

BRIDGNORTH DISTRICT COUNCIL

ALBRIGHTON CONSERVATION AREA APPRAISAL

Albrighton has three separate Conservation Areas: Albrighton, Albrighton: Station Road, and Donington and Albrighton.

This statement relates to the **Albrighton Conservation Area**.

ALBRIGHTON CONSERVATION AREA

LOCATION



Albrighton is a large village 10 miles north east of Bridgnorth and 7 miles west of Wolverhampton. The Conservation Area comprises mainly of the High Street from Red House and No. 16 on its western boundary; the north end of Cross Road from No. 3 and Birchwood House just north of Manor Gardens; between 1-5 Station Road and the Crown Inn south towards High Street. The boundary then runs eastwards along south and north boundaries of the plots facing onto the High Street, but excluding Wolverley Court. The boundary runs north of the southern tip of Shaw Lane to include Meadow View and Old Barn, before running east of the pond, Meeson House and 59 High Street. Running along the eastern end of Kingswood Road it encircles Albrighton Hall, its grounds and parklands to arrive back at High Street once again.

TOPOGRAPHY AND SETTING

The village of Albrighton is set in a rural landscape and lies mainly on fairly level ground having few distinctive topographical features. The eastern half of the Conservation Area is almost entirely made up of the historic park and wooded grounds of Albrighton Hall. The park, created before 1827, has the typically contrived arrangement of pasture land sprinkled with a scattering of indigenous trees, both singly and in groups, and belts of woodland. These trees are of great importance to Albrighton's character and are protected by an area Tree Preservation Order extending over the whole of the park and grounds within the Conservation Area and beyond.

There are important views of the parkland through the narrow ribbon of trees on its northern boundary with High Street. This narrow band finally merges with the more dense planting of specimen trees around the lodge and drive to Albrighton Hall, forming a more substantial belt behind the stone wall along High Street. This planting has a strong 19th century character.

There are no distant views from the northern side of High Street. Most of the street is enclosed by development, and a wooded bank adjacent to the former smithy on the eastern edge of the Conservation Area cuts off any views of countryside beyond. On the south side of High Street the western part of the Conservation Area extends a little way out into the countryside behind rear gardens but this is largely hidden from view from the High Street itself.

HISTORY



The origins of Albrighton can be traced back to the end of the sixth century. The name derives from the Anglo-Saxon meaning the farm or settlement of Aethelbeorht¹. Prior to the Norman Conquest Albrighton was held in two manors by the Saxons Algar and Godhit. Algar was probably Alfgar, the son of Leofric III, Earl of Mercia, and Lady (Countess) Godiva.

In 1066 the Saxons had fled and William the Conqueror gave Shropshire to Roger de Montgomery who gave Albrighton to Normannus Venator, (Norman the Hunter) a forester. The Domesday Book of 1086 records "*Albricston*" as being "*waste*" (cultivated land which had been allowed to fall fallow); the surrounding area was royal forest. It is probable that a church had been established about this time or even earlier. However, the present church of St. Mary Magdalene was completed in 1181 and is in the *Early English* and *Decorated* styles.

The manor of Albrighton came into the possession of the de Pitchford family. In 1232 a royal charter was granted making Albrighton a borough with its own Corporation and permitting markets and fairs to be held. Another charter regulating fairs was granted in 1303. The manor passed successively into the hands of the Tregoz, de la Warr, Troutbeck and Talbot families; the Talbots became Earls of Shrewsbury. The royal charter was renewed by Charles II in 1664, setting out at great length the constitution of the ancient borough of Albrighton. Because of the great numbers of people attracted by fairs they were often the scenes of riotous behaviour, so the privilege of holding a fair was granted by royal charter. The 1664 charter granted a weekly market and two fairs, in May and October. All fines from the court of Pyepowder, fees and stallage were to be paid to Lady Talbot.

In England a Court of Pyepowder, from the Old French *pie* *puldre* - an itinerant trader, had jurisdiction to adjudicate on offences and disputes arising from the fair or market.

In 1597 three Pattingham women, attending the Albrighton fair, were sentenced to be placed in the stocks for drunken behaviour. A bill for 8d, the cost of providing them with food during their sentence, was sent to their village. The stocks and lock-up were finally abolished in 1845 and the pinfold, a cattle enclosure or pen, relocated.

