



Alcester Conservation Area

Character Appraisal



September 2008

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1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Historic places are increasingly being recognised for the important contribution that they make to the national heritage, as well as to the local scene. This contribution can be gauged in visual, economic, and/or general quality of life terms, but it is nowadays more accurately reflected through an overall assessment of “cultural significance”.

1.2 Cultural significance means those special qualities or “values” (e.g. historic, scientific, aesthetic, social, spiritual, commemorative, etc.) which people associate with or attach to a place for past, present and future generations.¹ It is embodied in the “fabric” (i.e. all of the physical material, components and contents) of the place, as well as its setting (i.e. garden, grounds and surrounding streetscape or countryside) to create a unique identity. A comprehensive understanding of these values is fundamental to the ongoing conservation management of places.

1.3 The Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 (the Act) defines a conservation area as “*an area of special architectural or historic interest, the character or appearance of which it is desirable to preserve or enhance*”.

² Most conservation areas are traditionally based on groups of buildings but also encompass street patterns, open spaces or features of historic and/or archaeological interest.

1.4 Under the Act, Local Planning Authorities (LPAs) have a duty to review which parts of their districts possess special architectural or historic interest and to designate them as conservation areas. Designation is the principal means by which an LPA can apply conservation management policies to an area in order to preserve or enhance its character or appearance.

1.5 Government advice contained in *Planning Policy Guidance 15 - Planning and the Historic Environment* (PPG15) encourages the identification and recording of those elements that contribute to and detract from a conservation area’s special interest and its character and appearance.³

1.6 A review of the historic market town of Alcester has been carried out over the period August 2006 through July 2007. This exercise assessed the existing conservation area designation and amended boundary as adopted by Stratford-on-Avon District Council in June 1994. Much of the survey and analysis of the buildings and landscape form utilises material from the November 1993 report, which was prepared by Alan Smith & Partners.

1.7 Despite significant change and redevelopment over the past decade, most of the settlement and the immediate surroundings still retain those features of architectural, historic and cultural interest, which warranted the original conservation area designation. The boundary of

the existing conservation area (as amended June 1994) is shown on Map 1.

1.8 This appraisal identifies those special qualities of Alcester, which justify its designation as a conservation area. It does not attempt to provide a comprehensive guide to the importance of each individual element of the area and the omission of any particular building, feature or space should not be taken to suggest that it has no interest.

1.9 The primary objective is to increase public understanding and awareness of those aspects of the character and appearance of the conservation area that should be preserved or enhanced. This will allow future changes to be accommodated in an informed and sympathetic way, without adversely affecting Alcester's special qualities.

1.10 The scope of this document and its respective subject headings are based on the recent guidance issued by English Heritage; *Guidance on Conservation Area Appraisals* and *Guidance on the Management of Conservation Areas*, both published in February 2006.^{4,5}

1.11 Principal sources of information for the historic development section include *Local Past* (the website of the Alcester & District Local History Society), *Towns and Villages of England: Alcester* by David Green, Terry Slater's *A History of Warwickshire and Warwickshire Place Names* by Anthony Poulton-Smith.

2 PLANNING POLICY CONTEXT

2.1 The Town and Country Planning Act 1990 (with subsequent amendments) requires LPAs to prepare a Development Plan to guide and control development within their areas.

2.2 The current Stratford-on-Avon District Local Plan takes account of national and regional policy and sets out a range of policies which aims to reconcile the need to provide new development with a responsibility to protect and enhance the quality of the environment for all who live and work within the district. Particular emphasis is placed on "sustainability" in the sense that development should meet present day needs without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.

2.3 The policies and proposals set out in the Local Plan include those for housing, employment, transport and accessibility, shopping, countryside and other open land, recreation, sport, leisure and tourism, conservation and the environment, minerals, derelict land and waste disposal, community facilities and utilities infrastructure and implementation/monitoring.

2.4 With particular regards to the protection and enhancement of environmental features, there are some 14 specific policies defined in the Local Plan, which apply generically throughout the Stratford-on-Avon District. These relate to the protection of sites and buildings of historic, architectural and archaeological interest (i.e. listed



**Conservation Area
Boundary 1994
Map 1**

 Conservation Area Boundary
as Amended on 15 September 1994

Where property boundaries define the limits of the Conservation Area, all features forming the boundary (e.g. walls, hedges, trees etc.) are assumed to be wholly within the Conservation Area.

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buildings, scheduled ancient monuments and archaeology), conservation areas and the natural environment, e.g. landscapes, parks and gardens, ecology and geology, trees and woodlands, nature reserves, protected species and the Cotswolds Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB).⁶

2.5 It is intended that this appraisal, adopted on 18th September 2008 will support the policies contained in the Stratford-on-Avon District Local Plan. Additional area-specific policies may be defined for Alcester, which could include the withdrawal of some permitted development or “PD” rights for residents, business and other users. This simply means that planning permission must be sought for certain minor works (e.g. garden sheds, greenhouses, garages, roof enlargements/alterations, extensions, vehicle hard-standing, gates, walls, fences, etc.) which would not normally require a planning application.

2.6 Stratford-on-Avon District Council does not seek to prevent further development within the settlement, but to control it in such a way as to preserve or enhance those features, which contribute to the special character or appearance of the conservation area.

2.7 The implications of conservation area designation for Alcester should therefore be viewed in a positive sense. This means helping retain those special qualities which the local community, the public at large, Stratford-on-Avon District Council,

English Heritage and other amenity groups value as contributing towards its character, appearance and cultural significance.

2.8 The Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 introduced a new system of plans called the Local Development Framework. This will eventually replace the current District Local Plan, but it is not anticipated that the basis and emphasis of local planning policies in relation to conservation areas will change substantially.

3 SUMMARY OF SPECIAL INTEREST

3.1 The historic market town of Alcester presents the first-time visitor with a sense of intrigue, of a place steeped in history and tradition, somewhere to be explored, appreciated and understood.

3.2 Alcester's unique character derives from its strategic position on the Roman Icknield Street, combined with a medieval street pattern still populated by many fine secular buildings dating back to at least the 16th century. Half-timbered black and white houses jostle for attention alongside the later



Figure 1. Early morning in Alcester High Street; scene looking north from the junction with Swan Street/Stratford Road

additions of stone, brick and stucco render. A rich array of exterior pastel shades both harmonises and differentiates the various building forms in the town centre, especially along High Street, Church Street and Henley Street in the vicinity of St Nicholas' church. The net result is a seamless ribbon of streetscapes with a wide range of architectural, aesthetic and social interest.

3.3 An underlying theme of simple vernacular architecture contrasts quite subtly against the more refined styles of the 18th century onwards; symbols of the town's wealth and prosperity from the industrial revolution. Several former coaching inns and public houses stand testimony to its role as a transit point on the 18th century stagecoach routes between Birmingham, Leamington and London. Late-Georgian enhancements to many of the



Figure 2. Church Street looking west towards the transition into the High Street



Figure 3. Georgian elegance in Church Street contrasts with the more vernacular Town Hall and Henley Street beyond

earlier cottages and houses reflect the town's development and give an irregularity of vertical emphasis to many of the streets.

3.4 The buildings and street pattern appear just how they have evolved over time, without any uniformity of design or layout; indeed Alcester is anything but pretentious. As Pevsner observed so astutely when writing about Alcester 40 years ago *“all on a modest scale; nothing imposes itself, nothing hurts”*.⁷



Figure 4. The Cross Keys Inn on the corner of Stratford Road and Gas House Lane; view towards High Street junction

3.5 A wide diversity of building materials and their application are everywhere to be seen. Stone blind arcading emphasises the solid base of the otherwise rendered/half-timbered old Town Hall whilst red brick and terracotta define the pure industrial functionality of the former Minerva Needle Works. Slate, thatch and clay tile roofs add a further dimension of texture, interest and authenticity to the wealth of building forms, function and detail on display.

3.6 Virtually every building in the town has its own unique distinguishing features. These range from tall, elegant chimneys through gables and dormers of all shapes and sizes, overhanging timber “jetties”, leaded light and sash

windows, traditional Victorian/Edwardian shop fronts and neo-classical embellishments on some of the finer Georgian examples. The cumulative effect is not unlike that of faces in a crowd and gives Alcester a distinctive and historic atmosphere as a backdrop to its 21st century day-to-day activities.



Figure 5. Early-16th century timber framed houses at the top of Malt Mill Lane; the protecting upper storey forms a continuous “jetty”

3.7 Simple reminders of the past underline the virtual timelessness in parts of the town. From the once ubiquitous red telephone kiosk in Church Street through to the wrought-iron archway framing the entrance to St Nicholas’ churchyard, these elemental features make a significant contribution to the character and appearance of the various streetscapes.



