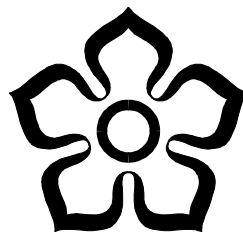


Aylestone Village Conservation Area Character Appraisal

(draft October 2007)



Leicester
City Council

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This is a consultation draft of the Character Appraisal of the Aylestone Village Conservation Area. Comments are welcome and should be sent to the Planning Policy & Design Group, Regeneration & Culture, Leicester City Council, New Walk Centre, Welford Place, Leicester LE1 6ZG or fax (0116) 2471149 or e-mail urbandesigngroup@leicester.gov.uk

1.0 Introduction

- 1.1 A character appraisal is the first step in a dynamic process, the aim of which is to preserve and enhance the character and appearance of each conservation area. It defines and records the factors that make conservation areas special, thereby providing a baseline for decisions about an area's future. It also identifies features and problems that detract from this special quality and suggests, by means of management and enhancement proposals, the ways in which the special interest could be safeguarded or improved. An appraisal also provides the opportunity to review the boundaries of conservation areas and, where appropriate, to propose amendments. In the case of the Aylestone Village Conservation Area the proposed boundary amendments are set out in section 6 and shown on Map 2.
- 1.2 The Aylestone Village Conservation Area was designated in 1975 and covers an area of 15.5 hectares (38.5 acres). It lies about 4km south west of the city centre on a ridge of river gravels above the damp marshland of the floodplain of the River Soar. The land rises by about 3m (10ft) between the canal and the Black Horse pub on Narrow Lane, reaching a maximum height above the canal of 4.5m (13ft) at the Middleton Street/Aylestone Road. The north part of the conservation area is relatively flat but around Sanvey Lane the sandstone and Mercia mudstones have created a quite steep slope.
- 1.3 The survey and Appraisal were carried out during 2007 following the methodology suggested by English Heritage. To ensure that a complete picture is built up about the value and character of the area the Council will ask people who live, work and visit the area for their views, including what they like or dislike about the area and their ideas about how the area could be preserved or enhanced.

2.0 Planning Policy Framework

- 2.1 The protection and preservation of historic environments are now extensively recognised for the contribution they make to the country's cultural and historic heritage, its economic well-being and quality of life. Public support for conservation – both in the built and natural environments – is likewise well established. National and regional governmental guidance reflects this.
- 2.2 The concept of conservation areas was first introduced into national legislation in 1967 in the Civic Amenities Act which defined conservation areas as areas "*of special architectural or historic interest the character or appearance of which it is desirable to preserve or enhance*". It is not the purpose of conservation areas to prevent change but to manage change in such a way as to maintain and, if possible, strengthen an area's special qualities.
- 2.3 Current legislation is set out in the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990. This places a duty on the Council to declare as conservation areas those parts of their area that they consider to be of

special architectural or historic interest [s.69(1)]. It also imposes on the Council to review past designations from time to time [s.69(2)]. Conservation area status also means that there are stricter controls on changes that can be made to buildings and land including the need for consent to demolish any building, strengthened controls over some minor forms of development and the automatic protection of all trees in the conservation area.

- 2.4 The Council has a further duty to formulate and prepare from time to time proposals for the preservation and enhancement of its conservation areas [s.71(1)] and these are set out in Appendix 4). The Council must also pay special attention to the desirability of preserving or enhancing the character and appearance of conservation areas when determining planning applications for sites within such areas [s.72(1)].
- 2.5 The City of Leicester Local Plan is the over-arching policy document for land use in the city and contains policies against which the appropriateness and design of development proposals can be measured. Some of these policies relate directly to the historic environment, including conservation areas, listed buildings and archaeology, and are designed to help ensure that new developments or conservation-led regeneration reflect the character and value of that environment. These are listed in Appendix 3. There is, however, a general presumption against the demolition of any building in a conservation area where that building makes a positive contribution to the character and appearance of the conservation area.

3.0 Definition of special interest

- 3.1 Although the majority of the buildings in the Aylestone Village Conservation Area date from the 20th century, the area is, nevertheless, historically important.
- 3.2 Firstly, it was part of an estate that remained in the ownership of a single family for over 750 years. That family was responsible not only for keeping the village very much as a rural backwater during the time of Leicester's greatest expansion during the 19th century but also for the construction of Aylestone Hall, one of Leicester's most important historic buildings.
- 3.3 Secondly, the area retains evidence of its ancient and medieval history in its road layout – Old Church Street, Middleton Street and Sanvey Lane all date from at least medieval times. This is particularly obvious in the latter two, where centuries of use have resulted in the roads cutting quite deeply below their surroundings as they follow typically winding routes.
- 3.4 Thirdly, the agricultural origins of the village can still be seen at various points. There is still one working farm on an old site at the foot of Sanvey Lane and the remnants of three other farms still exist at 12 Middleton Street, 21 Old Church Street and 60-62 Sanvey Lane.
- 3.4 Fourthly, the conservation area has three listed buildings that add architectural value to the area – Aylestone Hall, St Andrew's Church and 90 Old Church Street. The Hall and church both date from the 12th century and are the physical evidence of the close relationship that would then have existed between the secular and religious parts of society. 90 Old Church Street also has close links with the church, having been residence of its curate.

- 3.5 Taken together, these factors combine to create an area that continues to have architectural and historic value and, with the exception of those area's that the Council propose to exclude from its boundaries, continues to justify its conservation area status.

4.0 Assessment of special interest

Location and setting

- 4.1 Aylestone Village Conservation Area is located on the south west side of the city, approximately 4 kilometres (2.5 miles) from the Clock Tower. It is between 60m (195ft) and 65m (215ft) above sea to the east of the River Soar, above but very close to the river's floodplain and the damp marshland around the Packhorse Bridge. The village site is on a river gravel terrace providing well-drained building plots. The conservation area is about 15½ hectares (38½ acres) in size. The boundary is shown on Map 2.
- 4.2 The land rises by about 3m (10ft) between the canal and the Black Horse pub on Narrow Lane reaching a maximum height of about 4.5m (13ft) above river level at the Aylestone Road/ Middleton Street junction. The area to the north of Middleton Street lies along the 60m (197ft) contour and is relatively flat compared to the area around Sanvey Lane where the sandstone and Mercia Mudstones slope more steeply.
- 4.3 The River Soar is canalised at this point and known as the Leicester branch of the Grand Union Canal. It forms the conservation area's western boundary. The embankment of the former Great Central Railway cuts diagonally north to south between the canal and the western end of Sanvey Lane.

