The Parish of

Alvechurch

Bromsgrove District
Worcestershire, UK

Village Design Statement

Version 1.3
Available on-line @
www.alvechurch.gov.uk

Adopted by Bromsgrove District Council as Supplementary Planning Guidance

A Community Voice for Rural Character

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How To Use The Design Statement

If you're in Local Government, at County, District or Parish level, involved in planning, highway design or Highway Maintenance, or you're *an* Architect, *a* Planning Applicant, *a* Developer *or a* Property Owner, this VDS is for you.

First, refer to The Parish Section, *because it's* common *to all areas.*

Second, refer to the Village Section, Ward or Hamlet in which you have a specific interest

If you're in a hurry, make for **"To be Encouraged"** at the end of each section

Complementary material available via Bromsgrove District Council :
Design Guides for* Agricultural Buildings, Conversion of Rural Buildings, Agricultural Dwellings and Occupancy, Shop fronts, Advertisements and Car Parking Standards** ***The 1968"Gedge" Report

As a Property Owner, Prepare a Character Assessment For Your Property

If you are considering changing any external detail of your property, its paintwork, associated signs, garden or surroundings then please consider the following factors, which may help encourage rural character.

Look at the frontage from some distance so as to see it in association with its surroundings, including trees, shrubs and hedges.

Note the most distinguishing features and, separately, those, which seem to be more recent and perhaps out of character.

If necessary, **take photographs** and consult with friends and neighbours.

Now stand close to the property and note details of the building design itself – its doors windows walls and roofing etc.

Repeat the procedure for each elevation and consider each in relation to the rural character described in this Village Design Statement.

Now think about the changes you propose. Consider whether they might prejudice any of the distinctive characteristics you previously noted. If so, are there any other ways of meeting your requirements but which would conserve the building's heritage?

Where possible, use the opportunity for change to help remove any unwanted and uncharacteristic features.

When looking for guidance to implement VDS ideas, your Parish Council can provide assistance and consultation

Thank you for helping to preserve and enhance Rural Character

Alvechurch Parish Map, Worcestershire, UK

Hopwood

Weatheroak

Withybed Green

Alvechurch Village

Rowney Green

Bordesley

N

Not to scale

Introduction

Alvechurch Village - Withybed Green - Rowney Green - Hopwood - Bordesley - Weatheroak

The Parish lies in a rural setting, in Green Belt between Birmingham and Redditch

When we make alterations to existing buildings, construct something new or change a planting layout, do we consider how it may affect the rural and historic character? Something seen in another setting or context, which looked good at the time, may be inappropriate in our village.

We are the present guardians of our heritage. It is our responsibility, collectively and individually, to preserve it and to evolve and develop it in an appropriate way.

The material contained within is a statement of what is positive and valued in our community, present and future. There are inevitably examples of design within the Parish that do not fit the character defined, but it's not within the brief of the Village Design Statement (VDS) to be critical.

Our opportunity is to change the future, not to criticise the past.

The VDS aims to raise the rural and historic character awareness amongst local residents, businesses, planning applicants, highway designers, local planning committees and planning officers. We need to know how best to take account of what is special about rural character and the local distinctiveness of our buildings and surroundings

This VDS has been gathered via a series of public meetings, workshops and consultation, involving a considerable number of local people. That programme has been co-ordinated by a Steering Group following the Countryside Commission Format.

The finished document , issued for Planning Guidance, is available to the community and specifically to Planning Applicants on line @ www.alvechurch.gov.uk or via the Local Planning Authority

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The People Who Created The Design Statement

This Design Statement contains the summaries of material collected from each of five Character Workshops in which a broad cross section of the Parish community took part.

The material from the workshops has been supplemented by historical contributions from specialists within the community and other additional content compiled by the Steering Group

The Steering Group members and contributors to the workshops and feedback phases and document preparation are listed below. Without their help, completion of the project would not have been possible

The following organisations kindly contributed towards the making of the VDS:
Alvechurch Parish Council, Alvechurch Village Society Bromsgrove District Council, Shell Better Britain Campaign, Worcestershire County Council, The Countryside Agency (formerly the Countryside Commission)

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Section 1.1. History

The Parish Map, which forms part of this document, shows the geographic relationship between Alvechurch Village and its Hamlets, within the Green Belt, situated between Birmingham and Redditch.

The Parish broadly occupies the basin of the River Arrow headwaters. The river played a part in the early development of Alvechurch Village. Where the Worcester to Coventry road crossed the river, the Bishop of Worcester established a Palace residence and the settlement began. Semi-industrial activities followed, such as grinding of corn and, later, needle making, employing waterpower necessitating damming of the river.

In the 12th Century, the Bishop established an Alvechurch Deer Park, the original boundaries of which are still visible as ditches and banks around a major part of its periphery.

The southern boundary of the park is shared with Bordesley Deer Park. The major part of both parks lie within an area designated in the Worcestershire County Structure Plan as

"An Area of Great Landscape Value"

The Church of St Laurence in Alvechurch Village was also a centre for population settlement with many medieval houses still visible today. By the end of the thirteenth century the borough was thriving. The population then suffered badly from the Black Death plague and subsequently economic activity was restricted, becoming largely agricultural when the bishops ceased to use the Palace. During this phase, Alvechurch, with its palace, fishponds, gardens and deer park was a very good example of the recently recognised concept of "medieval aesthetically-modified landscape".