Figure 6. Ornamental gate piers and a wrought-iron archway define the entrance to St Nicholas churchyard

3.8 Whilst the concentration of buildings does predominate, it is the combination of spatial elements, which helps to define the quintessential character of the place. Gaps between buildings, their different juxtapositions and the sequences of spaces thus created, coupled with the irregularity of the street pattern open up perfect vistas with intriguing vanishing points. The medieval origins of Alcester's street pattern ensure that there is a complete lack of any urban symmetry.

3.9 For example, the broad sweep of the High Street contrasts quite markedly with the narrowness, irregularity and shaded seclusion of the pedestrianised Butter Street curving away behind the church.

3.10 Henley Street yields its otherwise straight alignment to the offset and imposing Town Hall, to create an unexpected triangular communal space.



Figure 7. Tranquillity and medieval charm still linger in the secluded shade and confines of Butter Street



Figure 8. Imposing Georgian townhouse facades provide "closure" to this part of Church Street, dividing the street into a series of uniquely recognisable visual statements

3.11 The gentle falling gradient of Malt Mill Lane away from its junction with Church Street is emphasised by the substantial timber-framed jettied houses. This gives a sense of tranquil enclosure before opening out further down towards the functionally named Gas House Lane.

3.12 Several cut-through passageways known locally as “tueries” link the main streets to rear courtyard areas and open spaces which once hosted a multitude of trades and traditional craft skills.



Figure 9. Traditional flagstone paving along one of the “tueries” leading off the High Street (rear of Tudor Rose café)

3.13 The boundaries of the narrow “burgage” plots are still discernible in many places, further emphasising the town’s spatial development around its medieval framework.

3.14 The churchyard with its surrounding tree line provides a focal point of greenery to frame the northern end of the High Street. Trees and grassed areas become more prevalent towards the fringes of the conservation area, especially along the eastern river frontage between Gunnings Bridge and the Stratford Road.

3.15 The clumps of mature deciduous trees along this meandering stretch of the River Arrow form an essentially rural setting for the historic town beyond. In many ways the seclusion of the waterfront and its restricted access enhance the appearance of the townscape when viewed across the meadows from the east.

3.16 Several other public areas make important visual, spatial and amenity contribution to the conservation area. These include the bowling green, recreation grounds (off Gas House Lane and Moorfield Road), the extensive allotment gardens behind Bleachfield Street and a band of evergreen trees which front School Road along the cemetery perimeter.

3.17 The many and varied historical, architectural, social and aesthetic attributes which define Alcester’s character and sense of place are clearly greater than the sum of their constituent parts. This pleasant market town creates a lasting impression of timeless heritage and cultural interest, which appears to adapt to the demands of modern life on its own terms and at a most leisurely pace.

3.18 When describing Alcester as part of the “King’s England” volume on Warwickshire almost 60 years ago, Arthur Mee remarked on how “it has lost much that was old and beautiful, but has kept enough to make it fascinating”.⁸

3.19 There are several strong and prevailing characteristics, which combine to give Alcester its special sense of place and cultural significance:

- St Nicholas church; dominant vertical form of the tower and offset clock face act as a focal point for the surrounding streetscape
- Excellent surviving examples of period timber framed buildings still set in their traditional narrow and deep, medieval burgage plots
- Well-preserved medieval street pattern with interconnecting "tueries" (passageways) between adjacent plots
- Many of the buildings from the late-Georgian and Regency periods exhibit very high quality brickwork
- Excellent examples of late-Victorian and Edwardian traditional shop fronts along the High Street
- Relationship of built and natural environments alongside the river

3.20 Alcester's historic core has seen relatively few 20th century developments. Going forward, the challenge facing the town, its inhabitants and the LPA, is how to maintain a vibrant, sustainable and socially inclusive community without irreversible erosion of the historic fabric, which reflects its "*wondrous past*". ⁹

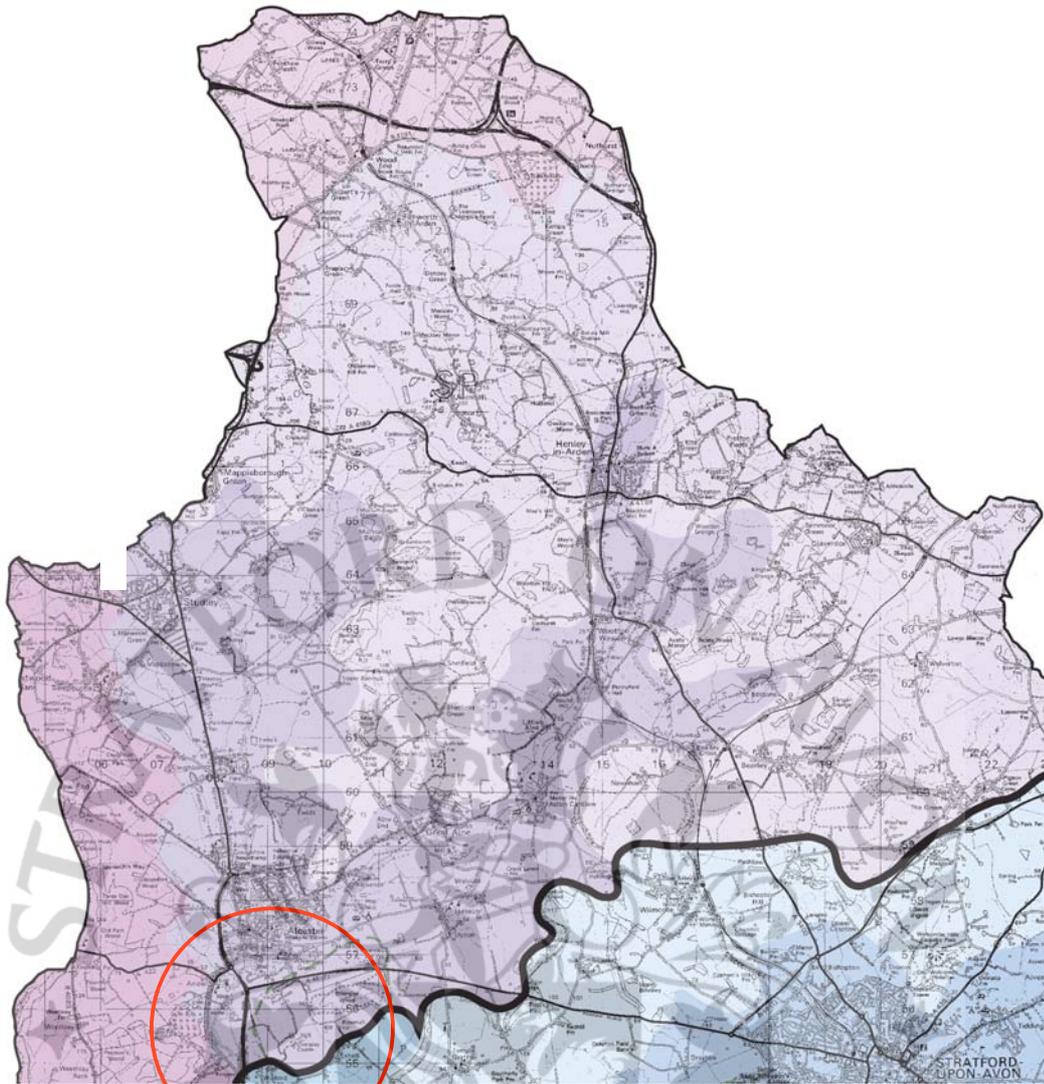
4 LOCATION AND SETTING

Location and Context

4.1 Alcester is situated at the confluence of the Rivers Arrow and Alne in the western extremity of Warwickshire. It lies within the medieval region of Arden, which today corresponds to one of the five main character areas, which constitute Stratford-upon-Avon district (see Map 2).

4.2 The present day town occupies the site of Roman Alauna, at the crossing of Icknield Street and the Salt Way, the present-day A435/A46 and A422/A46 trunk routes respectively. The population of the settlement was recorded as 6,214 at the 2001 census.

4.3 Neighbouring settlements include Bidford-on-Avon due south (4 miles) and Stratford-upon-Avon to the east (8 miles). The larger towns of Redditch and Evesham are located to the North (8 miles) and southwest (11 miles). Map 3 shows Alcester's general location with respect to Redditch; the larger-scale Map 4 gives more of an insight into the geography of the local area.