Historic development and archaeology

- 4.4 There has been a settlement at Aylestone village for at least 900 years as it is likely to have originated in the later Saxon period. Its name is thought to derive from the Anglo-Saxon 'Aegel's tun' which translates to 'Aegel's settlement' ('tun' means a thick fence around a settlement). The manor of 'Ailestone' appears in the Domesday Survey of 1089 and another spelling, 'Ayleston', appears in the Merchant Guild Roll of Leicester in the 12th century. Records show that the Manor of Aylestone has been passed down in a continuous family line from at least 1107 until the middle of the 19th century. This continuity of ownership is an important aspect of the Aylestone's history. The manor of Aylestone was originally large and wealthy but documentary evidence suggests that by the 12th century it was in decline, a decline that continued into the 14th century and probably beyond (perhaps even leading to Cobbett's comment about the village in the 19th century – paragraph 4.10 below).
- 4.5 Documentary sources suggest that the medieval village core coincides with the historic core of the present-day village. The location of the 13th century St Andrew's church on the corner of Old Church Street and Middleton Street also indicates that the village was probably clustered nearby. The church tower is the only part of the building that survives from this time and is thus the oldest structure in the conservation area, although it may contain fabric from an earlier, Saxon date. The church underwent much alteration and enlargement in the 14th and 15th centuries, perhaps in response to a growth in population and/or wealth in the area.

- 4.6 Nearby is another medieval building, Aylestone Hall. Built as a manor house in 1409 for the Vernon family, it is of a type known as a 'double ended hall house'. Its age and associations with the medieval history of the Midlands (through the Vernon and the Manners families) mean that it is probably one of the most important historic houses in Leicester. By the 16th century it was one of 50 manors in the possession of Sir George Vernon (known as "The King of the Peak") and whose ancestral home lay at Haddon Hall in Derbyshire. It came into the possession of the Manners family through marriage in 1565, and that family lived there until it passed, through succession, to the Dukes of Rutland. The building was much altered in the 16th and 17th centuries following its inheritance by the Earls (then, after 1703, the Dukes) of Rutland but was unlikely to have been the family home after 1641. The greatest changes to its appearance took place in 1850 when the present grey rendering was applied.
- 4.7 Beyond the west end of the village is the Packhorse Bridge. Like Aylestone Hall it also dates from around the 15th century and was built over marshy land so that the packhorses (the main means of transporting goods in Britain before the coming of good roads and the railways) had a dry route across the damp ground. This route appears to have been of great commercial importance in medieval times and its winding course can still be followed on Sanvey Lane. This ancient street is also reputed to have been part of a pilgrim's way which led to a Holy Well just south of Wigston Lane ('sanvey' being an old word meaning 'holy', a word that is also remembered in the name of the farm that lay on the east side of Lutterworth Road (Holywell Farm)). Another trading route passed through Aylestone village along Middleton Street and its primary function may be reflected in one of its former names, Coalpit Lane (it was also known as Union Street, after which the Union Inn is presumably named).
- 4.8 From medieval times until the middle of the 19th century the size and structure of the village seems to have remained relatively unchanged. However, the coming of the canal in the late 18th century and the construction of the Great Central Railway at the end of the 19th century affected the village and the conservation area to different degrees.
- 4.9 The canalisation of the River Soar began in 1776 when the Soar Navigation Company started to work southwards from the Soar's junction with the Trent. They reached Leicester near the West Bridge in 1796 and the city was opened up to a supply of cheaper coal from Derbyshire. Replaced by canal barges, the packhorse trains became uneconomic and Aylestone was left with the winding lanes and the Packhorse Bridge as the sole reminders of an ancient trade. The stretch of canal between Loughborough and through Aylestone to Blaby was opened in 1794.
- 4.10 By the end of the first quarter of the 19th century the village appeared to be in very poor condition. William Cobbett, the well-known traveller and writer, passed through the Aylestone on his Midland tours during the 1830s. Referring to it as 'Hailstone', Cobbett writes that the agricultural workers' cottages were 'deplorable dwellings' and 'worse than the cowsheds of Hampshire'. He was also drawn to reflect on the discrepancy between the wealth of the town (indicated by the spires of Leicester on the horizon) and the squalor of the living conditions of the villagers.

- 4.11 Cobbett also makes a typically acerbic comment on the contrast between the villagers' homes and the much more salubrious parsonage. This building, which shared with Aylestone Hall the reputation for having sheltered King Charles I before the Siege of Leicester in 1645, was replaced in 1839 with a new rectory. Known as 'The Holt' it was designed in Elizabethan style by William Parsons, one of Leicester's best known 19th century architects. It stood on Middleton Street in an extensive garden (which is now part of the grounds around Freemans' Holt). The village itself, however, continued to suffer from lack of investment in its housing, a fact sufficiently important to be reported in the Leicester Chronicle in 1848.
- 4.12 Nevertheless, the middle of the 19th century seems to have been a time of at least some investment in the village by the Duke of Rutland. In 1844 he contributed liberally towards the building of a new school (the National School) in Pole's Lane (now Church Road). This now forms part of the Parish Church Hall. In 1859 he gave the land on the south side of Middleton Street for use as the extension to the graveyard. And some time in the 1860s he had some old cottages pulled down and replaced with "more convenient ones". Some of these houses were apparently built without front entrances because, it is said, the Duke "disliked seeing his tenants gossiping in front of their houses".
- 4.13 As has been stated earlier, the Duke of Rutland owned all the land and buildings in Aylestone village, including Aylestone Hall which had had a number of different tenants over the years (in 1846 part of it was in use as a Ladies' Boarding School). However, despite his recent investments in his property, the Duke put the whole Manor of Aylestone up for sale. The public auction was held on June 24th 1869 and comprised many lots of widely varying sizes. The sale advertisement listed such particulars as "the whole of the beautiful village of Aylestone" and many houses as "Model Cottages recently built". The village itself was described as "truly English and rural in character".
- 4.14 The plan produced for the sale shows Aylestone to be a village of widely scattered cottages and farms (Map 3), not very much different in size from that shown twenty years later in the 1885 Ordnance Survey (Map 4). However, the breaking of the Duke's monopoly ownership of the village was the catalyst for future growth. One of the first new buildings was the Baptist Chapel on Sanvey Lane (formerly Mad Lane) which was built in 1871. The new chapel provided purpose-built accommodation and ended 16 years of temporary meetings in the houses of various members of the congregation. It is also known from the Parish Church records (the Church Rate Books) that many of the Duke's tenants were able to buy their cottages or farms, so keeping much of the village character. Some time after 1885 Middle Street became known as Middleton Street. The name Old Church Street appears some time between 1885 and 1925, replacing the original name, Church Street.
- 4.15 In 1896 most of the Parish of Aylestone was incorporated within the Borough of Leicester boundary and in 1898 the Great Central Railway began operations nearby. However, this had little physical effect on the village other than the creation of a high embankment on its western edge that blocked access to, and views across, the river and watermeadows. The Borough Council, somewhat belatedly, had requested a railway station, but the request had not been acted upon. Thus the old village of Aylestone remained isolated

