury, Bromscott, Pemscott and Putts in the Middle Ages. Alvescot overlies an area of transitional geology, one in which the oolitic limestone to the north gives way to cornbrash limestone, and then to Oxford clay and river gravels to the south.

Introduction

Alvescot Conservation Area was designated in 1988, following a process of public consultation. Conservation Areas are places of special architectural or historic interest, which have a particular character or appearance worthy of preservation or enhancement. It is this character, rather than the individual buildings, that Conservation Area status seeks to protect. A separate document, the Conservation Area Character Appraisal for Alvescot, describes the main features of the area which contribute to its special interest.

The purpose of this document

West Oxfordshire District Council has a duty under section 71 of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990, to formulate and publish proposals for the preservation and enhancement of Conservation Areas after consideration at a public meeting. This document has been prepared following public consultation at a public meeting. Changes to the character or appearance of Alvescot, including opportunities for new development, are expected to be limited in future years.



Development Advice

The primary source of reference for development advice is the West Oxfordshire Local Plan 2011 (adopted June 2006). Copies of the Plan can be inspected at: www.westoxon.gov.uk, or by visiting the Council's offices at: Elmfield, New Yatt Road, Witney.

The local plan contains specific policies for development in Conservation Areas, but other policies are also relevant to Alvescot. In relation to housing provision, Alvescot is a village covered by policy H5, which allows some new housing through the infilling of small gaps in an otherwise continuous built-up frontage; or through the conversion of appropriate existing buildings worthy of retention.

Policy H12 allows small-scale affordable housing schemes which meet local needs and that cannot be met in any other way.

Within the Alvescot Conservation Area the existing buildings, land uses, historic settlement patterns and open spaces should remain largely undisturbed. Where development is allowed, the following guidance is offered in order to preserve and enhance the appearance and character of the Conservation Area.

Any new buildings, and extensions to existing buildings, must be well designed in themselves and must be sympathetic to the established character of the area. They should respect the form, setting and scale of the adjoining and surrounding buildings.

Special care must be taken to ensure that views into and out of the Conservation Area, as well as views within the Conservation Area, are not harmed. New development must incorporate existing features of historic, visual or natural importance, such as trees, hedgerows, ponds, stone walls, paths and tracks.

Materials for new building works should be sympathetic to those prevailing in the area. In particularly prominent or sensitive sites natural stone will usually be the most appropriate material. The conversion of redundant historic buildings should respect the original character of the building and its setting, and any historical features of interest should be retained.

Large extensions or an accumulation of extensions can easily obscure the simple form of traditional buildings, and should be avoided. Important groups of buildings often have a special value and historic character which can be harmed by new development (however well designed). It should be recognised that in these instances extensions may not be acceptable.

Trees and hedgerows which make a contribution to the Conservation Area should not normally be removed unless dying or dangerous. Anyone wishing to prune or remove a tree must first notify the Planning Service. When planting new trees local character should be considered, and species selected to suit their context and the wider landscape character. For example, willow, alder and poplar are generally appropriate to the surrounding area.

West Oxfordshire Design Guide

The West Oxfordshire Design Guide provides additional guidance on: local characteristics; new development; sustainable building design; Conservation Areas and Listed Buildings; alterations, extensions, conversions and repairs to traditional buildings; the District landscape context; and a range of other design related issues.

Detailed design advice, with lists of practitioners, is contained in the appendices and includes material on: stonework, thatching, paintwork, joinery, and barn conversions;

The Design Guide is available online at: www.westoxon.gov.uk/planning/DesignGuide.cfm. Copies can also be purchased from Planning Services on: 01993 861420.



Architectural character and quality of buildings

The vernacular houses and cottages of Alvescot are typically long and low with steeply-pitched roofs (though a number of taller two-and-a-half storey houses with dormers at attic level can be seen). The early cottages are sometimes linked to form short terraces. Simple plan forms, two- and three-bay ranges and timber casement or sash windows predominate.

Most of the houses and cottages are constructed from the local pale oolitic limestone (used in coursed rubble form) and are topped with stone slate or Welsh slate roofs. Elements from a more formal architectural vocabulary are not as conspicuous as they are in nearby Kencot (though ashlar dressings and stone mullion windows make occasional appearances).



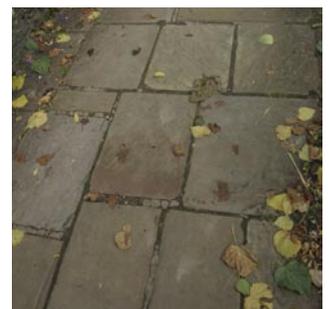
Characteristic Building Materials in Alvescot:

Roofs

- Stone slate;
- Welsh slate;
- Clay tiles.

Walls

- Oolitic limestone in very narrow beds;
- Cornbrash limestone for field and boundary walling, laid in very narrow beds;
- Timber framing;
- Lime render on infill panels;
- Weatherboarding of elm, oak or chestnut; left natural to bleach silver grey, or stained or painted black.



Alterations and extensions

Traditional but often unlisted buildings are vital components of the character of Conservation Areas. Seemingly small but inappropriate alterations to these buildings can easily damage the appearance of the wider area.

Buildings may need altering or enlarging from time to time to meet the evolving needs of successive owners. However, many existing buildings in Alvescot have a scale and character worthy of retention. Whilst the Council recognises that many buildings have the potential to provide additional space, this should not involve damage to the special character of the Conservation Area.

Listed Building Consent is required for any work that will affect the character or appearance of a Listed Building or structure, either externally or internally, regardless of that building's grade. Demolition, extensions, and internal or external alterations all require Listed Building Consent. The administration of Listed Building Consent is the responsibility of the District Council, and applications for Listed Building Consent should be made on forms available from the Planning Service.