Map 2. Location of Alcester within the Arden character area of Stratford-upon-Avon District; Stratford is located within the neighbouring Avon & Stour Valley area

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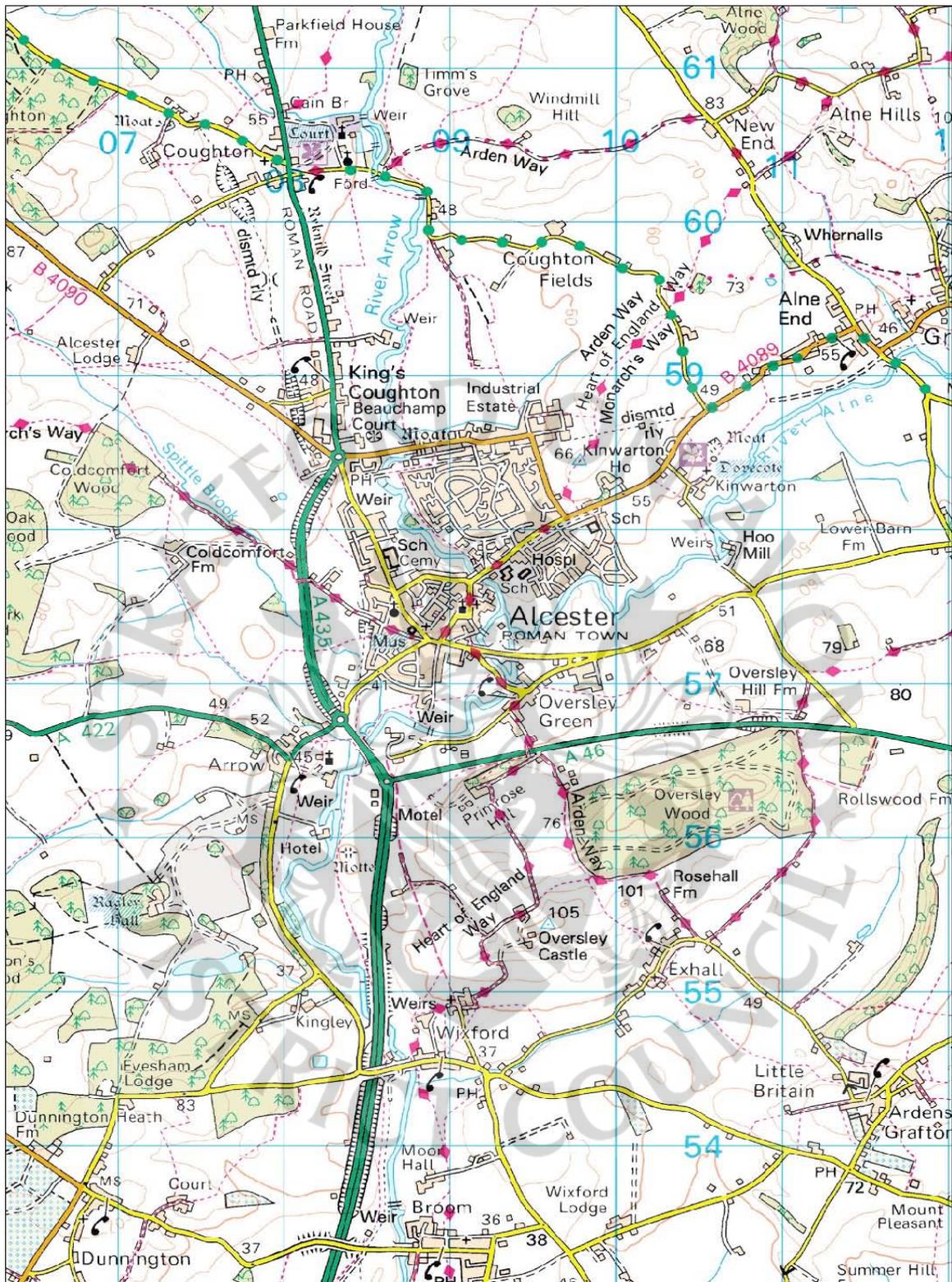
4.4 The local geology consists of keuper marl foundation (upper Triassic system), broken by the slightly harder Bromsgrove sandstones, which form rounded hills or ridges. These undulations give rise to the gently rolling countryside in the vicinity of Alcester, as characterised by the extensive farmland and richly wooded landscapes. The area around the river floodplains has deep alluvial deposits, which are the key to this cultivation.

4.5 Once an important transit point on the stage coach routes linking Birmingham, Bristol, Shrewsbury and London, Alcester's transportation links were transformed by the arrival of the railway in 1866. From the mid-1870s onwards, the railway station became a junction and was served by both the Midland Railway (Tewkesbury to Redditch route) and the Great Western Railway (to Stratford-upon-Avon via Great Alne). These lines were



Map 3. Alcester, the River Arrow valley and A35 trunk road (Icknield Street) in relation to the larger town of Redditch c. 1984; note that this map pre-dates construction of the southern and western bypass routes

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Map 4. Alcester c.2007 clearly showing the new A435 and A46 trunk bypass routes which relieve the town centre of through traffic

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secondary routes and carried relatively low levels of traffic; both having succumbed to closure by the late-1960s.

4.5 Today, with the exception of the station building (now a private house), the road overbridge on Evesham Street and some stretches of isolated track bed, virtually nothing of the former railway infrastructure survives.

4.6 Alcester maintains its historic “market” function and is consequently an important and busy centre for local residents and the surrounding villages. Whilst the A435/A46 bypass alleviates some of the pressure of heavy through traffic, sustained town access and local delivery vehicles exert a continual strain on the restricted on-street parking arrangements. This is most notable along the High Street and within the narrow confines of the Old Town Hall, even though there are large, free car parks centrally located immediately to the west of the High Street!

General Character and Plan Form

4.7 The physical character of Alcester's historic core derives from its relationship with the meandering River Arrow and a strategic position on the road system, which developed during the period of Roman occupation.

4.8 Flowing in a roughly north-south direction, the river forms a

wide loop around the eastern part of the town and largely dictated the compacted plan form along the valley floor still evident today. High Street, Church Street, Henley Street and Seggs Lane/ Swan Street/ Stratford Road (Salt Way) constitute the principal thoroughfares inside this loop, with river crossing points at Gunnings Bridge (Henley Street/ Kinwarton Road) and at Oversley on the Stratford Road near where the Rivers Arrow and Alne meet.

4.9 Development of the area around Bleachfield Street during Roman times contributed to an extension of the original compacted form on a north-south axis parallel to the River Arrow.

4.10 Subsequent expansion to the northwest along The Priory (Icknield Street) and to the southwest (Evesham Street) is evident from the c.1886 Ordnance Survey extract (Map 5). The evolved town centre appears bounded by the river to the east and the Midland Railway line to the west, with the deep burgage plots of the properties lining High Street, Church Street and Henley Street clearly visible. In fact, the only buildings east of Gunnings Bridge at the turn of the 20th century were those of the sanatorium and the Alcester Union Workhouse, built in 1836.

4.11 Extensive residential development of this area during the 20th century has tripled the size of the overall settlement but without distorting the original plan form (refer to Map 4).



Map 5. Alcester and its environs c. 1885 highlighting the compacted riverine form of the original settlement and its subsequent development to the south-west/north-west along the Birmingham and Evesham trunk routes; note the depth of the burgage plots to the west of High Street and Henley Street, with The Moors providing a green open space and orchards extending to School Lane (Ordnance Survey Warwickshire 1st edition Sheet XXXVII SW, 1: 10,560 scale or 6" to 1 mile, © Crown copyright 1886, All rights reserved; reproduced courtesy of Warwickshire County Record Office)

4.12 Other modern development exists to the west of The Priory and in the quadrant between Evesham Street and Bleachfield Street, albeit on a lesser scale.

4.13 The segregating effect of the River Arrow is largely responsible for helping retain the integrity of the town's historic core and currently marks the eastern boundary of the designated conservation area.

Landscape Setting

4.14 The historic core of Alcester remains strongly linked to its rural surroundings largely through the tree-lined meanders of the River Arrow (refer to §3.15) and the absence of any development south of the River Arrow; an area which is liable to flooding. Approaching from the east along the gently curving Stratford Road affords an excellent appreciation of the rolling landscape, which defines the town's essentially unspoilt rural setting.