and unaffected by new housing developments of the kind that were springing up beyond its northern boundary.

- 4.16 In the early part of the 20th century the village's continuing rural quality combined with its accessibility by horse-tram to give rise to its development as a 'pleasure resort' for city people. In 1911 a boating centre had been founded on the south bank of the canal off Middleton Street (now part of the Riverside Drive development). A boathouse and tennis courts, and subsequently a ballroom and restaurant, were built to cater for this leisure trade and Aylestone became "known to fame and to visitors by the laudatory notices in guidebooks of the excellent boating to be had there". Another attraction was the 'Japanese Pleasure Grounds' between what is now Croft Avenue and the burial ground. Founded by the Rossa ice cream family around the 1920s it survived until 1935. Local people often combined a visit to 'the Japs' with a boating excursion in the summer months.
- 4.17 The first major changes to the built environment of the conservation area began in earnest in the 1920s, nearly twenty years after the electrified and extended tram system reached Wigston Lane in 1904. A number of new semi-detached houses were built on Narrow Lane, Sanvey Lane and Middleton Street (Map 5). Some time between 1930 and 1952, Cats Lane became the now familiar Hall Lane. In 1952 Aylestone Hall and its adjoining gardens were bought by the then Corporation of Leicester and opened to the public in 1954. In the late 1950s, and much to the detriment of village townscape, the houses at 46 to 84 Old Church Street were demolished as part of the city's slum clearance programme, as was a group of small houses at 81-89 Sanvey Lane.
- 4.18 The next phase of development activity involved the construction of the Meadow Court residential home and a new detached bungalow in the 1960s on the slum-cleared land at Old Church Street. The largest development in the conservation area, however, followed the sale of the former rectory and its garden ('The Holt') in 1967. The vicarage, which had been used as flats since the 1920s, was demolished in 1968 and the site redeveloped a secure gated housing development for Freemen of Leicester. A small plot had been set aside for a new vicarage which was built in 1973.
- 4.19 At around this time there were also a series of controversial proposals for the garden and house at 21 Old Church Street ('The Lawn') which were finally resolved by the construction of the houses now numbered 21a to 21d and the restoration of number 21 itself. It was as a response to the impact that such changes were making, and could further make, on the sensitive environment of Aylestone village that the Council designated the Aylestone Village Conservation Area in February 1975.
- 4.20 Further small pieces of infill development followed at Narrow Lane and Sanvey Lane, before the redevelopment in the 1980s of the Aylestone Boathouse site created the Riverside Drive estate. The construction of new houses in the 1990s on the small industrial site at the junction of Narrow Lane and Sanvey Lane is the most recent change in the conservation area.

Prevailing and former uses

- 4.21 As has been stated earlier it was the sale of the Aylestone estate that began the changes that turned the conservation area from an agricultural settlement

into a residential suburb by the middle 20th century. Before then, the village had been entirely rural with at least four working farms in the 19th century - The Hollow (now Village) Farm on Sanvey Lane, the cottages now known as 60-62 Sanvey Lane, 21 Old Church Street (a 18th century glebe farmhouse) and 12 Middleton Street (now car sales). Only the first-named of these now survives as an agricultural holding.

- 4.22 Industry has played only a small part in the life of the village other than such farming-related businesses as blacksmithing. There is a suggestion that there may have been a number of framework knitters in the 19th century although by 1878 "it would be difficult to find half-a-dozen frames in the whole village". By the end of the 19th century the village was described as having few farmers, the inhabitants being mostly businessmen and that "consequently several of the ordinary features of village life are wanting here". Today the conservation area has only one industrial property, the leather products firm on Narrow Lane.
- 4.23 The village shopping centre was originally located around The Hollow on Sanvey Lane with a few shops scattered on Middleton Street and Old Church Street. However, with the coming of the trams to Wigston Lane, Aylestone Road took on the local centre role around 1911. The former village shops have been replaced by, or converted to, housing as have the pleasure grounds of Aylestone Boathouse and the Japanese Gardens (although remnants of the latter's water features are still to be seen in the back garden of a house on Middleton Street).
- 4.24 Elsewhere, the church glebe lands and most of the former rectory gardens to the north and west of the church have been redeveloped for housing (with some ancillary informal private open space and allotments). The original rectory, following its use as flats from the 1920s until its demolition in 1967, has been replaced with a modern house on Old Church Street. There has also been a quite substantial provision of accommodation for elderly people in the northern half of the conservation area (Freemens' Holt and Meadow Court). The canal, river and former railway line are now part of the Riverside Park (which was created in 1974) and is 'a unique urban development, combining ecological, historical and recreational interests'.

Architectural character and key unlisted buildings

*Map 7 provides a comprehensive assessment of all the buildings in the conservation area and the contribution that they make to the character and appearance of the area. Some of those that make a positive contribution to the character or appearance of the conservation area are highlighted in **bold** in the text below.*

Townscape and character areas

- 4.25 The unique character of conservation areas is largely a product of the quality of their townscapes – good townscape can make an area interesting or pleasant to visit, bad townscape can be unsightly or confusing, making a visitor feel exposed, uncomfortable or vulnerable. Different townscapes are made up of different elements, and it is the combination of these elements - landform, buildings, architectural styles, building materials and spaces - that create the individuality and character of each area, the particular 'places'. For the visitor, each will have its own series of views, changes in level, visual

contrasts, textures, rhythms and patterns that set it apart from its surroundings. Townscape can also provide a sense of an area's age and history or create feelings of safety and comfort. The presence of buildings or sites that ignore the design or architectural quality of their surroundings can damage or disrupt townscape, making it less attractive to the people who use it.