Apart from being a centre for markets and fairs for the surrounding agricultural area, Albrighton had had a number of local industries before the coming of the railway in 1849. In the early 1600's there had been a thriving button-making industry, in the 18th century it was clock-making and by the 19th century brick-making. However, Albrighton's main industry was predominately agriculture. The focus of the parish remained the church of St. Mary Magdalene; the area around it is now part of the separate Donington and Albrighton Conservation Area.

PATTERN OF DEVELOPMENT



The main centre of the village developed during the 18th and 19th centuries along High Street east and west of its junction with Cross Road and Station Road, away from the church. The construction of the Birmingham and District Railway to Chester in the 1840's linked Albrighton directly with Wolverhampton and Shrewsbury. The station was opened in 1849, the first train running in November of that year. Workhouse Lane subsequently became Station Road. As the village grew, during the second half of the 19th century, many of its public institutions were established. A Parochial school was already in existence when The National School was constructed in

Station Road, the education of local children being transferred to the new school building when it opened in 1856. The following year, 1857, the School Master's residence was built on a site adjacent to the school. An endeavour was made to form a library in the village in 1869, it duly opened in a cottage opposite the site of the present library. In 1872, however, the Earl of Shrewsbury granted permission for an old school building to be renovated and used as a library. In the 19th century Albrighton began to expand resulting in several houses being built during the mid to late 1800's. By 1851 the population had risen to 1141 from the 901 souls recorded in 1801.

Since the 1950s, however, Albrighton has expanded dramatically with the construction of large housing estates surrounding the historic core of the village, as well as redevelopment within it. This historic centre coincides with the present-day commercial centre, forming half of the Conservation Area.

Until the 20th century Albrighton was very largely linear in form. The village grew along the High Street, with open countryside to the north and south. This historic pattern of development can still be clearly seen within the Conservation Area, where the vast majority of historic buildings are on High Street itself. 20th century development has filled in gaps within the centre and extended the village eastwards along High Street. Large-scale housing developments to the north and south-west of High Street has destroyed much of the rural setting of the village's historic core.



The High Street meanders roughly east to west. This provides changing views moving along the street, such as the view westwards towards the parish church. The street is at its narrowest at the junction with Cross Road where the Crown Inn and No. 19, diagonally opposite, tightly enclose the street, but it opens out immediately to the west with the public open space in front of The Red House.



Within the historic centre High Street is wide and spacious. Along the southern side the buildings are set well back from the road behind a series of small greens and a long line of pollarded lime trees. At a bend in the road the street begins to broaden out to the east to form a large, roughly triangular open area with a secondary access road between the greens and buildings to the south. This is enclosed to the east by a pair of houses and their gardens. The historic core of the village ends at this point. Eastwards High Street narrows, with the 20th century development to the north and the parkland

of Albrighton Hall to the south.

Properties, in the main are built up close to the public highway, many opening directly onto the street. The last remaining large break in the frontages is between the Crown Inn and 83 High Street, comprising of the public car park, garden area and trees behind a sandstone wall. This provides a significant contrast to the general pattern of the Conservation Area and preserves something of the original setting of the Crown Inn. Smaller similar breaks are provided by the gardens behind the high brick boundary walls of the Manor House and 70 High Street. There is a varied mixture of detached buildings, individual buildings joined to form larger blocks and short terraces. The terraces vary greatly in size from small, low 2-storey houses to tall 3-storey buildings, producing a great diversity of eaves heights and rooflines.



Most buildings are orientated along the line of the street; Lloyds Bank, set at a slight angle to it, is an exception. Some, such as Nos. 16-19 High Street, front directly onto the street. Others are set back behind shallow forecourts or gardens, often enclosed by railings, low brick walls or hedges, such as those of the Grey House, the Manor House and the Methodist Chapel. This produces an irregular building line which is part of the village character.

BUILDINGS



Historic buildings make an important contribution to the character of the Conservation Area. A number of them are of considerable architectural and historic interest in their own right; many of these are listed buildings. The Crown Inn, which forms an important focal point at the western end of the Conservation Area, is by far the oldest building within it. A 16th century timber framed building remodelled in the early 18th century in brick and

later much altered, it is one of very few buildings of pre-18th century origin which have survived anywhere in the village, and is therefore of special historic interest as a relic of Albrighton's past. It is listed Grade II.

Individual 18th and 19th century houses in High Street form the single most important and prominent type of historic building within the Conservation Area. Most of them are broadly similar: brick built, 2 or 3 storeys, with symmetrical elevations and sash windows. The Red House, the Manor House and No. 77 (chemist's shop) are good 18th century examples.