Figure 10. Alcester from the east with open fields and mature trees along the River Arrow providing an unspoilt rural setting; the dominant vertical form of St Nicholas' church tower is just visible



Figure 11. Stratford Road from the River Arrow bridge looking towards Swan Street; the mature roadside trees are significant landscape features

4.15 Key characteristics of the eastern approaches to Alcester are the semi-regular pattern of medium to large sized open fields and water meadows running down to the river. Deep hedges and a broad flank of mature trees along the river bank complement this greenery and provide a very effective visual screen for the settlement; only a brief glimpse of St Nicholas' church tower offers any hint of the town which lies beyond.

4.16 Important views of the surrounding countryside are readily visible from the southeastern boundary of the conservation area, including Primrose Hill and Oversley Wood approximately one mile distant, beyond the far bank of the meandering River Arrow.



Figure 12. View south from Stratford Road with Oversley Wood and the slopes of Primrose Hill in the distance

4.17 The southern extremity of the conservation area at the end of Bleachfield Street underlines the important links, which exist between the town and its surroundings. A large open field and former allotment gardens combine to enhance the character

and setting of the diverse house forms with their contrasting building materials and varied roofscape.

4.18 Distant views of Alcester are particularly notable from the Ridgeway, which forms a western backdrop to the town. Also, the elevated grounds of the late 17th century Ragley Hall to the southwest of Arrow afford a good vantage point of the Arrow Valley.



Figure 13. Bleachfield Street as seen from the southern extremity of the conservation area; Stratford Road is in the distance behind the trees with the "Blacklands" in the foreground

5 HISTORIC DEVELOPMENT AND ARCHAEOLOGY

Origins and Historic Development of the Area

5.1 Alcester's well-documented history almost certainly extends beyond the Roman period for which it is arguably best known. Archaeological evidence suggests that there was an Iron Age settlement in the vicinity sometime between 800 BC and the time of the Roman occupation of Britain in AD 43.

5.2 The focused development of Alcester as a town really began during the Roman period. Slater (1997) suggests that Alcester was probably the largest settlement and only real town in Roman Warwickshire at this time.¹⁰ It would almost certainly have been the main settlement on Icknield Street between Roman Corinium (Cirencester) and the important Watling Street staging post at Letocetum (Wall) just south of Lichfield, Staffordshire.

5.3 The compact town centre appears to have been walled and to the south was "an extensive grid of roads servicing a major trading complex of workshops and associated housing". Industries included leather tanning, metalworking and the manufacture of distinctive coarse pottery.¹¹ Archaeological evidence indicates that this industrial area marked the first real expansion of the original settlement in what later became Bleachfield Street.

5.4 Agriculture was also important during Roman times with the cumulative wealth of the settlement being reflected by the building of many richly adorned villas. Their large size and the high quality of the contemporary interior furnishings were particularly notable, including heating, decorative plaster and mosaic tiled floors.¹²

5.5 Following the end of the Roman occupation around AD 410, Alcester's status as local economic and administrative centre largely disappeared. It

appears likely that the modern name of "Alcester" originated during this period; "caester" (or "castra") from the Latin word for fort and "Alauna" meaning its location near the River Alne.

5.6 To what extent the town became a Saxon settlement is debatable as noted by Green (1993), although archaeological evidence and local place names confirm some Anglo-Saxon influences.¹³ For example, Oversley takes its name from the Saxon "oferes leah" meaning "clearing by the river bank". The ancient crossing point of the River Arrow at Gunnings Bridge derives from the word "Gunnyld" which may be of Saxon or possibly Danish origin.

5.7 A local ironworking industry appears to have developed in Alcester during the 8th century. Timber supplies from the Forest of Arden no doubt provided an abundant supply of charcoal for the smelting process although the iron ore would have come from further north, possibly using the River Arrow for transportation.¹⁴

5.8 Rather surprisingly, there is no mention of Alcester's economic assets for taxation purposes in The Domesday Book of 1086. However, the nearby hamlet and manor of Oversley with its mill on the River Arrow did merit inclusion.¹⁵

5.9 The town's earliest documented records date from the 1140s when the Norman nobleman Ralph de Boteler founded a small Benedictine abbey. A secluded site north of

the town and within one of the meanders of the River Arrow was chosen, Boteler transforming it into an island with the addition of a connecting moat on the western side.

5.10 Alcester Abbey functioned as an independent religious order until 1466 when it was absorbed into the larger Evesham Abbey, subsequently becoming a priory. Following the Dissolution of the Monasteries during 1539-40 the buildings were dismantled and the stone re-used in enlarging/restoring the local manor house at Beauchamp Court.¹⁶

5.11 Today the only clues as to the existence of an abbey at Alcester are its archaeological site (just to the north of School Road beyond the conservation area boundary; refer to Map 4) and two street names; Priory Road and Abbey Close off the Arden Road.

5.12 Sir Robert Corbet was the first Lord of the Manor of Alcester, having been gifted the lands and title by Henry I at the beginning of the 12th century. Possession of the manor was then divided between the Fitzherbert and Botereil families until the mid-15th century when Sir John Beauchamp gained overall control. From 1536 through to 1813, the powerful Greville family, who later became the Earls of Warwick, held the title.

5.13 The impressive c.1618 Town Hall was originally built as a Market Hall using funds of £300 generously denoted by the third

Sir Fulke Greville, Lord Brooke. Originally a single-storey structure with open arches and stone pillars, the upper storey was added in 1641. The stone arches were infilled as part of alterations instigated by the Lord of the Manor, Lord Hertford, in 1894. A fairly recent application of render masks the characteristic close timber studwork of the upper storey.



Figure 14. The Town Hall looking from the shadows of Butter Street c.1922 (© F T S Houghton, reproduced by permission of English Heritage NMR; ref. A42/8247)



Figure 15. The Memorial Town Hall c.2006 as seen from Church Street

5.14 Renamed the "Memorial Town Hall" in 1919 as a dedication to the fallen of World War I, the building holds immense functional, historical

and commemorative significance within 21st century Alcester.

5.15 The ancient manorial seat of Beauchamp Court was actually situated on the southern fringe of King's Coughton north of Alcester. It eventually fell into disrepair towards the end of the 17th century and a mid-Victorian red brick farmhouse now occupies part of the site. Parts of the moat and some earthworks remain (refer to Map 4).

5.16 Alcester's importance as a commercial centre was officially recognised in 1274 when Edward I awarded a Royal charter to hold a weekly market. The Market Place was denoted by a High Cross, which originally stood at the head of Henley Street near to the present Town Hall. Butter Street (or Buttermarket Street as it was known during the 16th century) takes its name from the dairy products and other perishable goods sold within the coolness of its perpetually shaded and narrow confines (see Figure 7).¹⁷

5.17 The administrative powers of the "Court Leet" date from the 1290s, the Lord of the Manor being given special jurisdiction by the Crown to enforce local byelaws, preserve the peace and define/maintain trading standards. Annually elected officers and constables with highly descriptive duties, including the High Bailiff, Low Bailiff, ale and fish tasters, bread-weighers, leather-tester and brook-lookers, carried out enforcement. Administrations of this type were mostly defunct by the early-19th

century but the Alcester Court Leet survives today, more through ceremonial tradition and as an historical novelty than anything else!

5.18 Flax was widely grown in England during the medieval period and Bird (1977) describes Alcester as a centre for its cultivation until the wider availability of cotton in the late 18th century.¹⁸ The slender stems of this versatile plant produce a light-coloured textile fibre and its seeds yield linseed oil. Cloth and linen were predominant local cottage industries during the 14th century and records show a cloth market dating from this time.¹⁹



Figure 16. Bleachfield Street looking south; the timber framed house with lath and plaster infill dates from the mid-17th century

5.19 Bleachfield Street seems to have been the centre of the textile trade, its name deriving from the bleaching process used to whiten the linen fabric. Most of the buildings in this street were destroyed by fire around 1620 and so nothing of medieval origin survives. A move to rename it as "Regent Street" in 1910 met with disapproval from town residents and so the original name lives on

to signify this important period of Alcester's development.²⁰

5.20 Alcester's position at the intersection of the Salt Way and Roman Icknield Street gave it renewed importance as a staging post from the 16th century onwards. Many of the town's inns date from this period, notably The Bear in High Street and the former Greyhound's Head (now Greyhound House at Nos.29 - 31 Henley Street) of c.1595.

5.21 Swan Street takes its name from the c.1541 Swan inn, which stood opposite the southern end of High Street, although the present red brick building dates from the early-19th century.