- 4.26 The Aylestone Village conservation area has a varied townscape and can be separated into five main 'character areas', each centred around one of the area's streets - Old Church Street, Middleton Street, Riverside Drive, Narrow Lane, and Sanvey Lane. A sixth 'character area' is made by the public open spaces that form the western boundaries of the conservation area.
- 4.27 Old Church Street is the core of the original village, having grown up around the church. Here are to be found the area's oldest buildings, St Andrew's Church, 21, 23 and 90 Old Church Street and Aylestone Hall. It has a quiet, almost rural, feeling, enhanced by the mature trees that soften the built form and give seasonal interest. The built form is one of two storey houses, generally in red brick, strung out along a gently curving street. Tall chimneys add interest to the skyline. Building density is low, giving a fairly 'open' feel to the area although some original garden walls remain to enclose and define the boundaries between the public and the private spaces. The high boundary wall to Aylestone Hall Gardens is an important physical and visual edge, enclosing the park, the Hall and its stables but offering glimpses of them through trees, gateways and railings. The articulation of the wall, and the blind arch, narrow buttresses and corbelled brick eaves that decorate it, create more visual interest. The trees in Aylestone Hall gardens form a strong green edge to the northern boundary of the conservation area. Trees and a sharp curve at the north end of the street 'stop' views onwards while the spire and churchyard of St Andrew's church are important landmarks.
- 4.28 Although not in the conservation area, the Meadow Court care home is an intrusive element in the streetscape. At a point where buildings once enclosed the view northwards (see Map 5) this building has been set back on its site, opening up the space. It is a large building compared to its neighbours and its light buff-red brick introduces a discordant element into the village colour theme. The potential for the development to add value to the townscape by addressing its historic context has been missed. On the opposite side of the road lies the Freeman's Holt development. Its mature trees add considerably to the quality of the townscape but it is a 'gated community' and therefore closed off to the general public. This 'separateness' is confirmed visually by its large locked gates.
- 4.29 The townscape quality of the southern part of the conservation area is not of the same merit as that of Old Church Street. It is cut off from the rest of the village by Middleton Street. This very busy road is part of the city's main outer circle route but is, nevertheless, an important feature of Aylestone's character. Although somewhat softened by the street trees in Croft Avenue, it is a harsh environment which does not encourage the visitor to linger and effectively splits the conservation area in half. However, the buildings on either side of the road are built above the level of the highway and this slight elevation helps to create a quite strong sense of enclosure. This is enhanced by views of sloping gardens and privet hedges rising above garden walls. Sunken roads such as this often indicate that the route is of some antiquity. The most important features are the church yard trees and the old burial

ground opposite. With a scattering of late 19th century headstones and a variety of mature trees, this small open space complements the well-treed churchyard and provides a quiet green oasis where the traffic noise of Middleton Street appears muted. These trees soften the otherwise hard urban environment around them. Middleton Street, adding a sense of enclosure and emphasizing the changing ground levels as the visitor approaches the low lying river flood plain.

- 4.30 Riverside Drive occupies the former site of the Aylestone Boathouse and other buildings associated with the early twentieth century leisure trade. It is a residential development from the mid-1980s that provides a pleasant living environment. With no historical development on the site to provide a reference for the architecture, its appearance is therefore suburban and unremarkable. However, its open plan layout creates a quiet green enclave beside the river and the sinuous form of its access road echoes the winding routes of the village's oldest streets.
- 4.31 Narrow Lane has existed since before 1869 (Map 3) and probably for many years before that, so it has an important link to village history. The plan that accompanied the 1869 land sale shows a 'glebe' (church-owned farmland) on its north side so the road could have originally been a farm track and boundary mark. Most of its buildings date from the twentieth century and are a mix of inter-war semis, a few Edwardian terraced houses, a Victorian pub, a 1930s factory and a group of flat-roofed terraced homes. Towards the north end there is little 'sense of place' or visual stimulation, but the view of the church set behind its churchyard trees and the prominent tall Scots pine in the burial ground rising above the houses at numbers 2-12 Narrow Lane, are particularly noteworthy.
- 4.32 Sanvey Lane is a narrow winding street, most of whose buildings date from the twentieth century. At its western end is Aylestone Farm which has a range of original farm buildings laid out around four sides of a yard. From here, the ground rises quite sharply towards the eastern end where a series of tight bends lead towards Middleton Street. These bends serve to frame and enclose views of some of the most interesting buildings in this part of the conservation area, such as 60-62 and 27-31 Sanvey Lane. The house at 25 Sanvey Lane is an important corner around which this interesting townscape pivots. The slope towards the river also adds interest, particularly where the road narrows and passes under the former railway line. The trees opposite 81-89 Marsden Lane are of particular townscape importance.
- 4.33 The sixth character area comprises the high green embankments of the old Great Central Railway, now part of the extensive linear park, the Great Central Way, and the wide watermeadows of the Riverside Park. The former provides a safe, green environment for pedestrians, cyclists and leisure use, while the latter offers much wildlife interest and nature trails. Both areas are actively managed as public open space by the Council.

Architectural character and key buildings

- 4.34 The majority of the architecturally important buildings in the conservation area are to be found north of Middleton Street. The most important one in terms of history, architecture and townscape value is **St Andrews Church**. This small limestone Grade II listed building dates from at least the 13th century, with additions and alterations of the 14th and 15th centuries. Its east-west

alignment places it at an angle to Old Church Street, opening up attractive views of the tracery in its large east window. The 13th century tower is surmounted by a broach spire rising above, but complemented by, the softer form of the trees that line the edges of the churchyard. The churchyard has been cleared of its slate gravestones, most of which have been re-sited along the north boundary and the churchyard paths, but their designs and inscriptions are of historic interest. The church is the only stone building in the conservation area and has historic associations with the nearby Aylestone Hall, being the scene of the marriage between Dorothy Vernon of Aylestone Hall to Sir John Manners following their elopement in 1594, the marriage that brought the Hall into the possession of the Manners family. It is the architectural highlight of the village. At the southwest corner of the churchyard there is a small war memorial.