No. 31 is a variant with casement windows and the entrance in the third bay. All of these are listed Grade II. Two-storey examples with varying window details include Nos. 70, 73, the Grey House (with casements and a late 19th century wing), all listed, and Nos. 21 and 71. No. 33 is rather different, a tall early 19th century 2-storey 2-bay house with later bay window.

The few historic purpose-built commercial or public buildings within the Conservation Area are not of great intrinsic architectural or historic interest, but are important in the street scene. The Methodist Chapel, a Gothic building in brick completed in 1884, is very simply detailed but its large gable and window to the street are very prominent and contrast strongly with neighbouring buildings. Equally striking is No. 82 High Street next to the Chapel, a tall gabled late 19th century building quite unlike anything else in the Conservation Area.



These larger buildings are intermingled with smaller, more simple old buildings, producing diversity of size, scale and massing, height

and rooflines, proportions and details, all of which enrich the interest and character of the Conservation Area.

Largely unaltered small houses with simple but attractive detailing, such as the early 19th century No. 19 High Street, 42 Victoria Place or the unusual late Victorian front with arched windows of 35 High Street, are just as important to the character of the Conservation Area,



reflecting Albrighton's historic development.



Many other buildings have been damaged by unsympathetic 20th century alterations, but their scale, massing and proportions, traditional materials and surviving details still make a significant contribution. An example is the building containing Nos. 17 and 18 High Street; an 18th century building which despite the insertion of shop windows and loss of its original sashes is still a recognisably part

of the historic character of the village. Inappropriate mid-20th century developments such as the shops at Nos 63A to 69 High Street have had a rather more damaging effect.



At the eastern end of the village is a small scattered group of buildings of considerable historic and architectural interest. Meeson House is an unusual Georgian building dated 1733, but its plain 3-storey front with a parapet screening the roofs disguises a complicated building history. No. 58, a simple early 19th century 3-storey brick house, now derelict, has an attached smithy and outbuildings currently in state of collapse. The lodge to Albrighton Hall is a good quality mid-Victorian Italianate building with matching gate piers. The Hall itself is a 19th century country house set in its own park and almost obscured from view.

MATERIALS



The principal building material within the Conservation Area is red brick. This is used for the whole range of buildings, from the better quality 18th and 19th century houses, such as the Red House and the Manor House, to the Wesleyan Chapel and modest terraces of small houses such as Victoria Place. The Crown Inn, originally wholly timber-framed, was largely rebuilt in brick in the 19th century. Red brick boundary walls such as that of 70 High Street also contribute to the character of the Conservation Area.



Smooth render or stucco, mostly over brick, is an important part of the original character of some of the buildings such as 33 High Street, The Harp Public House and 3 Cross Road. Stucco can also be seen used for later additions or alterations



Render or roughcast has been applied to other buildings at a later date, often in the 20th century, drastically altering their appearance. The Grey House and Meeson House are substantial detached Georgian houses with 19th or 20th century render over the front elevations, but there are many other smaller buildings such as the Old Library and Nos. 45 to 50 High Street which have had similar treatment. Other buildings have had their brickwork painted,

obscuring the colour but leaving the pattern of brickwork visible. Examples include Nos. 16-18 and 31 High Street.



Stone is largely confined to the eastern part of the Conservation Area, where it is a significant element of its character. Albrighton Hall and its lodge are of fine quality ashlar sandstone. This is continued by the sandstone wall which lines the south side of High Street and Kingswood Road.

Roofs are predominantly of plain clay tiles, with roof slopes parallel to the street, plain verges and prominent brick ridge or end chimneys. There are exceptions such as the gable parapets of 17-18 High Street or the Victorian fretted bargeboards of the Crown and 51-52 High Street. The Crown, the Methodist Chapel and a few other buildings have gables towards the street.



Some 19th century buildings have shallow-pitched slate roofs such as those of Victoria Place and The Harp. The hipped roof with deep eaves of 33 High Street is unusual within the Conservation Area. Some buildings have suffered from unsympathetic replacement of original roof materials, such as the re-roofing of 77 High Street with concrete tiles instead of the original clay. This adversely affects the character of the Conservation Area.



Painted joinery is another important element of the Conservation Area's architectural and historic interest. It is used for a wide variety of original features and details, including sash windows and casements, panelled doors, doorcases and porches. Timber is extensively used for bollards around the green open spaces.