Apart from general planning and highway considerations, it is expected that in all cases the basic size of the existing property will be respected and that alterations and extensions will take into account the scale and character of the original form.

Within the Conservation Area extensions will not be allowed to fill private gardens or create sub-standard living conditions. Similarly, extensions which lead to a loss of daylight to neighbouring dwellings or create problems of loss of privacy will not be supported.

All development activity should be sustainable, with the aim of preserving energy and resources and reducing pollution. Factors such as building orientation, re-use of materials, insulation, solar shading, water conservation and innovative heating and power generation systems can all help to further these aims.



Repairs to traditional buildings

The repair of traditional windows and doors is often a better and cheaper alternative to wholesale replacement. Draughty and ill-fitting windows and doors often only need stripping of old paint layers. For reducing noise and draughts, secondary glazing and draught proofing are very effective alternatives to sealed unit double glazing.

Traditional window designs are fundamental to the character of local buildings. When replacement windows are installed these should match the original designs. Modern top hung night vents and large sheets of fixed glazing are rarely appropriate. Timber windows and doors are generally appropriate.

Modern substitutes such as PVCu and aluminium do not look the same, and generally have poor environmental consequences. Modern Georgian style doors with integral fanlights have no historical basis and should be avoided.

Paint is the traditional finish for external joinery. European hardwoods such as oak and elm were usually left unfinished to weather naturally. Timber stains and varnishes are modern introductions, and need to be chosen with care to avoid inappropriate colours.

The repointing of stone walling and brickwork should always be undertaken with great care, as the visual character of a building or boundary wall can be destroyed by ill-advised work. Hard cement-rich mortars and raised ribbon pointing should be avoided. Bagged mortar joints are the traditional finish in the District.

Roughcast render on stone buildings is a traditional finish, and should be retained where existing. Removal of stucco or render finishes can expose poor quality porous stone to unacceptable weathering. External finishes of this kind were often an essential part of the original architectural concept, and they should be retained or restored wherever possible.

Stone or brick walling should not be painted as this can lead to damage of the walling materials, as well as resulting in dramatic visual alteration.



Boundary treatments

Alvescot has a loose-knit character and does not have a strongly-defined edge. Rather, it seems to first emerge 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 ones 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 walling of various heights can be seen throughout the village. A couple of properties, including Shill House and Park Farm, have higher status boundary features, such as square pillars topped by capping stones and ball finials.

Highways and public spaces

The County Highways Authority, District Council, Statutory Undertakers and Alvescot Parish Council will be encouraged to exercise particular care to ensure that where work does take place within the Highway or public spaces, that the design of materials and details positively preserves and enhances the visual character of Alvescot.

All proposals for new or replacement poles, masts, streetlights, overhead cables, utility boxes, traffic signage and traffic calming measures should be subject to consultation with the Parish Council and Local Planning Authority. The use of standard fittings or components is unlikely to preserve or enhance the character of the Conservation Area.

All new work should be fitted sensitively into the existing context. Physical measures should involve minimal visual interference with the established villagescape. The installation of any new overhead cables will not be supported.

The landscape context of Alvescot Conservation Area

The West Oxfordshire Landscape Assessment provides an analysis of the landscape which surrounds the Alvescot Conservation Area. Alvescot lies within the Bampton Vale landscape character area.

Principal factors threatening the landscape setting of the Conservation Area:

- Agricultural intensification, particularly drainage and conversion of pasture to arable;
- Removal of natural vegetation cover;
- Poor maintenance and loss of field boundaries;
- ‘Suburbanisation’ of rural settlements and roads;
- Noise and visual intrusion from Brize Norton airbase;
- Visual intrusion of pylons and overhead power lines.

Enhancement priorities for the landscape setting of the Conservation Area:

- Retain and manage areas of floodplain pasture, meadows and riparian vegetation;
- Promote traditional practices of willow pollarding and ditch management;
- Introduce new planting along watercourses and in lines and groups within valley floor, using typical riparian species, such as willow and alder;
- Within open clay vale landscapes, restore a stronger structure of hedgerows, hedgerow trees and belts of woodland;
- In semi-enclosed clay vale farmland, retain and extend the existing hedgerow network and allow mature hedgerow trees to develop;
- Where possible, encourage conversion of arable land to pasture;
- Plant large blocks and belts of native woodland, to link with existing woodlands and restore a more mixed pattern of woodland and farmland.

Landscape, trees and views

For any development activity, the existing landscape, vegetation and wildlife context must be carefully considered. Established plant and animal communities must be conserved during and after construction, and provision must be made for such assets into the future. Biodiversity enhancements may be possible through the creation or restoration of habitats, which support rare or protected species. Planting schemes should reflect not only the broad landscape character, but also the specific local context as described in the West Oxfordshire Landscape Assessment and elsewhere.

As well as being important natural components in their own right, trees and hedgerows form vital habitats for wildlife, and can provide important corridors between isolated habitats. Some hedgerows and trees are protected by law, so if your application involves the removal of a part or the whole of a hedge or tree, you should first contact the District Landscape and Forestry Officer. If the application involves planting, careful attention should be paid to the species used. Whilst the planting of local, native species (including traditional fruit tree varieties) will be encouraged, non-indigenous ornamental species may sometimes be appropriate (though ornamental conifers are generally not appropriate within Conservation Areas).



Typical indigenous species for Alvescot (River Meadowlands):

Key species

Willow	<i>Salix spp.</i>
Alder	<i>Alnus glutinosa</i>
Poplar	<i>Populus spp.</i>
Ash	<i>Fraxinus excelsior</i>
Hawthorn	<i>Crataegus monogyna</i>

Significant species

Oak	<i>Quercus robur</i>
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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
01993 861666
01993 861662
01993 861659