- 4.35 **Aylestone Hall** (Grade II*) lies at the northern end of the conservation area but is hidden behind trees and high brick boundary walls. It is the most important, and the most substantial, building in the conservation area. Illustrations of it around the 16th century show it to be a timber-framed building sitting on a stone plinth but the original facades are no longer visible, having been covered in a grey render in 1850. All external architectural details, such as the star-shaped Tudor chimneys, have thus been lost. However, much of the timber-framed and paneled interiors remain, although now lost to public view since the building was converted into three private dwellings. As a result of that conversion, the Hall has also been separated from its original grounds by an evergreen laurel hedge. On its north side is the old stables set around two sides of a yard. There are pointed arches over the original windows and doors and some original cast iron ventilation grills and an ornate vent pipe on the north elevation. However, the Hall is a very important feature of the park.
- 4.36 Another old building of particular note is the former curate's house at **90 Old Church Street**. Sited at the narrowest part of the street behind a very narrow front yard, it is an important visual 'stop' to views westwards along the street. The house is one of the most interesting surviving houses of the old village and is of historic value, being Grade II listed. It dates from the 18th century (as evidenced by timber framing at its western end) and its former close relationship with the church is an important part of its history. It was extended eastwards and refaced in brick in 1723, a date marked in blue brick on the front elevation. It has small widely-spaced casement windows on the street frontage with glazing bars and shutters, a steeply pitched slate roof and a red brick façade with a dentil eaves course. The doorcase is simply moulded with a rectangular fanlight above.
- 4.37 Although its brickwork has been painted, the neatly detailed brick stringcourses and eaves brackets of the nearby former school-house, 'The White House' at **88 Old Church Street**, can be seen against the small Victorian brick gable and porch of what is now the **Parish Church Hall** in **Church Road**, but was originally the village school, built in 1844. The continuing relationship of these two buildings is therefore of some historic significance. Just beyond the parish hall is a small group of late Victorian terraced houses at **1-15 and 2-4 Church Road**. Although only one property retains its original windows they are nevertheless contribute to the architectural and historic character of the area.
- 4.38 Further north there are several 19th century cottages. The first group, at **27-29 Old Church Street**, is built in Flemish Bond with moulded brick Tudor-

style hood moulds to the first floor windows, corbelled eaves and tall chimneys. The slate roofed brick porch at number 27 has a finely detailed gable to the street while the porch at number 29, extended in the 19th century to create a small shop, still retains its Victorian shopfront surround and blind box. Fifty metres northwards is **23 Old Church Street**, also known as Vine Cottage. Originally much smaller, evidence of its extension on the north side can be seen in the unmatched brickwork in the centre of the front facade, the larger windows on the right and the change in roof pitch. The ground floor left-hand window has also been enlarged but generally glazing bars have been retained, adding much to the character of the building. The shutters are a modern addition although there is evidence of shutters on the ground floor window in earlier photographs. Uniquely in the conservation area it is roofed in red pantiles.

- 4.39 On the other side of the road **40-42 Old Church Street** is a symmetrical pair of mid-Victorian houses with projecting gables, simply ornamented bargeboards and segmental brick window arches with stone keystones and terminal voussoirs. A short distance beyond is the gable of the former glebe farmhouse at **21 Old Church Street**. Projecting forward of its 20th century neighbour, this large structure, broken only by two small windows and two tall chimneys, is nevertheless an important architectural statement at the entrance to the conservation area.
- 4.40 The rest of the buildings are of little architectural merit, being either 20th century infill on former garden plots or, in the case of the late 1960s Freemen's Holt bungalow development, in the extensive grounds of the former St Andrew's vicarage. Most are hidden behind boundary walls and trees, particularly the latter which contributes little to the architectural quality of the area but does offer intriguing views into the well-kept grounds through its gates and boundary railings. The design of the semi-detached house at 38 Old Church Street attempts to echo its Victorian neighbour using gables with bargeboards and shallow segmental arches over the windows but is not carried out with any conviction or real understanding of its sources.
- 4.41 The modern houses at 21a-21d Old Church Street are perhaps more honest in that their design is unashamedly 1970s, although the use of pale buff bricks is perhaps less than appropriate. The building that detracts most from the quality of Old Church Street is the Meadow Court development. Although not in the conservation area its prominent position at the center of Old Church Street makes it visible from all points. It has been designed with no references to the historic or architectural character of the village and makes no attempt to address the curve of the street at this point. The vacant site to its north is another element that detracts from the character of the conservation area. About 80m to the west the access roads into the parish hall site behind 90 Old Church Street expose unsightly brick and concrete extensions set at the back of a graveled yard area.
- 4.42 The terrace at **38-46 Narrow Lane**, although substantially altered, stands forward of the other properties on the south side of the lane and, with The Black Horse opposite, creates an interesting 'pinch point' at the entrance to the lane. The curved frontage of the factory at **71 Narrow Lane** with its double horizontal lines of metal windows sweeps the eye into the lane from the south. The **Black Horse** at **63-65 Narrow Lane** is a very plain building but it retains its large regularly spaced windows; its gable end that emphasises the narrowness of the lane at this point.