A character random height paling fence forming the boundary to Bordesley Deer Park against a backdrop of hills and woodland

Medieval houses in Alvechurch survive to this day

Section 1.2. Landscape Setting and Wildlife

Alvechurch Parish, with the exception of the Alvechurch Village envelope and Rowney Green Village envelope, is designated Green Belt and over half of that is classified a "Landscape Protection Area". There are large tracts of open countryside, mostly agricultural, surrounding the Village and its Hamlets, these being of great importance in maintaining the buffer between Birmingham and Redditch. The Parish is set in a landscape of low rolling glaciated hills bisected by the River Arrow.

In the foreground, hardly visible, is Hopwood Park Motorway Services and behind it Alvechurch Village – both blend into the landscape within a "bowl" surrounded by hills.

At the Parish Centre, the Village of Alvechurch lies in a bowl within the valley. On the west side, Scarfield Hill and Coopers Hill are on the rim of the bowl with Grovely and Wast Hills to the north. Eastwards lies Swan Hill and Weatheroak. The River Arrow flows out of the bowl through a narrow gap between Newbourne Hill and Cobley Hill towards Redditch in the South. The Church of St.Laurence, dating back to 900 A.D., sits on a hill within the bowl on the south edge of Alvechurch Village.

The Hamlets of Withybed Green, Hopwood, Weatheroak, Rowney Green, and Bordesley are separated from Alvechurch Village by tracts of open countryside, these being of great importance in maintaining the Green Belt between Birmingham and Redditch.

The countryside within the Parish is interspersed with hedgerows and a variety of trees, woodland and copses. Peck Wood Ancient Woodland, on the edge of Newbourne Hill, between Rowney Green and Alvechurch Village, is visible from many parts of the Parish. The hillsides afford spectacular distant views, extending across Warwickshire to the Cotswold Hills and Worcestershire to the Breedon and Malvern Hills.

The Parish comprises a diversity of important wildlife habitats, which support many plant and animal species including some of high conservation concern

Section 1.3 Settlement Form

The Parish of Alvechurch has several significant transport routes passing through its area.

The M42 bisects the Parish with Hopwood and Weatheroak to the north and the remainder to the south.

The A441 Birmingham to Redditch road runs through the area from north to south, following a by-pass, skirting Alvechurch Village to its east. The by-pass, where it joins the M42, influenced the siting of The Hopwood Park Motorway Service Area.

The Birmingham and Worcester Canal provides a pleasant feature as it runs north to south at the western edge of the Parish. Together with the M42 and the Redditch Spur Railway line it forms a man-made boundary to the settlement. The canal was originally built to transport bulky and heavy materials from Birmingham and beyond but that died out gradually after World War One. More recently it has seen a rebirth as a source of recreation; Alvechurch having its own boat yard offering rental and mooring for narrow boats.

Local brickworks in Alvechurch supplied red bricks for buildings in the area during the period between the mid-19th century and 1939.

An extensive network of public rights of way, including public footpaths, bridleways, maintained by volunteers from the Alvechurch Village Society, canal towpaths, and cycle ways are available to local people, plus regional and national visitors. The excellence of the footpath network and its maintenance is referred to in several published guides to walks in Worcestershire and The Midlands.

The pattern of development in the outlying hamlets has been established principally around farming communities although, along with Alvechurch Village, they now form part of the commuter belt serving the West Midlands Conurbation in general and the commercially important centre of Redditch to the south.

The Parish contains many important landmarks and features, for example, at the centre of Alvechurch Village there are historic half-timbered medieval buildings; along the river, there are water meadows with wild flowers and the Old Mill, Radford Road (no longer active as a mill).

Certain developments within the hamlets, and also within the village of Alvechurch itself, benefit from the spectacular views offered by hillside locations.

Each of the outlying hamlets has its own established local communities whilst also having a bond with the wider community of the Parish via the use of pubs, shops, schools and restaurants etc.

Age profile predictions for the Parish in the medium to longer term may lead to increased demand for sheltered accommodation and singe person dwellings.

Employment opportunities within the Parish are limited and, in line with the transport policies and environmental concerns, sympathetic commercial developments and building restorations would be appropriate, particularly on existing brown field sites, even if they fall outside existing village envelopes.

To be Encouraged

Page 8

Settlement Form

- **Open spaces** and play areas planted with native species
- **Views** of open spaces, trees, hedges and hills
- Rural gates, fences and **unclipped greenery**
- **Access** to canal towpaths, public footpaths and bridle paths
- **Open water** provided by the canal, lakes, river and streams
- **Agriculture and horticulture**
- Any features contributing to **rural pursuits**
- Barn conversions, small-scale industry and commerce making **use of** redundant character buildings

Quiet lanes provide the ideal setting for walking, cycling and horse riding

Bittell Lakes create opportunities for sailing and fishing

The Parish is well provided with country pubs

Footpaths across open farmland link each area of the Parish

Horses being ridden along lanes and bridle paths are a common sight

The Parish has many pony paddocks with associated stables – some well disguised

Open farmland and informal green space including woodland and spinneys between Alvechurch and its surrounding hamlets, particularly on the Rowney Green and Weatheroak side, **contribute importantly to the area's rural character** and recreational quality. This factor was expressed with enthusiasm at each of the Character Workshops.

Section 1.4. Buildings

During the course of development of The Parish over the centuries, there have been local sources of timber, sand, gravel, sandstone and clay. These materials influenced building design, colour and character

During the 19th and first half of the 20th century, bricks were produced at a works sited close to the canal. Red clay dug locally influenced the colour of the bricks, which became a characteristic of properties built during that period.