Figure 17. The Swan Hotel stands at the corner of Swan Street and Bleachfield Street; view looking west

Until the 1870s this thoroughfare was known as Huckerhurst Street, meaning "the way to the woods where the mallow plant grows".²¹

5.22 Barley grown for malting and beer production was another important local industry recorded during the 16th and 17th centuries. Malt Mill Lane takes its name from this once flourishing industry,

there being no less than seven malt houses alone in this single street and several others nearby. Publican brewers who brewed ales for consumption on the premises would have run most of the inns. The high-quality crop yields of the fertile river valleys allowed the Alcester maltsters to meet this demand and supply malt across the wider local area.

5.23 Malt Mill Lane survives as an "archetypal medieval street" with its buildings arguably providing unsurpassed examples of the traditional timber framed "jettied" form of construction (refer to Figure 5).²² The Old Malthouse, which stands on the corner with



Figure 18. Grade I listed and dating from c.1500, the scale and close studded timberwork of The Old Malthouse on the corner of Malt Mill Lane and Church Street (Old Post Office corner) hints at the wealth of its original maltster owners

Church Street dates from c.1500 and was restored in the 1970s, together with most of the other houses as part of a community housing project. A traditional floor-malting kiln has been preserved in the communal gardens to symbolise the

historical significance of this industry to the town.

5.24 Other local industries during the 16th and 17th centuries were predominantly based around agriculture. They included leatherworking, footwear, glove making and ironmongery/blacksmithing to service farming equipment needs. Needlemaking developed as a specialised metalworking trade from the 1670s onwards and subsequently became a major source of employment in the town.

5.25 Hemp was also grown alongside staple arable crops and there are records of rope manufacturing being carried out behind the High Street until just before World War I. The Ropewalk off School Road takes its name from this particular activity.²³

5.26 The English Civil Wars of 1642-51 represented a particularly traumatic period of upheaval for the entire country. Alcester's location virtually halfway between the rival protagonist camps at Warwick and Worcester placed it in the frontline of the conflict and the Parliamentarian forces caused damage to the town in 1645.

5.27 Religious dissent seems to have been rife in and around Alcester during the Civil War years and following the Reformation of 1660. The parish church of St Nicholas had hitherto existed as the sole place of worship since at least the 8th century, its present tower having been built around 1350. Other religions held meetings mostly

in private houses, notably the Anabaptists who met during the 1650s in a secret chapel along what later became known as Meeting Place Lane; now simply Meeting Lane.²⁴

5.28 A Quaker meeting house was built to the east of High Street in 1677 and the Presbyterians opened their own chapel in Bull's Head Yard during the early 1720s. An enlarged brick-built Baptist chapel opened in Meeting Lane c.1736 and this building still stands today; its round-arched entrance doorway through the boundary wall is a distinctive feature.



Figure 19. Meeting Lane looking west towards Henley Street; the early-18th century Baptist chapel is on the left

5.29 A new chapel was built fronting onto Church Street in 1859, the neo-classical design, deep plot and set-back aspect making the building most prominent for the location and in marked contrast to its vernacular style neighbours.



Figure 20. The present Baptist chapel on the eastern side of Church Street dates from 1859; the timber framed building to the left is Windsor House

5.30 Major restoration works were carried out to the main body of St Nicholas church c.1729-33 following a serious fire. Green (1993) remarks on the much narrower confines of Church Street at this time, with the shops and houses of "Shop Row" fronting onto "The Shambles" at the top of High Street and backing directly onto the churchyard.²⁵ Given this compacted street layout it is fortunate indeed that the fire did not spread to neighbouring buildings and cause more widespread damage; a fate which accounted for the loss of many fine timber-framed buildings elsewhere in England.

5.31 Shop Row was eventually demolished in the early years of the 19th century to give the church and churchyard their more



Figure 21. St Nicholas church with its 14th century tower provides the focal point at the top of High Street; the shops and houses originally continued around into Church Street as "Shop Row" and obscured much of the church/churchyard until the 1820s

open aspect. Prior to 1754, the lower end of High Street originally broadened out all the way down from the present day Post Office to Swan Street and was known as the "Bull Ring". This name derives from an enclosure where the animals were held and baited prior to being slaughtered in The Shambles; the name "Shambles" comes from the Saxon for "bench" where the town's butchers killed and sold their meat.²⁶

5.32 High Street itself is a relatively modern and collective name for the street. Pre-19th century Alcestrians would have referred to the specific sections by their trade designations, e.g. Bull Ring, The Shambles, together with the central section, which was known as the "Sheep or Beast Market".²⁷

5.33 The demolition of Shop Row and the Bull Ring development aside, the street pattern of Alcester's historic core survives virtually intact from medieval

times. Most of the period shops and houses, which front these streets today date from the 16th century through to the 19th century. Also, some of the fine Georgian brick buildings in Church Street undoubtedly mask earlier timber framed construction behind their facades.

5.34 Road improvements and the development of turnpikes during the mid-18th century made long-distance stagecoach travel a reality. The town benefited as an ideal stopping-off point on the "Britannia" route from London to Shrewsbury and Holyhead.

5.35 There were at least seven coaching inns by the 1830s and some organised their own coaching services. For example, The Bear ran a daily service to Birmingham known as "The Quicksilver" and there was another service to Leamington Spa called "The Angel". The Globe Hotel was a notable coaching inn, which once stood on the corner of The Priory and Evesham Street. It was demolished in 1965 as part of a road improvement scheme, the name living on under the present day Globe Roundabout.

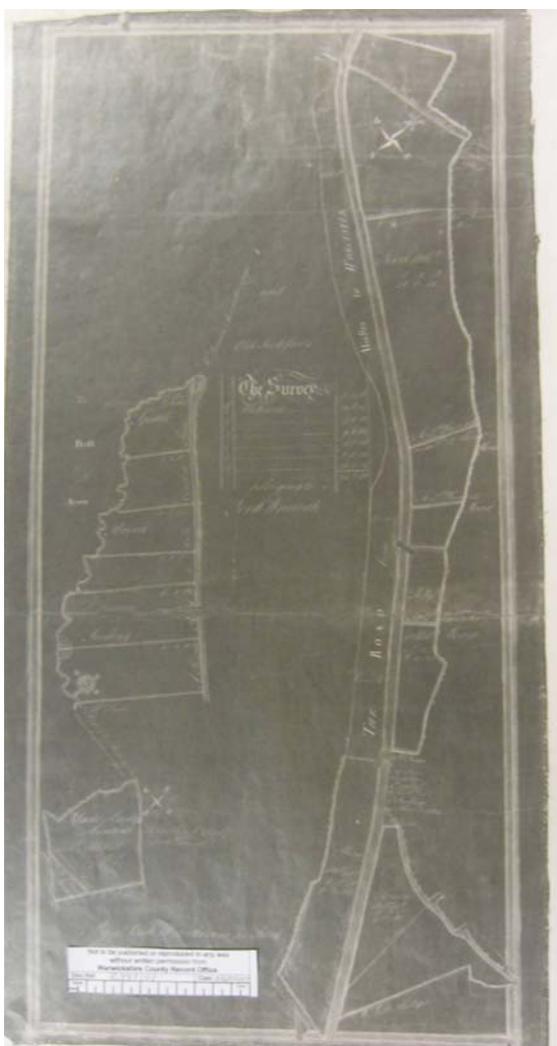
5.36 Alcester retained its importance as something of a "stage coach town" well into the 1850s. It was largely self-sufficient in its daily needs until the arrival of the railway in 1868 opened up the accessibility of products from more distant markets.

5.37 Agriculture underwent a radical transformation from the late-18th century onwards when

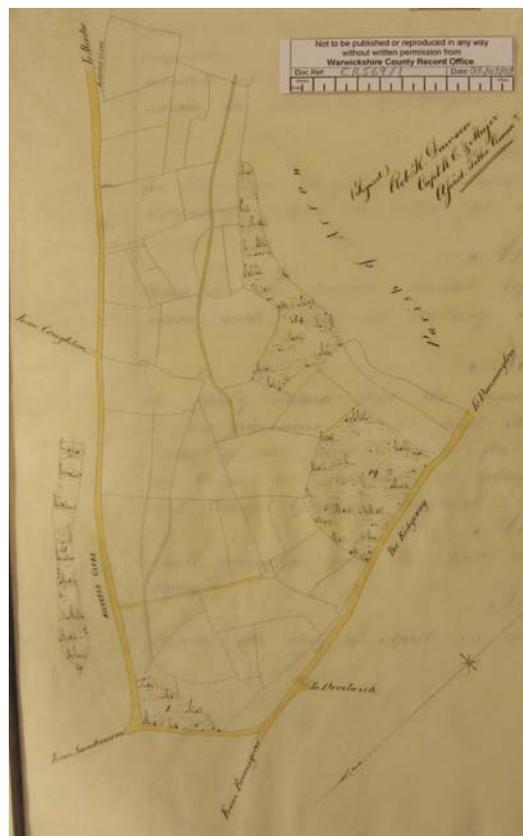
the 1771 Alcester Enclosure Award was passed through Act of Parliament. The medieval tradition of cooperative farming on large open fields sub-divided into strips was now replaced by a more efficient system of competitive farming.