- 4.43 As mentioned above, Middleton Street is an important feature of the conservation area, helping to create its character and forming an integral part of its development and history. The **Old Aylestone Social Club** at the south end, although badly altered, nevertheless retains some interesting Italianate architectural details and brickwork. The **Union Inn, 27 Middleton Street** probably dates from some time around the turn of the 20th century and its paired gables, false timber-framing and regularly spaced sash windows add much to the visual quality of the street. The former farmhouse at **12 Middleton Street**, now much altered, retains its early 19th century doorcase and canopy and is an important part of the village's history.
- 4.44 South of Middleton Street there are few buildings of architectural interest, and of those, most have been altered by the installation of plastic windows. However, the former **Baptist Chapel** (1871) adjacent to **21 Sanvey Lane** is still virtually as built. It is designed in a simple 'Gothic' style with two small red brick gables on the street frontage. A large window with simplified Decorated-style tracery breaks the street façade and the entrance porch to the right interprets the Early English style with a pointed arch which is repeated in the small lancet window to its left. Topped by wrought iron and terracotta gable finials, a Welsh slate roof, red clay ridge tiles and stone detailing in stringcourse and eaves, this little building is an important architectural feature of the area.
- 4.45 A small early 19th century house, **25 Sanvey Lane**, sits on the corner opposite Logan Avenue. Its angled brick façade has been painted but a wide stone stringcourse is still visible and the corbelled eaves brackets have been picked out in black. Immediately to the west is **27-29 Sanvey Lane**. This pair of semi-detached cottages is built in Flemish bond with blue brick sills and hood moulds to the ground floor windows and door, blue brick window sills with flat arches above the first floor windows and three tall symmetrically placed and corbelled chimneys. The Welsh slate roofs project over a dentil patterned eaves course, a decorative feature which is repeated around the end gables. The lack of proper glazing bars at number 29 is regrettable. The neighbouring house at **31-33 Sanvey Lane** is built in the same style but much of the detailing is lost under the painted facades.
- 4.46 The house at **40 Sanvey Lane** is a simple late Victorian building but, being built on an awkward corner plot, it adds interest to the street scene in its use of articulated facades and gables. Further downhill is the former farmhouse of Powdrill's Farm, now two houses, **60-62 Sanvey Lane**. Not currently within the boundary of the conservation area they nevertheless contribute to its architectural character. Of a plain design they have some interesting details such as small symmetrically arranged windows and a corbelled eaves course. They make an important contribution to the area's architectural and social history.
- 4.47 At the end of Sanvey Lane lies **Aylestone Farm**, one of the original four farms that would have employed most of the villagers before the Industrial Revolution. Many of its original buildings still stand and form the three sides of the farm yard. Beyond the railway is the **Packhorse Bridge**, a Grade II* listed Mountsorrell granite structure dating from at least the 15th century. It would have provided a safe and dry route across the swampy meadowland by the river and would have been an important commercial route, established over

many centuries, for the trains of packhorses that were the main means of moving goods before the coming of better roads and the railways.

- 4.48 The rest of the built environment of the conservation area is made up of a mix of inter-war semis and more recent housing of varying but ordinary designs, none of which is of particular architectural or historic interest.

Building materials and the public realm

Building materials

Clay

- 4.49 Clay as a building material is most commonly seen as brick. Local red brick is the predominant building material in the conservation area, although more modern colours have been introduced – such as pale red and buff. Many properties have brick boundary walls, sometimes topped with railings or timber fences. Visual texture has been introduced by laying brick façades with pale headers and contrasting dark stretchers to create a checkered pattern (27-29 Sanvey Lane and 27-29 Old Church Street). Buildings from the 20th century introduce other clay-based materials such as tiles hung vertically for decorative purposes (tile-hanging). At the vicarage on Old Church Street they are green while the more traditional red is used on the modern terrace on Narrow Lane. Red pantiles are an unusual feature of the roof at 23 Old Church Street. A few blue bricks have been used as decoration (such as the date on the east wing of 90 Old Church Street and the hoodmoulds and window heads at 27-29 Sanvey Lane) but their most robust appearance is as blue engineering bricks for the bridge carrying the old railway over the footpath to the water meadows.

Stone

- 4.50 St Andrew's Church is the only stone building in the conservation area where local limestone is laid in a random rubble pattern with smooth ashlar buttresses and window tracery. The Packhorse Bridge is another stone structure, but it is built of Mountsorrell granite. Mountsorrell granite also appears along Old Church Street as boundary walls around the churchyard and the Middleton Street burial ground and at 21-21d Old Church Street (where the wall has been reduced in size and capped with courses of red brick). It is also commonly used throughout the conservation area, as it is across the whole of the city, as kerb stones. Limestone can be seen as stone slates on the roof of 21 Old Church Street and as pier caps carved in the Gothic style on either side of the entrance to the burial ground. Another form of stone is the Welsh slates that are common on many of the older buildings in the conservation area. Stone is also used for gravestones, many of which are of slate and have been re-sited to line the paths around the churchyard. There are a few carved limestone headstones in the burial ground. A few houses use limestone for decoration, notably the stone lintels and band on the façades of 32-40 Narrow Lane.

Timber

- 4.51 The use of timber tends to be confined to windows, doors and boundary fences, although plastic has replaced many of the timber windows and doors in the conservation area. The most attractive examples of timber are to be found at the Aylestone Hall stable block where the original windows and doors are designed with simple pointed arches and the timber windows at the church hall appear intact. There are one or two bargeboards but these tend

not to be prominent features. There are, however, many timber fences – close-boarded, picket etc – not all in good condition.

Metal

- 4.52 Metal, which is not a common material in the conservation area, tends to be used to define boundaries. Around Aylestone Hall Gardens there are modern mild steel railings along the Hall Lane frontage, with steel bow-topped railings along Old Church Street. Bow topped railings have also been used along the frontages of the recent housing development at 49-59 Sanvey Lane. The Hall's stables have some cast iron features such as ventilation grilles and a very decorative vent pipe in the Hall Lane elevation. Some wrought iron is left at the churchyard in the form of a decorative gate and gateposts, the design being repeated on Church Road around the Church Hall. Several houses have modern fancy wrought iron gates or boundary fences. Mild steel railings and gates form the boundary of Freeman's Holt with Old Church Street.

Stucco/render

- 4.53 Aylestone Hall is the more obvious use of render in the conservation area. It was first applied in the mid-19th century and is decorated in a very dull grey colour which does little to enhance either the building or its surroundings. Elsewhere, render is used sparingly as decoration, usually on mid 20th century houses.

Others

- 4.54 In several cases façades have been painted, obscuring the original brickwork and removing colour from the environment. There are some red or grey concrete roof tiles and a large number of domestic timber windows and doors have been replaced with plastic.

The public realm

- 4.55 Street lighting in the conservation area is of the city's standard type - modern steel columns with high pressure lanterns. There are also several telegraph poles and their associated overhead wiring in various locations.
- 4.56 Roads and footpaths are generally black tarmac and most kerbs are concrete although, on Old Church Street particularly, the original red granite kerbs remain. The two short concrete bollards that have been installed in the pavement at the entrance to Freemens' Holt are of an inappropriate material and scale. The fibreglass litterbin at the north end of Narrow Lane does little to enhance the quality of the conservation area and is poorly sited in relation to the adjoining blue brick planter. The planter, the cast iron bollards and the line of granite setts are, however, more valuable in the street scene. The planted area at the junction of Riverside Drive and Middleton Street is set behind a low timber railing. Street lighting is provided by Council standard steel columns with high pressure lanterns.