The outlying hamlets are all characterised to some degree by the type of residential development carried out.
Victorian and earlier buildings were built close to the frontage of the lanes and roads. Later development has been set further back and includes a mixture of lawns, hedges, trees and verges. There is little uniformity of building lines and styles but instead, a diversity of character associated with historic periods of development. A mixture of suburban, medieval, Victorian, Georgian and country cottage style housing creates variety in the area.

In recent years, infill and high-density development has led to less land associated with each property.

To be Encouraged
Buildings

- Any **clusters of high density development** within a settlement **being small-scale** and broken up by generously planted open space
- Building **design** taking account of the **styles** identified within the VDS
- **A random mix of building designs** and heights adjacent to each other
- **The avoidance of uniform materials** and colours for visible elevations of adjacent properties e.g. garage doors
- **New properties fitting in** with those of established, traditional design
- **Alvechurch red brick colour**, or "pebble dash" render; not "Cotswold", buff nor concrete-based products
- Refurbished buildings incorporating **reclaim-style materials** and blue brick, to retain originality
- **Roof variety**, using dormer windows, dental courses and decorative verges
- Traditional **tiled roofs and slate roofs**, (not "pan" tiles) with **pitch angles** of no less than 35 deg. for tiles, 25 deg. for slate
- **The avoidance of** panel fencing and **concrete** attachments
- Where privacy and security is necessary, reclaim-style **brick walls complete with a frost proof brick or stone header** course

Section 1.5. Highways and Related Features

The retention of a patchwork of material and informal grass edges associated with footpaths and highways is to be encouraged

Recycled kerbing materials have a mellow appearance whilst remaining functional

Stone setts must be retained and encouraged for use in new schemes where possible

Setting kerbing height below 80mm will improve its appearance

Rough-faced conservation kerbing will mellow faster than the smooth concrete of a standard kerb

Bus shelters with pitched roofs are preferred to flat roofed alternatives

Local "duck" stones can be used as cobbles in small measure associated with paths, highways and drives

To be Encouraged

Highways and Related Features

- **The avoidance of additional kerbing** - any necessary new sections should be low level (below 80mm) and either reconstituted stone character or, best option, granite setts
- "Damaged" kerbs repaired by resetting the originals or using **recycled materials** in order to improve function but retain character
- Raised sections of road surfacing material to form a bund preventing **water spillage from the road into properties** in rural lanes without footpaths; not the introduction of kerbing
- The use of appropriate materials with mellow appearance and/or the ability to weather down quickly
- The avoidance of bollards, mini roundabouts and intrusive street lighting
- Non-uniform block paving, **blue brick and/or tarmac**
- **Verges** left to flower and re-seed **in early summer**
- **Narrow footpaths with hedges alongside**

Section 2.1. History

Refer also to Features Common Throughout Parish – P5

Alvechurch Village Hall

St Laurence Church

Over many years Alvechurch has enjoyed the benefit of its Village hall, its Baptist Church, Catholic Church and Church of England St Laurence

The advent of the canal, the turnpike and eventually the railway did not result in significant residential development. Historical maps of the village show a slow rate of development up to the beginning of the 20th century; It then accelerated, particularly since 1950. At first, "ribbon" development satisfied the need for residential expansion and later, large areas on the western side of the village were in-filled.
Ribbon development began before World War Two but significant expansion began post-1945, and for the most part, post 1960.

Section 2.2. Landscape Setting and Wildlife

Refer also to Features Common Throughout Parish – P6

The oldest part of Alvechurch Village is set amongst mature trees and hedgerows adjacent to the River Arrow and on the adjoining Bear Hill. St Laurence Church commands a prominent position on Bear Hill, surrounded by low-density residential properties and ragged hedgerows containing a variety of wildlife. Most development has taken place on the same side of the river as Bear Hill. Properties set on the hillside form a major feature and add to the pleasant randomly evolved nature identified during the Alvechurch Character Workshop. Other developments within the valley have a more suburban character but all benefit from views of the adjacent hills and the rich planting of native mature trees and hedgerows.

Homes set on slopes benefit from views of the surrounding landscape

Low-density housing at the fringes of the village help it blend with the surrounding landscape

The shopping precinct sits within mature trees when viewed from The Meadows recreation area

Section 2.3. Settlement Form Population Approx 2,600 Refer also to Features Common Throughout Parish – P7

Alvechurch Village, at the cross roads of the Worcester to Coventry road and the Birmingham to Pershore Turnpike, is a commercial and social centre. It provides schooling up to age thirteen, has local shops, restaurants and fast food outlets.

There is limited employment in today's Alvechurch. Many of its residents commute to the neighbouring conurbations of Redditch and Birmingham, with the adjacent M42 motorway providing easy access to a wider area.

The Wiggin Memorial Playing Fields ("The Meadows"), Crown Meadow, George Road Playing Field and the School Playing Fields are the significant publically accessible open spaces within the village.

Smaller less formal open spaces have gradually been in-filled, making those that remain valuable assets not only as informal play areas, but also as oases for wildlife.

Despite the urban-style development, which has taken place in blocks between 1950 and the present, many parts of the village retain a rural character and there is a strong community spirit, often fostered by rural activity.

The use of the canal should be encouraged; it forms a natural boundary but is also a recreational amenity and a contributor to the commercial economy.

The character of the network of walks linking different parts of the village, with its associated trees and hedges, should be maintained.