5.38 A comparison of the Earl Brooke estate map of 1752 and the c.1771 glebe plan (Maps 6

and 7 respectively) shows the two-dimensional changes to the parish lands, some 1,530 acres in total. The real effect on the landscape would have been very marked, with the smaller fields visually demarcated by fences and hedges to identify. Landowner boundaries. Any traces of the characteristic "ridge and furrow" strips and common grazing lands were mostly eradicated in 1813 when Lord Hertford of Ragley Hall levelled large areas of farmland.



Map 6. Facsimile copy of Earl Brooke estate map of 1752 showing large field system to southwest of Alcester (reproduced courtesy of Warwickshire County Record Office)



Map 7. Glebe plan c. 1771 showing area of smaller fields to northwest of Alcester (© Warwickshire County Record Office)

5.39 The local needle making industry developed considerably during the 19th century. Using wire supplied from Birmingham, small, dispersed workshops along the River Arrow valley

had traditionally undertaken the various disparate fabrication processes, operating as cottage-industry units. By the end of the 18th century, water-powered corn mills such as the Ragley Mill (just north of the Alcester Abbey site) had been adapted to carry out the more hazardous scouring and pointing operations.

5.40 From the 1820s onwards, further process improvements allied to the introduction of steam power led to more centralised production.²⁸ Alcester became a centre for the industry and by the 1850s boasted at least 18 different manufacturing sites scattered around the town.²⁹ Some of the known needlemaking firms included Harrison's (Priory Road), Allcock's (Henley Street), Payne's/ Guillaume's (Malt Mill Lane), Simmon's (Bleachfield Street) and Dowdeswell's (also on Bleachfield Street).³⁰

5.41 Large-scale mechanisation saw the establishment of purpose-built needlemaking factories such as the Allwood Minerva Works, which opened in 1880. The Alcester Productive Society (latterly the c.1900 Excelsior Works) at No.2 Malt Mill Lane is now a private house.

5.42 The Minerva Works site is significant in terms of historical development because it highlights expansion around the transport-oriented infrastructure introduced by the arrival of the railway in 1866 (refer to §4.5 and Map 5), i.e. away from the town's historic core.



Figure 22. The impressive former Minerva Works in Station Road was a state-of-the-art needlemaking factory from 1880 to the early-20th century; it has been successfully converted to provide local business accommodation

5.43 Alcester's population also grew considerably during the 19th century. The demands of the industrial age created more opportunities for employment away from agriculture and a comparison of early census data highlights this migratory trend.

5.44 At the first national census of 1801 Alcester's population was a mere 1,600. By the end of the Victorian era this figure had risen to over 3,200.³¹ In 1841, 174 workers were employed by the needlemaking industry out of the town's total population of approximately 2,400.³² This figure remained fairly constant through to the 1880s, by which time almost 25% of the population worked in the industry.

5.45 Bartholemew's Gazetteer of the British Isles for 1887 noted Alcester's population as 2,430 and made specific mention of its manufacturing of "needles and fish-hooks".³³ The peak of the industry in Alcester occurred just before the turn of the 20th

century, after which it gradually declined as operations focused on nearby Redditch. Bicycle manufacturing was another local industry, which briefly flourished in years leading up to World War I.

5.46 Notable social improvements to benefit Alcester during the Victorian era included mains gas supply, a proper sanitation system and more schooling facilities. Gas House Lane takes its name from the gasometers, which were erected there in 1850. The town even had a brewery from 1886 onwards, but the fortunes of the Alcester Brewing Co. were somewhat mixed and the premises to the rear of Church Street closed in 1924.³⁴

5.47 Alcester had long benefited from having highly regarded educational establishments; the Newport Free School in Birch Abbey was originally a chantry school but become one of the few grammar schools established during the reign of Elizabeth I. A new National School was founded in School Road in 1843 and there were numerous privately run schools based in the town over the next 70 years or so. A Roman Catholic school opened next door to the c.1889 Our Lady and St. Joseph church on the western side of The Priory in 1902. There was also a Methodist chapel of c.1812 further down The Priory opposite The Globe Hotel.

5.48 At the turn of the 20th century, Alcester's plan form and character had altered little through the preceding centuries.

The Ordnance Survey map extract from 1903 (Map 8) reveals virtually no development since the previous survey was carried out in 1885 (refer to Map 5).

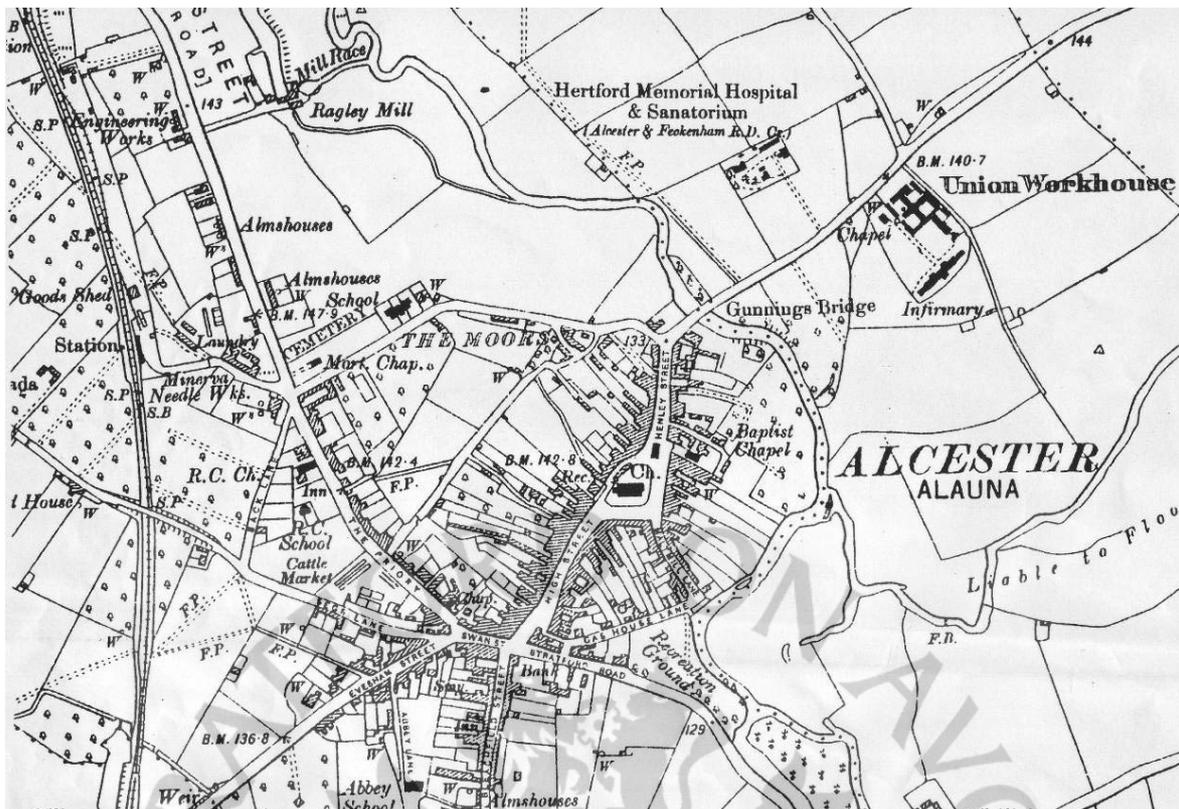
5.49 Unprecedented changes occurred over the next 60 years, which affected the town's built environment, as well as the way of life enjoyed by most Alcesterians. Two World Wars and the subsequent economic pressures resulted in a quantum shift in the ownership of land and people's occupations.

5.50 Post-1945 saw the start of major local authority housing developments to the northeast of the town. Many families took advantage of the opportunity to move into new accommodation and enjoy an improved standard of living beyond of the older, traditional cottages and houses.