Greenery and green spaces

- 4.57 Residents of Aylestone have easy access to two contrasting areas of public open space at either end of the conservation area. Aylestone Hall Gardens is the formal space, laid out with large grassed areas, interspersed with beds and borders, a bowling green and tennis courts. The park has some very fine trees, including a Blue Atlas cedar. A tall laurel hedge now separates the new private homes in Aylestone Hall from the rest of the park and the park itself is

surrounded by tall brick walls and modern black-painted steel railings. At the south end are sections of the Riverside Park and the Great Central Way. These informal 'countryside' spaces have watermeadows, canalside walks and direct pedestrian and cycle access down the old railway line into the heart of the city. These parks continue to be maintained by the Council as public open space.

- 4.58 At Freemens' Holt there are allotments and informal tree-shaded grounds along the riverside. There are many fine trees and each small bungalow also has its own private courtyard. This is a gated development, however, so access is restricted and the primary benefit to the conservation area derives from the trees within the grounds. The churchyard and graveyard both provide additional open space, the former now laid largely to grass following the relocation of the 18th century slate gravestones to the edges of the paths. However, mature trees line the boundaries, adding much to the green character of this part of the conservation area and softening the otherwise harsh environment of Middleton Street. The street trees in Croft Avenue are also very valuable, for the same reason. Their trees and plants add visual texture and seasonal colour, helping to create an almost 'rural' environment, and their front boundaries are valuable in defining and separating the public realm from the private.
- 4.59 Trees are therefore a very important feature of the conservation area, particularly as regards the townscapes of Old Church Street and Hall Lane. There are two Tree Preservation Orders in the village at 21-21c Old Church Street and Riverside Drive.
- 4.60 The domestic gardens of Aylestone are generally well-maintained and contribute significantly to the character and appearance of the conservation area. Most houses still have their front gardens intact and their flowers and shrubs provide seasonal interest and colour for residents and passers-by alike. They add to the 'green' feel of the area and are havens for wildlife. Garden walls and fences are important 'edges' that help to define the boundaries between the 'private' and the 'public' domains. Where they have been removed, for example to provide car parking space, this edge is weakened or lost to the detriment of both the visual environment and to the sense of enclosure to which they would previously have contributed.

Negative factors

- 4.61 The greatest loss of character in the conservation area is on Old Church Street. The massing, design and layout of the elderly persons' home at Meadow Court makes no concessions to the street, to neighbouring buildings or to the character of the original development on the site. In particular, the sense of enclosure created by the layout of the original houses relative to the street has not been recreated, to the detriment of the townscape. In addition the loss of the triangle of green space in front of it has increased the perceived width of the street and created an unsightly car park. The recent addition of a front boundary wall with railings has improved its relationship with the street but the railings could be more robust. The vacant plot between Meadow Court and 44 Old Church Street is somewhat of an eyesore.
- 4.62 On Middleton Street the loss of 'The Holt' (the former vicarage) and its outbuildings near St Andrews Church has had a negative effect on the townscape at the point where the road curves gently to the left. While the

original buildings would have helped to create a sense of 'enclosure' of the view along Middleton Street this effect was following the demolition of the buildings in the late 1960s. All that remains are the fragments of brick and granite walls which are incorporated into the boundary wall of Freemans Holt.

- 4.63 In virtually all of the original buildings in the village, windows have been replaced in white or timber-effect uPVC. Some styles include mock glazing bars but none are successful in reproducing the visual form of original casement windows, to the detriment of the buildings concerned. Painting of brickwork also has a detrimental effect on the appearance of buildings, obscuring the texture and colour of the natural brick surfaces. In some cases alterations to the elevations of late 18th/early 19th century cottages have changed their appearance to such an extent that evidence of their age has been completely lost (for example the large windows and mock bays at 35-37 Sanvey Lane).
- 4.64 The central part of the conservation area around Narrow Lane, Sanvey Lane and Riverside Drive is architecturally undistinguished and has little historic value. The character and appearance of the conservation area is thus diminished.

Problems and pressures

- 4.65 The conservation area, being almost fully developed, suffers from few problems and is under minimal pressure for development. Important open spaces are already well maintained and developed and there is very little vacant land under pressure for development. The majority of the houses are modern and alterations (such as plastic windows) or extensions would have little impact on their architectural character. It is perhaps the character of these largely 20th century houses and buildings in its centre that exert the most pressure on the character and appearance of the conservation area.

Capacity for change

- 4.66 Other than the vacant plot on Old Church Street, there is little capacity for change in the conservation area. Most of the houses are modern and in good condition and are therefore unlikely to be considered as redevelopment prospects at least for the foreseeable future.

5.0 Community involvement

- 5.1 There is no accessible local venue where an unsupervised exhibition could be left for a two week consultation. Therefore the exhibition will be set up in the Council offices in the city centre and all residents and businesses in the conservation area will be informed individually by letter of the venue and dates. Copies of the document will be available at the exhibition for consultation. It is hoped that a drop-in session can be arranged one evening in the church hall on Church Road for the purpose of discussing the draft management and enhancement proposals. A Press Release will notify local people of the exhibition and drop-in meeting and posters will be put up around the area. Posters will also be put up around the area giving the locations, dates and times of the exhibition and public meeting. The draft appraisal will be placed on the Council's website. All comments received will be taken into consideration before the final document is produced and will be included as an Appendix to that document, together with the Council's responses to them.

6.0 Conservation area boundary

6.1 The Council has reviewed the boundaries of the conservation area and proposes to amend them to include the following :

Proposed amendment	Justification
Include 58 and 60-62 Sanvey Lane	The bungalow at no.58 is vacant and any redevelopment would have an impact on the appearance of the conservation area at this point. The houses at 60-62 are what is left of one of the original village farms and, although altered, are therefore important to the history and architecture of old Aylestone. They make an important contribution to the townscape value of the street.
Include 2-4 and 1-15 Church Road	These are high quality terraced houses dating from the late 19 th century. They make a positive contribution to the character of the area and date from the when the village began to change following its sale in 1869.
Include 1, 27-39,12 Middleton Street, 1 Sanvey Lane, 1-8 Croft Avenue	Middleton Street has been associated with the village for centuries and numbers 1, 12 and 27 are of some architectural and historic interest. They have been included for that reason. However, to make the boundary more logical at this point the houses on Croft Avenue have also been included as they also add to the character of the village and help create Middleton Street's particular 'sense of place'.