The adjacency of the countryside and footpath access to agricultural land is important.

Much of the housing in the Conservation Area in the centre of Alvechurch is small character properties. Future changes to the village must meet the needs of a changing society.

Shop fronts and their signs in keeping with the character of the buildings they occupy are to be encouraged

To be Encouraged

Settlement Form

- **Environmental impact assessments,** made before allowing further development of open spaces
- Strengthening of **rural character to be a focus for the future**
- Convenience of use of the railway station
- Canal and **boating** facilities within convenient walking distance of the village centre
- **The convenient use of the canal;** it forms a natural boundary but is also a recreational amenity and a contributor to the commercial economy
- **The character of the network of walks,** with its associated trees and hedges, linking different parts of the village, e.g. through the churchyard and its surroundings
- **Streams open,** not piped in
- **Maintenance of hedges** in a manner sensitive to wildlife
- Planting of **native species trees and hedges** for succession
- The **harmonious mix of recreational, residential and commercial activity** within the village
- **Character landmarks,** e.g. Humpback bridges, The Square and major trees such as on the Redditch Road approach, the large beech tree forming a natural archway into the village
- pThe adjacency of the countryside and footpath **access to agricultural land**
- **Introduction of rural character design into areas where it is lacking,** e.g. residential estates, the shopping precinct and its associated square
- **Shop fronts and their signs,** in character with the buildings they occupy
- **Spaciousness of existing recreation sites** associated with native species planting
- The Village Car Park recycling area which is well hidden and functional
- **A clean and well maintained village**

Section 2.4. Buildings

Refer also to Features Common Throughout Parish – P9

New buildings in local brick colour are in keeping

The predominant mix of building character in the Conservation Area of Swan Street, Red Lion Street, Bear Hill is Elizabethan, Victorian and Georgian. Other parts of the village could be encouraged to follow those themes where appropriate

Building lines back from the road allow space for full size trees to grow without damage to properties or the significant exclusion of light

Some late 20th century developments have adopted elements of traditional detail design, brick colour and roof angles.
Attention needs to be given to building layout, variety in height and planting of native trees

Informal layout of buildings is good practice (the photograph has been used for demonstration purposes only – it was not taken in Alvechurch)

Brookside is a good example of mature planting within a development

Adopt roof pitch angles of no less than 35 deg. for tiles, 25 deg. for slate

To be Encouraged

Buildings

- Informal, **random layout and random height of buildings**
- New **properties blending in** with those of established design
- Local-colour **red brick**, as opposed to buff or "Cotswold"
- The predominant mix of building character in the Conservation Area of Swan Street, Red Lion Street, Bear Hill is Elizabethan, Victorian and Georgian. Other parts of the village could be encouraged to follow the same themes where appropriate but a pastiche of half timbered buildings is considered inappropriate
- Refurbished buildings incorporating **reclaim-style materials** and blue bricks, to help retain originality
- Generous planting such as found in the Brookside development
- Clever use of the contours of the land such as in the "Buckleys" development
- Small house designs softened by the planting of trees and hedges
- **Spaciousness of layout** and set-back building lines can be **mixed with small clusters** of higher density buildings as per Meadow Lane but must be associated with adjacent open space and planting
- **Variation in roof lines** including the use of dormers, dental courses, decorative verges and gable ends
- Incorporation of traditional tiled and slate roofs, (not "pan" tiles)
- Pitch angles of no less than 35 deg. for tiles, 25 deg. for slate
- Subtle changes in levels, creating variety
- Appealing rooflines and roof character viewed from outside the development
- Retention and further planting of native species trees and hedgerows to disguise the severity of new buildings
- Self-sustainable planting schemes within shopping areas
- **Rural-type gates and rustic** non-panel **fencing** without visible concrete attachments
- Where privacy and security is necessary, the use of a reclaim-style **brick wall with a blue brick header course**
- **Residential road edges free from urban kerbing – no kerbing at all if possible.**
- Gravel, crushed stone, random-sized block or tarmac driveways which weather down to become mellow
- **Walks and cycle ways fringed with rural greenery** linking various sections of development
- Business and shop front and design with **a "traditional village" character**

Section 2.5. Highways and Related Features

Refer also to Features Common Throughout Parish – P10

Hoop- top fencing introduced into a part of the village previously devoid of "conservation" street furniture

Good design public seating in a non-manicured setting

Roadside parking can be an advantageous means of traffic calming whilst contributing to passing trade for shops

The canal forming part of the Alvechurch Village boundary is a valuable cycle way and footpath leading in and out of the area

Should lamp standards need to be replaced, heritage-type designs are preferred

Victorian paving bricks, conservation kerbing, grey or brindle "drivesett" blocks, stone setts, cobbles and tarmac are preferred materials

To be Encouraged

Highways and Related Features

- **Footpaths, made from asphalt,** mellowed over a period of time, with vegetation at the fringes
- Victorian paving bricks, grey or brindle "drivesett" blocks, stone setts, cobbles and tarmac for highway-associated construction (red or buff brick-sized block paving is to be avoided)
- The avoidance of high concrete kerbs (height below 80mm)
- Low-level, stone-character **conservation kerbs**
- **The highway within the built up area specifically designed for servicing village businesses and homes,** thus encouraging through traffic to use the bypass
- **Service roads** with mature hedges and trees reducing traffic noise from the main highway
- **Edges of roads and paths** left uncut in spring and early summer
- Character **narrow roads and lanes** coming into the centre of the village
- **The importance of informal road and footpath edges, unclipped hedges and trees,** fundamental to rural character as identified in each of the Character Workshops