5.51 Semi-detached houses appeared along the north side of School Road first, closely followed by a series of spacious, planned estates to the north of the



Figure 23. School Road retains its rural feel despite post-1945 residential development along its northern fringe



Map 8. The Ordnance Survey map of 1903 shows virtually no change from the c. 1885 survey, with only the Hertford Memorial Hospital & Sanatorium northeast of Gunning's Bridge standing out as a new development (Ordnance Survey Warwickshire 2nd edition Sheet XXXVII SW, 1: 10,560 scale or 6" to 1 mile, © Crown copyright 1903, All rights reserved; reproduced courtesy of Warwickshire County Record Office)

Kinwarton Road. These included their own local services and the development was expanded up to the line of the Alcester to Bearley railway by the mid-1960s.

5.52 Private motor transport became more affordable from the late-1950s onwards. This led to a much-increased mobility amongst the working population and commuting to work became a reality. Many of the older properties in the town changed ownership as new families moved into the area. Combined with the development of private housing estates to the south of Kinwarton Road during the 1970s, Alcester's social character gradually became more diverse.

5.53 Various infill and residential estate developments appeared between Evesham Street and The Priory/Birmingham Road during the 1970s and 1980s. The line of the former Evesham to Redditch railway now forms the effective western boundary of the town. House building has also impacted on the quadrant between Evesham Street and Bleachfield Street, with a new development off the latter completed during mid-2007.

5.54 Whilst these developments provided much-needed local housing, many of Alcester's historic landmarks and traditional buildings were unfortunately lost during the 1960s in the name of



Figure 24. Aerial view of Alcester c.2000 highlighting the modern residential development, which has occurred within the southwest quadrant (© Jefferson Air Photography, no. 72892, reproduced with permission)

progress. Examples included the original Newport Free School building in Birch Abbey and the National School on School Road. The original Alcester Grammar School building with its distinctive Gothic-style windows is remembered in the aptly-named Chantry Crescent and Newport Drive; two new roads off Birch Abbey which bound the site on which it stood for so many years.

5.55 In addition to the loss of The Globe Hotel, the bottom of The Priory was dramatically altered with the demolition of the Methodist chapel and several neighbouring houses to make way for re-development in the late-1960s (ironically with buildings themselves now in need of major redevelopment).

5.56 The c.1857 former Corn Exchange in the High Street ranks as another avoidable casualty but arguably the worst debacle was the controversial demolition of the



Figure 25. Stratford Road c.1960 showing the brick-built cottages Nos.28 - 34 and part of the timber framed 16th century Rookery in the distance (© Crown copyright English Heritage NMR; ref. AA71/661)



Figure 26. The courtyard and one of the cross wings at the rear of The Rookery during demolition, May 1960 (© Crown copyright English Heritage NMR; ref. AA71/659)

16th century hall house known as The Rookery, which stood on the corner of Stratford Road/Gas House Lane.

5.57 Largely formed in response to the loss of these important buildings, the Alcester Civic Society has subsequently played an influential role in helping retain and protect the town's historic character for the benefit of present and future generations. The designation of conservation

area status in 1968 has afforded some safeguards against demolition and "unsympathetic" development.

5.58 The extent of modern development within the town's historic core is apparent from a comparison of two aerial photographs taken almost 50 years apart; c.1952 (Figure 27) and c.2000 (Figure 28). Whilst the medieval street pattern is instantly recognisable, many of the former needlemaking workshops and gardens to the west of High Street have gone to make way for the central car parking area and supermarket.

5.59 The last of Alcester's needle making firms operated from the Riverside Works at the lower end of Malt Mill Lane (see Figure 27) and specialised in surgical products until closure in the 1980s.³⁵

5.60 Two new bypass roads were constructed in the 1990s to divert the A46 and A435 through traffic away from the town centre. A link road from the B4089 roundabout at the northern end of the A435 bypass provides access to the Arden Forest Industrial Estate and skirts around the residential estates to meet the Kinwarton Road (refer to Map4).

5.61 These road improvements have significantly mitigated traffic congestion within the town centre, whilst aiding the commercial development of the settlement. Whether further expansive development takes place up to these new southern/

western boundaries remains to be seen.

Archaeology

5.62 Extensive archaeological excavations at Alcester have yielded a veritable treasure trove of finds from many different periods of history. Stone coffins and burial sites were discovered during the construction of the railway in the 1860s.³⁶ Since the 1920s these excavations and their associated research works have undoubtedly made Alcester one of the best-understood smaller Roman settlements in Britain.

5.63 In addition, the town possesses a rich legacy of "above ground" or standing archaeology by virtue of the large number of historic buildings grouped around its well-preserved medieval street pattern.

5.64 Relics from the Iron Age include pottery shards, loom weights and a miniature shield. A 1st century vase was discovered in 1925 and there have also been important finds from the Saxon period. These include a fine silver bracelet and a Tau-cross of walrus ivory found in the rectory garden during 1873; the "tau" referring to the distinctive scrolled "T" shape of the Greek letter by that name. This unique artefact has major national significance and is owned by the British Museum. A replica for display in the Alcester heritage museum in Globe House is planned.³⁷



Figure 27. Alcester as seen from the south in April 1952; note the deep burgage plots on both sides of the High Street and the extent of the needlemaking workshops, also the gasworks and the buildings along Stratford Road (© Crown copyright Wingham Collection, reproduction by permission of English Heritage NMR, ref. SP0957/21)



Figure 28. A comparable aerial view c.2000; the burgage plots to the west of the High Street are still discernible but have been truncated to make way for the central area re-development (© Jefferson Air Photography, no. 72903, reproduced with permission)

5.65 The Historical Environment Record (HER) database held by Warwickshire County Council gives information on over 1,000 known sites of archaeological significance within Alcester and its environs.³⁸ Map 9 clearly indicates the high concentration of archaeological finds within the town centre, the vast bulk of which date from the Roman period. These include coins, pottery, glass and leatherwork, as well as the foundations of many early roads and buildings. Slater notes the existence of “large cemeteries” on the town’s outskirts which date from the Roman period.³⁹ Each find has a unique locator reference (MWA) as shown on Map 9, which corresponds to an individual entry on the HER database.

5.66 Details of the archaeological excavations in the context of the Roman town and its infrastructure are given in the comprehensive reports by Booth (1980).⁴⁰ The remains of Roman dwellings have been found along Swan Street, Stratford Road, Henley Street and Malt Mill Lane. Evidence suggests that the former Brooklyn Ford Garage site at Priory Road/Swan Street is built on the site of a large stone granary, which the Romans used to gather grain in the form of taxes. Part of the outline of a Roman wall is set out in red tarmac in front of the Somerfield supermarket.⁴¹

5.67 The area around Bleachfield Street holds a particularly high density of archaeological finds on

account of it being the likely site of the Roman commercial centre. Important discoveries here include parts of a building with hypocausts (heated floors) and raised pillar floors, a tannery and bronze cavalry harness fittings, in addition to the more common finds of jewellery, ornaments, household objects and pottery.⁴²

5.68 The later core of the Roman town lay on either side of Henley Street and Church Street, and was defended by an earthwork rampart in the 2nd century (MWA506, MWA5001 & MWA5837) and an extended stone wall in the 4th century (MWA4494). Archaeological excavations carried out in the vicinity of Henley Street and Meeting Lane have revealed the remains of mosaic flooring from the Roman period.⁴³

5.69 The evidence of a Saxon settlement is limited and largely based on a few finds made in the Stratford Road/Bleachfield Street area. These include a decorative belt strap fitting and a jewelled sword mount (MWA6461 & MWA8176).

5.70 Alcester’s medieval period is well represented in archaeological terms. The surviving street pattern with its long narrow burgage plots and interlinking tueries provide strong indicators as to how the town developed around the nucleus of St Nicholas’ church. Other evidence from the late medieval period includes an area of furrows running roughly east to west near the present

Alcester Grammar School. These were excavated during 2001 and it seems likely that they were part of a field system attached to the nearby Alcester Abbey. Medieval roof tiles and stone slates were also found. No.19 Henley Street retains internal cruck beams dated c.1385.

5.71 Archaeological work within the Scheduled Ancient Monument (SAM) area which encompasses the abbey site (refer to §5.11) has revealed the probable remains of a medieval timber structure and some pottery shards of 12th/13th century origin (MWA9127). The pottery may have been associated with the Alcester Ware kilns believed to have lain just to the east of the site and south of the abbey (MWA4403). Medieval pottery has been discovered at many sites across the town, including Bleachfield Street (MWA5490), Tibbetts Close (MWA5386) and along School Road (MWA10332). Works at Nos.4 - 6 Evesham Road during 2001 discovered a stone well containing medieval pottery.