18th and 19th century iron railings such as those of Meeson House, the Lodge, Manor House, 35 High Street and Rose Cottage in Cross Road also make an attractive contribution to the street scene.

Brickwork is also used to decorative effect in the segmental-arched openings of numerous buildings including 21 and 58 High Street, and the round arches of 35 High Street. Other buildings, including The Red House and 73 High Street have gauged brick flat arches made up of cut and rubbed or specially moulded bricks.



Some 18th and 19th century buildings have painted stone or rendered lintels, some plain as at Victoria Place, others more ornamental such as the key stones and channelled detail of Grey House or 31 High Street.



Original doors and surrounds are among the most striking and ambitious features of buildings in the Conservation Area. The most elaborate examples are the 6-panelled doors, transom lights and painted timber door surrounds and pedimented porticoes of The Red House and the Manor House. There are numerous variations and more simple examples but the basic theme of classically detailed door surrounds with pilasters can be seen on many buildings ranging from the simple detail of 19 High Street to the rendered, pedimented Tuscan doorcase of No. 70. Most have panelled doors, flush, moulded or fielded. Some of the less pretentious buildings have painted boarded doors.

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Most of the older buildings have door and window openings of vertical rather than horizontal proportions. A number of the original sash windows survive. There is a variety of types and details: 12-pane sashes are the most common, but there are also 16-pane windows such as those of 19 and 75 High Street and the margin lights of 77 High Street. Victorian 4-pane or plate glass sashes can be seen in buildings such as 18 High Street and the gate lodge to Albrighton Hall. Original timber casement windows are much more rare, but 31 and 58 High Street have fine examples with iron opening lights. Sadly 58 High Street (The Old Smithy) is currently boarded up and derelict.



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Alterations and loss of original details have damaged the original character of the Conservation Area. Many windows and doors have been replaced with inappropriately detailed non-traditional designs, though fortunately most of these are at least in painted timber rather than wholly unsympathetic non-traditional materials such as the PVCu in 21 High Street. Equally damaging is the alteration of openings which can drastically alter the proportions and character of buildings, destroying much of their architectural and historic interest.



THE CHARACTER OF THE CONSERVATION AREA



The historic core of Albrighton, which comprises most of the original part of the village pre-dating 20th century expansion, makes up a little less than half of the Conservation Area. Although Albrighton has grown to the size of a small town, this historic core retains a strong village feeling. The greens and the long row of lime trees lining the southern side of the spacious High Street are major elements of that village character and appearance. They form an effective contrast to the built-up frontages, softening the visual impact of the street as a whole. Breaks in these frontages add another important element of contrast and variety. The original linear form of the village can still be clearly seen in the concentration of historic buildings along High Street, contrasting with 20th century development. The mix of uses is also an important part of the village character.



The Conservation Area includes a large part of the commercial centre of Albrighton, but the commercial and residential uses are very much intermingled rather than



segregated. Commercial premises are scattered along High Street in small groups amongst the houses rather than concentrated together. In recent years some houses, which had previously been converted to shops have reverted to residential use.

Within the Conservation Area there are a number of buildings of special architectural or historic interest, some of them listed. None are of outstanding quality, but they are nevertheless vital elements of the village's character and appearance. Buildings such as the Manor House, the Crown Inn and Meeson House provide focal points of interest in the street scene. But equally important collectively is the mixture of old and 20th

century buildings. The predominance of traditional materials, forms and detailing and small domestic scale of most buildings provides much of the visual interest and character of the Conservation Area.



The eastern part of the Conservation Area is quite different.. The historic park and wooded grounds of Albrighton Hall, with open countryside beyond, preserve a significant part of the original rural distant glimpses of Albrighton Hall across the park emphasise the country house and estate character of this part of the Conservation Area.

Around the entrance to Albrighton Hall is a small area with a quite distinctive character of its own. It is dominated by Meeson House, its attached high garden wall and railings. The front elevation of the house closes distant views eastwards along High Street, and makes an attractive grouping with the lodge and gate piers opposite. East of Meeson House, its garden wall on the north side and the park wall on the south side tightly enclose the street. The tall plain elevation of No. 58 High Street provides an effective counterpoint.



The Albrighton Conservation Area thus does not have a clearly defined unified character throughout. It comprises very different areas, each with their own distinctive form and appearance, which are in marked contrast to each other. That contrast is in itself a major element of the special interest which designation as a Conservation Area seeks to protect.

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Albrightton Conservation Area Appraisal