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Traffic Calming Measures

To be encouraged if their visual appearance takes account of rural character

- Their appearance must not be urban
- Coloured road surfaces and the use of bright colours should be kept to a minimum
- "Gateways" to the Village centre must be specifically designed to reflect local character
- Designs should eliminate the need for high-profile concrete kerbs
- The use of illuminated bollards should be avoided where possible
- Low-level "moulded" roundabouts with a mock brick appearance are a better visual alternative than mini roundabouts with kerbs, bollards, lighting and signs
- Lighting, visible away from the area intended to be lit is inappropriate
- Lamps should be "white light" not sodium vapour and should be shrouded
- Any necessary lighting supports should be in keeping with the village hoop-top fencing character
- **Parking provision can be an advantageous means of traffic calming whilst also contributing to passing trade for shops**

Section 3.1. History

Refer also to Features Common Throughout Parish – P5

The development of Withybed Green was initiated during the 18th century by the building of the canal, and continues to be influenced by it, attracting a steady tourist trade particularly during the holiday season.

Section 3.2. Landscape Setting and Wildlife

Refer also to Features Common Throughout Parish – P6

It lies west of Alvechurch at the foot of Scarfield and Coopers Hills and is separated from the housing of Alvechurch Village by the canal and single-track railway line. Withybed's canal, brook and small woodland copses in its hilly agricultural setting are a stable environment for a diversity of plants and wildlife.

Section 3.3. Settlement Form

Population approx 100

Refer also to Features Common Throughout Parish – P7

The compact and unspoilt hamlet of Withybed Green, contributes greatly to Parish recreation, via its access to footpaths across farmland. The "country pub" Crown Inn provides a focus for the community as well as food and drink for locals and visitors alike.

The mix of character terraced cottages and detached properties has attracted a broad age band of residents who, whilst taking part in Alvechurch activities as a whole, identify with Withybed Green's unique community and character.

Section 3.4. Buildings

Refer also to Features Common Throughout Parish – P9

Most of the properties are 19th century, built in response to the commercial activity associated with the Birmingham and Worcester Canal.

Section 3.4. Highways and Related Features

Refer also to Features Common Throughout Parish – P10

To be Encouraged

- The retention of unspoilt landscape around Withybed Green
- Canal-side development, only of existing buildings or in small scale, adjacent to them, whether residential or commercial, incorporating boating facilities, helping to consolidate present character and acting as a link with Withybed's historical background
- Any new or alteration building work, architecturally in keeping with the best of existing character
- Ample self-contained parking associated with any building alteration or development schemes
- An absence of kerbing, signage and street lighting. Should it be necessary for safety or functional reasons, avoid intrusive, urban style

Section 4.1 History

Refer also to Features Common Throughout Parish – P5

Rowney Green
– the main area of population (A Ribbon Development)

Comprising mainly large detached properties, this settlement, whilst it had its origins in farming during the 18th century, has become a ribbon development, most of which was constructed post 1950.

The Seecham Area

A small community, half a mile from the main village, identifying with its particular part of the settlement. Its listed property, Seecham Manor, dates back to medieval times. Longfield Manor and Rowney Green House Farm are also listed properties in what is one of the oldest parts of Rowney Green.

Lower Rowney Green

Originally comprising cottages built on The Bishop of Worcester's land during 17th and 18th centuries, this compact community identifies to this day with its low density "unspoilt", quiet "hidden valley" and smallholding agriculture of the past.

Section 4.2 Landscape Setting and Wildlife

Refer also to Features Common Throughout Parish – P6

The spaciousness within the development, including mature native trees and hedges, forms a major part of Rowney Green's rural character

The traditional design of recently constructed stables blends into the mature landscape

Unrestricted rural landscape views from Chapel Lane provide recreational amenity for villagers and visitors

The settlement, with each of its three sub-sections, is spread over approximately one square mile and situated about a mile south east of Alvechurch Village, separated by farmland, the Alvechurch by-pass and the slopes of Newbourne Hill. Each of the three sub-sections has subtly different landscape character. To the northern side of Newbourne Hill, close to the motorway, lies Seecham agricultural and equine community. The ribbon development of Rowney Green lies on the top of Newbourne Hill and Lower Rowney Green lies in a small adjacent valley.

The whole of Rowney Green is designated "A Landscape Protection Area".

Extensive areas of bracken and bluebell woods are an added bonus. There are large pockets of uncultivated spinney and woodland as well as ancient grassland. The spring-fed stream of Lower Rowney Green contains water, filtered through the adjacent sand and gravel hilltop. The whole Rowney Green area is a haven for a rich variety of wildlife.

Access to footpaths and bridle paths from within the village ensures that all residents and visitors can enjoy the benefit of the landscape and farmland

Stables, where possible, should be set down into the landscape or amongst trees

Pretty country lanes without through traffic are ideal for walking and horse riding

With no shop, nor pub, The Peace Memorial Village Hall provides a focal point for village social life. Good community spirit is promoted by societies and individuals using the hall, children's play area, tennis courts and playing field.

With the nearest school and shops three miles away in Alvechurch Village, and with only limited public transport, households rely heavily on private cars.

On the fringe of the village development, to the south, is Bordesley Hall, hidden behind woodland, within a fold of the hill. Split into small industrial and commercial units, it provides local employment.

Peck wood, also on the south side of the settlement, contains an outdoor pursuit centre. Visitors to the centre make extensive use of public footpaths and bridleways within the immediate area.