5.72 Other notable artefacts from the medieval period include silver coins dated c.1248-50 and c.1302-27, cooking pots and a copper book clasp, from the area around Birch Abbey. A Henry III silver quarter was found at the former Brooklyn Garage site in 1994.⁴⁴

5.73 Post-medieval archaeology from the period c.1485 onwards is visually apparent in several of the

timber-framed buildings, most notably The Old Malthouse on the corner of Malt Mill Lane and Church Street (see Figure 18). Other buildings in the vicinity contain early timber frames and roof trusses concealed behind later 18th/19th century facades.

5.74 Car park construction works undertaken behind Arrow House in Church Street during 2001 revealed rubble from a 17th/18th century brick building and post-medieval pottery.⁴⁵ More recently the excavation of new foundation trenches at nearby Dorset House exposed part of a greenhouse and cart shed belonging to the former Alcester Brewing Co.

5.75 Evidence of Alcester's once thriving flax industry is provided by "retting" and "scrutching" relics found in a brook and on meadowland near the River Arrow.⁴⁶ These tools were respectively used to aid soaking of the flax in special ponds and to remove the outer straw.

5.76 Preparation of the former Abbey Works site on Bleachfield Street during 2002 saw the discovery of a single hearth with metalworking slag; another tangible link to one of Alcester's former industries.

5.77 Alcester has a rich legacy of archaeology and it is highly likely that any building alterations or construction work involving ground disturbance will require full archaeological consultation and on-site supervision.

6 SPATIAL ANALYSIS

Character & Interrelationship of Spaces within the Conservation Area

6.1 Spaces define the inter-relationships of buildings, streets and other built environment features within a settlement and they ultimately help shape its unique character and appearance. Communal green open spaces in particular make a vital contribution to maintaining the necessary "balance" between built forms and the more natural surroundings of the countryside.

6.2 The variety and distribution of both public and private open spaces adds significantly to the character and environmental quality of the conservation area. These key areas include the following:

- St Nicholas churchyard
- Gas House Lane recreation ground; off Stratford Road
- Moorfield Road recreation ground
- Small area of river frontage adjacent Gunnings Bridge
- Birmingham Road cemetery bordering along the north side of School Road
- Our Lady and St. Joseph Roman Catholic churchyard off Priory Road

6.3 St Nicholas churchyard, its boundary wall to Church Street and the paved walkway into

Butter Street are the principal open space at the heart of the town. Fine specimen trees within the churchyard include oaks, yew, holly (*ilex varieties*), a Crimean lime (*tilia x euchlora*) and the elegant Monkey Puzzle conifer (*araucaria araucaria*), which partially overhangs Church Street. The small rose garden, shrubbery and borders which follow the line of the boundary wall add a sense of scale to the treeline as well as providing a verdant frame to the overall setting of the church.

6.4 The recreation ground lying within the triangle formed by Gas House Lane, Stratford Road and the curving River Arrow essentially defines the eastern gateway into the conservation area. Mature trees line both thoroughfares and complement the smaller trees along the riverbank to give a natural visual boundary to the town. Well-laid out paths offer the chance to explore, with several public benches and areas of shade affording peace and tranquillity away from the busy Stratford Road.



Figure 29. View over the recreation ground looking towards Gas House Lane

6.5 Alcester's other recreation ground lies to the west of Moorfield Road and covers a larger area. Tennis courts and an area of grazing combine to form a broad rectangular band of green space which extends from the rear gardens of the houses on Priory Road through to the grounds of the Alcester Infants School off School Road (refer to Figure 28 for indication).



Figure 30. Moorfield Road recreation ground with the footpath from Nelson's Tuery in the foreground; the tennis courts can be seen in the distance

6.6 This area constitutes an essential public space which is already enclosed by residential development on all sides; Priory Road along the south-western perimeter, The Ropewalk to the west and Moorfield Road to the east, with the central car parks and superstore beyond. The setting of the recreation ground is enhanced by mature hawthorn hedges along the Moorfield Road perimeter and the tree-lined footpath, which cuts diagonally across it to link up with Nelson's Tuery/Priory Road.

6.7 An important buffer zone of green space exists along School

Road at the conservation area's northern gateway. Although only part of the Birmingham Road cemetery lies within the designated area, the dense array of semi-mature evergreens and highly distinctive Ashleaf maples (*acer negundo*) give important form, colour and scale along the edge of the settlement.



Figure 31. Birmingham Road Cemetery showing the density of tree coverage and the extent of this key "buffer zone" along the northern edge of School Road

6.8 The sanctity of this green space is emphasised by its solidly built red brick boundary wall with intermediate piers and an ornate pair of wrought-iron entrance gates.

6.9 Our Lady and St. Joseph Roman Catholic Church and former school occupy spacious, mature grounds off Priory Road. The combined grounds and churchyard constitute a significant area of green open space along the conservation area's western boundary. They provide an important balance to the immediate built environment as well as defining the setting and sense of place for the church and adjacent buildings.



Figure 32. Our Lady and St. Joseph Roman Catholic church with its distinctive bell tower spirelet (flèche) stands in ample mature grounds to the west of Priory Road



Figure 33. The large mature grounds of Victorian houses such as Perrymill and Acorn House make a key visual contribution to the conservation area's Evesham Street southwestern gateway

6.10 Important semi-public open spaces within the conservation area include the courtyard setting of Colebrook Close to the east of Malt Mill Lane and two former allotment gardens. These are situated between School Road and the River Arrow just to the north of Gunnings Bridge and behind the houses on the eastern side of Bleachfield Street (refer to §4.17 and Figure 13). The latter area in particular is a crucial green space, which preserves the rural setting of the town along its southeastern fringe.

6.11 Numerous private open spaces also exist within the conservation area. These are mostly mature gardens attached to the larger Georgian/Victorian houses along the north side of Evesham Street and the deep burgage plots running down to the River Arrow behind Church Street. The cumulative effect of the long gardens set within the graceful meander of the river is one of a continuous swath of greenery, which frames the town's eastern aspect.



Figure 34. Aerial view of Alcester from the south showing the extent of the green open spaces and trees which enhance the southern/eastern fringes of the conservation area (© Jefferson Air Photography, no. 72893, reproduced with permission)

6.12 Most of the green open spaces, which survive with the conservation area, are remnants of a much earlier historic landscape. Loss of and/or further development on any of these key spatial components will grossly undermine the delicate balance that exists between the built and natural environments. This can only be to the detriment of the overall conservation area and not just to the specific site(s).

Key Views and Vista

6.13 Important views into the conservation area are apparent from different vantage points along the designated boundary; notably from the south and east as previously highlighted (refer to §4.15 - §4.17, Figure 10 and Figure 13). Other views unfold from within the area itself and some combine with "landmark" buildings to create unique vistas which emphasise the settlement's special character, appearance and sense of place.

6.14 A selection of the principal views and vistas is as follows:

- The town seen from the east approaching along Stratford Road; Figures 10 & 11
- High Street looking north from the junction with Swan Street and focusing on St Nicholas church tower; Figure 1
- The Memorial Town Hall as seen looking north from The Old Malthouse on the corner of Church Street/Malt Mill Lane with Henley Street in the distance; Figure 3
- St Nicholas's churchyard as framed by the narrow confines of Malt Mill Lane; Figure 5
- Church Street and the closure provided by the pastel-coloured brick-built facades of the Georgian buildings; Figure 8
- Looking in the opposite direction to the top of the High Street; Figure 2
- Baptist Chapel; Figure 20

- Priory Road looking north towards the Birmingham Road/School Road/Station Road junction; framed by the arching trees adjacent the Public Library; Figure 35

6.15 Map 10 indicates these views and vistas using the following notation for ease of identification:

- Yellow arrow – important vista within the conservation area
- Blue arrow – view looking out from the conservation area
- Red arrow – view looking into the conservation area



Figure 35. Mature arching trees frame the vista looking north along Priory Road

ALCESTER

ROMAN TOWN
(Site 08)

THE MOORS

Alcester Infants School



Key Open Spaces & Important Views Map 10

- Revised Conservation Area Boundary September 2008
- Key areas of public and private open space
- ➔ Important vista within the Conservation Area
- ➔ Important view looking out from the Conservation Area
- ➔ Important view looking into the Conservation Area

Where property boundaries define the limits of the Conservation Area, all features forming the boundary (e.g. walls, hedges, trees etc.) are assumed to be wholly within the Conservation Area.

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