6.2 The proposed new boundary is shown on Map 2.

7.0 Management and enhancement proposals

7.1 The City of Leicester Local Plan contains policies specific to the preservation of the historic environment (see Appendix 3). Most importantly, there is a general presumption against the demolition of buildings in conservation areas. However, the Council also has a duty 'to formulate and publish proposals for the preservation and enhancement of any parts of their area that are conservation areas [s.71(1) of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990] and to submit such proposals 'for consideration to a public meeting in the area to which they relate' [s.71(2)].

7.2 The management and enhancement proposals set out in Appendix 5 are based on the appraisal of the conservation area as set out above and will be a specific matter for consultation with local residents, business people, visitors and other interested parties. Where considered reasonable or appropriate any suggestions for future management and enhancement resulting from these consultations will be incorporated in the final report.

8.0 Contacts and appendices

8.1 For further information on this, or any other conservation area or listed

building, you can contact the Council's conservation officers as follows :

- Conservation & Nature Team, Planning Policy & Design, Regeneration & Culture, Leicester City Council, New Walk Centre, Welford Place, Leicester, LE1 6ZG;
- Phone Leicester 2527281
- Fax Leicester 2471149
- e-mail conservation@leicester.gov.uk
- On the Council's website at [www.leicester.gov.uk/conservation areas](http://www.leicester.gov.uk/conservation_areas)

Appendix 1 : List of buildings in the proposed conservation area

Aylestone Road	Aylestone Hall, 689
Church Road	Aylestone Parish Church Hall, 2-4 (even), 1-15 (odd)
Croft Avenue	1-8 (incl)
Hall Lane	Aylestone Hall stables
Marsden Lane	Aylestone Village Farm, 81-95
Middleton Street	12, 20-28 (even), burial ground, 30-36 (even), 1 (Old Aylestone Social Club), 27 (Union Inn), 29-39 (odd)
Narrow Lane	2-12 (even), 12a, 16 (The Crofters), 26-30 (even), 38-46 (even), 37-59, 63-65 (Black Horse PH), 71, 75
Old Church Street	38-44, 86-88, 90, 21, 21a-d, 23-25, 25a-b, 27-29, St Andrew's Church rectory, St Andrew's Church
Riverside Drive	1-30 (incl)
Sanvey Lane	40-48 (even), 52-56, 60-62, 1, the Apostolic Church, 21-59 (odd), 95-109 (odd)

Article 4 Directions in force

Old Church Street	40, 42
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Appendix 2 : List of listed buildings and tree preservation orders in the proposed conservation area

Aylestone Road	Aylestone Hall
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Appendix 3 : Relevant Local plan & other policies

Subject	Policy No.	Details
The Plan Strategy	PS01	b) conservation and enhancement of the city's buildings
Built Environment		
Archaeology	BE01	Preservation of the city's archaeological heritage
Listed Buildings	BE02	Alterations & extensions
	BE03	Changes of use
	BE04	Setting
	BE05	Demolition of ...
Conservation Areas	BE06	New development & changes of use in...
	BE07	Demolition in ...
Buildings of local interest	BE08	Impact of development on...
Green Environment		
Nature conservation	GE02	Development and sites of Importance for Nature Conservation
Biodiversity	GE03	Maintaining Biodiversity Enhancement Sites
Protected species	GE04	Development and protected species
Wildlife	GE05	Development and wildlife habitats
Green Wedges	GE06	Protection of Green Wedges
	GE07	Unacceptable land uses in Green Wedges
	GE08	Acceptable land uses in Green Wedges

Appendix 4 : Results of consultations

Comments received	Council response

Appendix 5 : Management and enhancement proposals

Location	Management/enhancement proposal
Short term = up to 3 years, medium term = 3-5 years, long term = 5+ years	
1 Conservation Area generally	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Apply the policies set out in the Local Plan and relevant Supplementary Planning Guidance to ensure that all development proposals <u>preserve or enhance the</u>

	<p><u>character and appearance of the conservation area;</u> Delivery : ongoing</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Publish and distribute an explanatory leaflet about the conservation area and the implications of designation; <p>Delivery : short term and annually</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Seek resources to provide grants for the repair and restoration of architectural details such as timber sash windows <p>Delivery : short to medium term</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Undertake a photographic survey to provide a baseline for monitoring change in the conservation area and update regularly <p>Delivery : ongoing and 3 yearly</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Encourage the retention of local construction materials in the public realm such as kerb stones etc <p>Delivery : ongoing</p>
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Appendix 6 : Glossary of architectural terms

ashlar	smooth faced masonry blocks laid horizontally
balustrade	a series of short posts or pillars supporting a rail
bargeboard	projecting board placed against the outside incline of the roof of a building, often used decoratively
corbel	a method of laying bricks or stone so that each course projects slightly forward of the one below
cornice	horizontal projecting section at the top of a building or wall
dentildoorcase	decorative timber or stone framing a doorway
fanlight	a window over a door
finial	a formal ornament at the apex of a gable or spire
fishscale	a pattern created by overlapping the semi-circular cut edges of roof tiles or slates
flèche	slender spire rising from the ridge of a roof
keystone	the central wedge-shaped stone at the top of an arch that locks the arch structure in place
hoodmould	a projecting moulding over a door or window designed to throw rain off the face of a building
lancet	a slender window with a pointed arch
modillion	a small bracket, usually one of a series
pediment	a low pitched gable shape over a door or window
rusticated	chamfered edge masonry blocks laid with very deep joints

segmental arch	a very shallow arch [of a bay window – a very shallow curved bay]
sham timber framing	pieces of timber applied externally to create the impression of timber frame structure beneath
stringcourse	a continuous decorative horizontal band projecting from a wall and usually moulded
stucco	a cement-type render used for facing external walls
swag	decoration carved to resemble a draped flower garland or fabric
tracery	ornamental stone or metal openwork in a window opening
voussoir	one of the wedge-shaped stones that form a round arch