The Rowney Green Lane ribbon development forms the major part of the settlement, containing approximately 90 dwellings, the Village Hall and playing fields. Many of the houses were built to maximise on the spectacular views from the top of the hill.

Seecham is mainly an agricultural area containing only a limited number of properties, but includes a long-established riding school.

Lower Rowney Green, characterised by the "loop" formed by Gravel Pit Lane and Chapel Lane, provides a recreational walk into open countryside comprising fields, woodland and spinneys. It is a low-density development with a "time warp" character, made possible by strict application of green belt policy, and no infill development. The "cottage" community has around it a mixture of smallholdings and pony paddocks.

Section 4.4 Buildings

Refer also to Features Common Throughout Parish – P9

A, recently built, traditional design cottage. Retention of the mature hedge is good practice

Sympathetic barn conversions also form part of the Seecham Area character.

A recently-built garage, making good use of reclaimed bricks, slate roof and wooden window frames, to blend with the original cottage

Retention and additional planting of native species of hedgerow and trees can help soften new properties

Holly trees and hawthorn hedges, allowed to grow to large scale - the houses behind them are set back substantially from the road

Residential development partly hidden behind mature native hedges and trees is a typical of Rowney Green character

Buildings, set within a spacious plot have room for substantial adjacent planting helping blend them into their rural surroundings

Rowney Green, like other hamlets within the Parish, has a small development of well designed houses, originally council-owned

When altering or renovating old properties, the use of traditional materials and roof angles helps retain original character

Section 4.5 Highways and Related Features

Refer also to Features Common Throughout Parish – P10

Where a footpath is necessary, the informal look of low-level mellow kerbing provides a better rural feel than urban-type kerbing.

Unadopted narrow access lanes with their associated trees and hedges are a pleasant Rowney Green feature

Informal openings to driveways, as opposed to hard paved surfaces and concrete edging, are good practice

An absence of kerbing, signage and street lighting is preferred. Should it be necessary for certain safety or functional reasons, it should be of a non-urban style.

To be Encouraged

- Access to footpaths and bridle paths within the village enabling residents and visitors to enjoy the benefit of landscape and farmland
- Application of Green Belt Policy with no infill development ensuring the on-going recreational quality of Seecham and Lower Rowney Green
- Stables and other livestock-related facilities, where possible, blending into the landscape or set amongst trees
- Spaciousness within the development, including mature native trees and hedges, forming a major part of Rowney Green's rural character
- Small Industry and commerce, in harmony with rural character
- The use of traditional and reclaim-type materials
- When altering or renovating old properties, the use of original roof angles helping to retain character
- Where possible, at the time of new building, the retention of existing native hedges and trees or, if that's impractical, planting of replacements
- Informal openings and thresholds to driveways, as opposed to hard paved surfaces and/or concrete edging
- An absence of kerbing, signage and street lighting

Section 5.1. History

Refer also to Features Common Throughout Parish – P5

Hopwood forms the largest land area within the Parish; most of it agricultural with a low population density. Scattered individual properties date back to 17th century but most of the housing has been built during the 20th century, close to the A441.

Section 5.2. Landscape Setting and Wildlife

Refer also to Features Common Throughout Parish – P6

Hopwood lies to the north of Alvechurch, on the slopes of Grovely Wood and adjoins in part the Birmingham conurbation boundary. Large areas of open countryside surround the remainder. Hopwood Dingle, between Hopwood and the Birmingham Boundary is an important conservation area with SSSI status. Bittell Lakes, one of which is a feeder for the Birmingham and Worcester Canal, and the others previously for River Arrow-related industry, are to be found on the West side of the hamlet.

The majority of Hopwood settlement sits on the side of a hill, from the top of which there are impressive views over large areas of open countryside

Section 5.3. Settlement Form

Population approx 650

Refer also to Features Common Throughout Parish – P7

The Hopwood Park Motorway Service Area, at the junction of the M42 and the A441, is a significant development. Its planning consent fell outside the domain of The District Council. However, they did influence the creation of an associated nature park. It is well sited in a valley, hidden from local residential developments, providing employment opportunities. Where National Government takes precedent over the Local Planning Authority, the VDS, if acted upon, could help soften the impact of a development.

At Hopwood Park Motorway Services, surface water drainage, including provision for oil and fuel spillage, has been catered for by a natural reed bed filtration system.

The floating ornamental fountain shown in the photograph aerates the water as part of the overall system, designed to protect the environment

Canal feeder lakes provide opportunities for wildlife observation, fishing and boating in addition to enhancing views across a spacious, open landscape.

The Peacock is a "country pub" within two miles of the Birmingham City boundary

The Hopwood settlement is well served for recreation facilities. It has two pubs, a hotel, a village Hall, a community centre and playing fields, two rugby clubs, a cricket club, a sailing club, fishing lakes and canal. Part of the North Worcestershire Path runs through Hopwood.

It is the largest land area Ward within Alvechurch Parish but has the lowest population density. It is also the closest ward to the Birmingham City boundary. The level of recreation on offer is an amenity for the adjacent urban population as well as for local people.

Successive Planners have maintained a building moratorium and encouraged agriculture. It is important to maintain defences against creeping urbanisation in the future if the spaciousness of Hopwood is to be retained.

Hopwood residential development is mainly distributed along a one-mile section of the A441 and the lanes leading from it, with the exception of a mobile home park at which approximately 16% of the population reside.
The M42 Motorway, crossing it in an east-west direction, separates Hopwood from the rest of the Parish.

Working farms, a welcome sight along the back lanes of Hopwood, are to be encouraged in their efforts to protect the environment

On the canal, commercial transport has given way to recreational use, generating local employment

A number of large houses have been preserved by conversion to residential care and nursing homes

Section 5.4. Buildings

Refer also to Features Common Throughout Parish – P9

Most of the properties in Hopwood were built pre-1950, with recent building work confined to barn conversions. It has neither church, nor school, but instead, a Village Hall and Community Centre are a focus for activities.

Some of the older houses along the A441were built end-on to the road, so that their front and back faced north and south.

A well designed small development and associated planting

This three-storey farmhouse is a local feature common also to other parts of The Parish

Overhanging eaves, inset dormer windows and decorative gable ends, are a local characteristic

Section 5.5. Highways and Related Features

Refer also to Features Common Throughout Parish – P10

The absence of kerbing, signage and street lighting is preferred. Should it be necessary for certain safety or functional reasons, it should be of a non-urban style.

Where the ribbon development along the main road is set back on a service road, trees and hedgerow help to blend it in with its surroundings

A quiet unsurfaced, access lane off the main A441 makes a welcome contrast to the noise and busyness of the adjacent road

The A441 Birmingham to Redditch Road carries a large amount of traffic, connecting South Birmingham with the M42

To be Encouraged

- **Defence against creeping urbanisation** to retain the spaciousness of Hopwood
- **Where National Government takes precedent over the Local Planning Authority,** implementation of the VDS could help to soften the impact of development

- Encouraging the efforts by **Working farms**, a welcome sight along the back lanes of Hopwood, to prosper and protect the environment
- **Canal-side development**, whether residential or commercial, incorporating boating facilities and consolidating Hopwood's present character

- **The change of use of residential properties** into suitable commercial activities, incorporating their restoration to original character
- **Self-contained parking** provided for in any building alteration or development schemes
- **The absence of kerbing**, signage and intrusive street lighting. Should it be necessary for certain safety or functional reasons, it should be of a non-urban style

Section 6.1. History

Refer also to Features Common Throughout Parish – P5

The community, developed largely during the 20th century, retains an independence from its close neighbour, the Borough of Redditch. Its rural character relies largely upon its setting within farmland and its uninterrupted views of surrounding hills.

Section 6.2. Landscape Setting and Wildlife

Refer also to Features Common Throughout Parish – P6

Extensive views of the surrounding hills and open farmland are Bordesley's most significant landscape feature.

Many homes enjoy interrupted views across farmland to the rear.

A relic of Bordesley Park Boundary, this random-paling stock fence illustrates hand-made rural character which could be replicated with today's rustic fencing materials

Access to the open countryside is limited to one public footpath

Section 6.3. Settlement Form

Population approx 230 Refer also to Features Common Throughout Parish – P7

Bordesley is a ribbon development along the A441 approach road to Redditch and the B4101 Redditch to Beoley Road, about three miles south of Alvechurch Village; there is no church, nor village hall.
The Meadow Farm public house and the petrol filling station, located close to the intersection of the two roads, provide a focal point.
The heavy levels of traffic along the A441 means there is little recreational outlook from the front of the houses.

Settlement Form continued

Service station plus car sales and service facility provides potential for employment and convenience shopping but takes no account of rural character

A wholesale horticultural nursery is an appropriate commercial activity hidden from the road and providing potential for local employment

Ample unclipped verges with large mature trees and hedges result from low-density development

Section 6.4. Buildings

Refer also to Features Common Throughout Parish – P9

Houses are predominately mid 20th century, with some more recent infilling

Sufficiently large plot sizes allowing large trees and unclipped hedges to co-exist with buildings, helping them to blend with the rural setting

Section 6.5. Highways and Related Features

Refer also to Features Common Throughout Parish – P10

To be Encouraged

- **An absence of kerbing,** signage and street lighting. Should it be necessary for safety or functional reasons, it would be of a non-urban style
- Factors covered within the VDS implemented to help prevent the oncoming of creeping urbanisation
- **Ample off-road parking,** enabling vehicles to turn around and re-enter the main road in relative safely

Section 7.1. History

Refer also to Features Common Throughout Parish – P5

The settlement of Weatheroak, dating back to Roman times, began at the cross roads of the Roman road Ricknild Street (now called Icknield Street) and the Worcester to Coventry road.

Properties range from the 14th to 19th century with one or two 20th century examples only.

The majority were built in association with agriculture and for the estate workers of Weatheroak Hall, now the clubhouse of a Golf Club.

The former owners of the hall (The Mynors) built several of the cottages at Weatheroak in the early 1800s to house staff.

The designer was Bidlake, a well-known architect of that time, who also designed the local St. Mary's Church tower. Weatheroak Hall design probably influenced these cottages since there are similarities between the buildings. Weatheroak Hall itself, together with the golf course, falls outside Alvechurch Parish, in the Parish of Wythall.

Section 7.2. Landscape Setting and Wildlife

Refer also to Features Common Throughout Parish – P6

The Weatheroak settlement blends into the natural landscape. The pattern of agricultural development is sympathetic to it and defined by it.

The compact and sparsely developed hamlet lies three miles east of Alvechurch Village, centred on Weatheroak Hill. Gently sloping grazing land, a wealth of hedgerows and specimen trees are characteristic of the area.

Highly visible features on the skyline such as tall trees, the windmill and woodland, visible from some miles away, give the settlement a positive sense of identity

Section 7.3. Settlement Form

Population approx 80

Refer also to Features Common Throughout Parish – P7

There is no village hall, nor shop, but the Coach and Horses Public House provides a focal point for the community. People employed in nearby conurbations occupy most of the residential properties.

The golf club, (once Weatheroak Hall and once the local landlord) attracts many hundreds of people into the area to either play golf or attend social functions.

Coach and Horses public house, has a traditional walk-in entrance from the road. It has been extended but the "original pub" character has been cleverly retained

An existing character building, previously used as a store for the public house, appropriately converted for commercial use as a micro brewery

Local farming spilling onto the main Weatheroak Hill highway, flanked by an abundance of native hedgerow

Active conventional dairy and sheep farming, complete with farmyard smells, adds true rural character to the settlement, close to the public house

Icknield Street is a single track low traffic usage lane providing a good recreational opportunity for walkers, horse riders and cyclists

The wall-mounted post box opposite the Coach and Horses pub at the Icknield Street crossroads is a strong man-made landmark.

Section 7.4. Buildings

Refer also to Features Common Throughout Parish – P9

A small number are converted agricultural buildings. The Bournville Trust, which owned and maintained substantial amounts of land and property in and around Weatheroak during the 20th century, has had a stabilising effect on development.

Weatheroak building character has been affected only in a small way by late 20th century development and contains fine examples of architecture dating back to 14th century. Good building design detail linking a number of residential, agricultural and commercial properties within the settlement is also to be found in places elsewhere within the Parish.

Buildings continued

Informal boundaries created by unclipped hedges and loose stone driveways without kerbing

Steep roof angles, windows with leaded lights, ornate chimneys, all practical to build with today's materials

Decorative barge boards on gable ends and local Alvechurch-character red brick

A local landmark, this listed property has had a recent porch addition in keeping with the original building's character

Examples of recent building additions in keeping with original character

Section 7.5. Highways and Related Features

Refer also to Features Common Throughout Parish – P10

An absence of kerbing, signage and street lighting is preferred. Should installation be necessary for certain safety or functional reasons, it should be a non-urban style.

The absence of road markings and kerbing on country lanes may encourage lower speeds of through traffic unfamiliar with the route.

To be Encouraged

- Tall native trees planted on the top of the hill as landmarks for the benefit of future generations
- Continued planting of woodland saplings as has happened during the past 15 years on several acres of agricultural land between Brockhill and Icknield Street

- Any development, should it be necessary, reflecting historic building character and continuing agricultural land use.
- Converted agricultural buildings should not be extended beyond their original size
- Suitable commercial activity, e.g.Weatheroak Brewery associated with the Coach and Horses is a good use of existing buildings
- Working farms having a positive influence on rural character
- Hedges, forming boundaries; an important character element and encouragement to wildlife
- Attractive recreational rural locations. The pub and picnic points continuing to attract walkers, cyclists, horse-riders and motorists from the local area and the neighbouring conurbations of Birmingham and Redditch

- Strong man-made landmarks e.g. the red brick windmill and the wall-mounted post boxes
- Support for continuity of the existing policy of major land and property owners, the Bournville Trust, which, during the 20th century, has had a stabilising effect on development

- An absence of kerbing, signage and intrusive street lighting. Should it be necessary for safety or functional reasons, it must be of a non-urban style

Examples of Detail Design from within The Parish

www.alvechurch.gov.uk

Doors and Porches

Individually made joinery doesn't automatically cost more than off-the-peg items but enables owners to maintain their properties in keeping with traditional character. There are local contractors able to supply your needs: for advice Contact the VDS team via your Parish Council: 0121 447 8016

U-pvc doors and windows are inappropriate in listed properties and The Conservation Area in general

Could you incorporate designs like these in your property or development?

Examples of Detail Design from within The Parish

www.alvechurch.gov.uk

Chimneys and Roofs

Examples of Detail Design from within The Parish

www.alvechurch.gov.uk

Windows, Driveways and Paths

U-pvc doors and windows are inappropriate in listed properties and The Conservation Area in general

Driveways & Paths

Gravel, Tarmac, stone setts, cobbles or random block

Informal paths, driveway edges and verges

Examples of Detail Design from within The Parish

Planting to Soften the Appearance of Buildings

Examples of Native Species Suitable for Large and Small Scale Applications

Large Trees	Field Maple (acer campestre), Beech (fagus sylvatica), English Oak (quercus rober), Silver Birch (betula pendula)
Small Trees	Crab Apple (malus), Hawthorn (crataegus monogyna), Cherry (prunus), Mountain Ash/Rowan (sorbus aucuparia)
Hedging	Whips from native trees, as listed above, planted in late autumn, make a cheap native hedge Also planted as whips: Blackthorne, Hazel, Hornbeam Pot-grown shrubs planted autumn or early spring – Holly, Wild Rose (rosa rugosa), Viburnum Opulus
Climbers	Ivy (hedera helix), Honey Suckle (lonicera)

The above are few examples of suitable planting; your Parish Council can provide further assistance and consultation via local specialists within the community

Examples of Detail Design from within The Parish

www.alvechurch.gov.uk

Boundaries

Chestnut fencing
Clipped Hedges
Picket fencing
Natural colours
Random height palings
Woven wattle

Combined fencing and hedging
Blue brick capping
Natural unclipped verges
Reclaim brick walls and edging
Five-bar gates
Rustic post and rail