

PART 2 - ALMELEY VILLAGE

2:1. POLICIES FOR THE VILLAGE

2:1.a. MAIN VILLAGES

Policy H.4. of the UDP. identifies Almeley as a “Main Village”, along with 45 other villages in the County. Because this imposes certain conditions on the Village which do not apply to the rest of the Parish, it is dealt with separately here, in this Guidance.

Main Villages are intended to be the rural locations for general market housing, in order to reduce the pressure for development of such housing on the wider rural areas. They have been chosen as being more sustainable settlements, i.e. as having a relatively good level of public transport to Hereford or market towns and as having a significant level of community facilities.

2:1.b. REASONS FOR ALMELEY'S INCLUSION

Almeley is just above the minimum of 250 for population size, has 3 buses a day in each direction, and is better equipped than many, with its pub., church, shop, post office, hall, school and cricket field.

All Main Villages have been given a “Settlement Boundary”. Almeley's Boundary encloses 124 of the Village's houses, its church, pub., post office and shop, leaving 9 houses, 2 farms, its hall, school and cricket field outside.

2:1.c. RULES FOR SETTLEMENTS

All types of new housing can be permitted inside the Settlement Boundary, but none outside it (save for “exceptions” under policy H.10, of which Mountain View is an example, and the various categories in the Wider Parish, noted on Page 3, above.) Development for employment, recreation or community purposes can be permitted both within and outside but adjacent to it. Developers can be required to provide new infrastructure, facilities or spaces as part of any housing proposal.

All the general policies of the UDP. about standards of design, protection of amenity and landscape, etc., apply to the Village as they do to the rest of the Parish. (Again, the full text of the UDP. should be consulted.)

2:1.d. PARISH OPINION

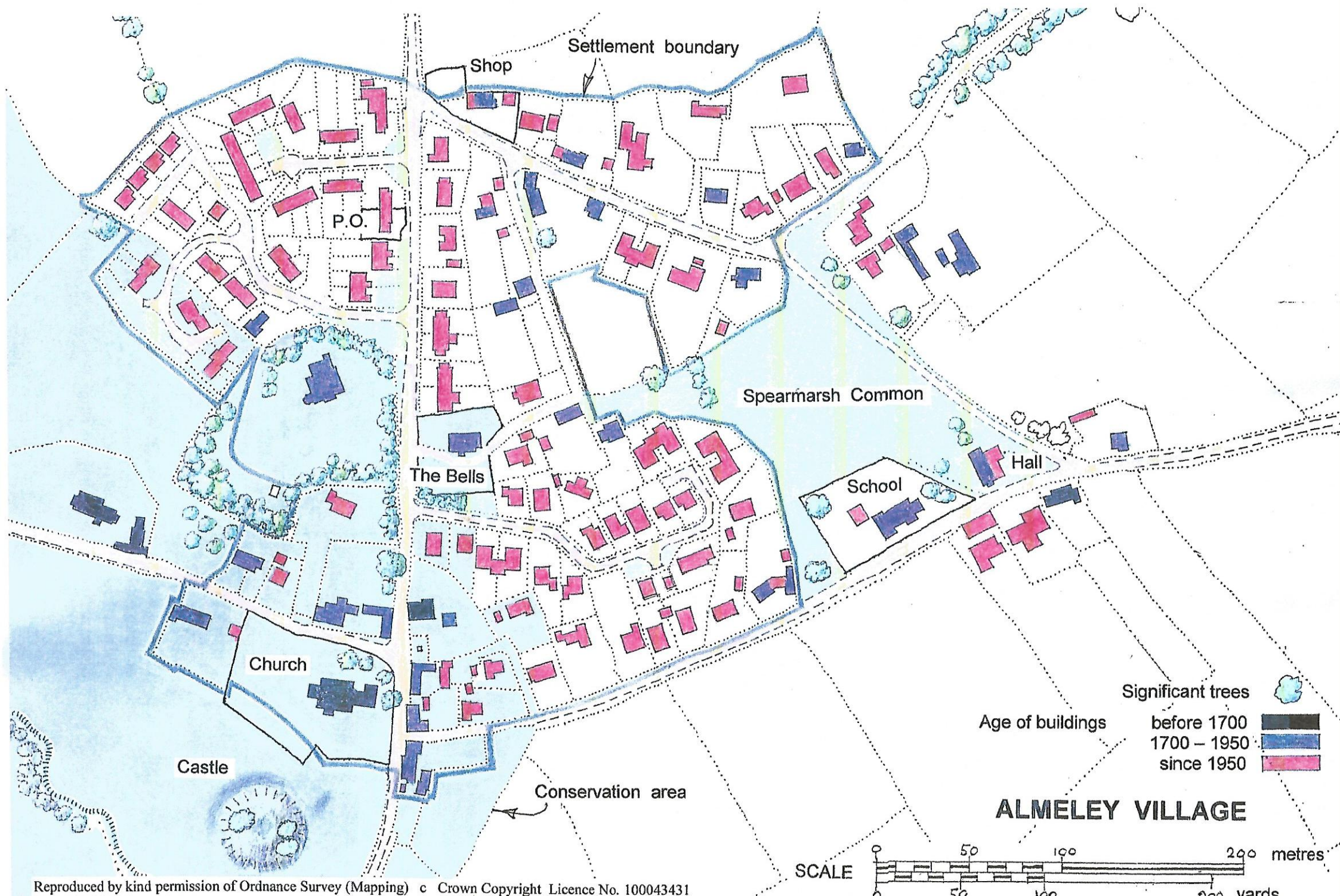
A very large majority of the respondents to the Parish Plan Survey supported the general intentions of these UDP. policies including the perpetuation of the Settlement Boundary and, in particular, opposed proposals for large housing developments North of the shop and on the Southwest side of the Village between Mountain View and the Manor, both outside the Settlement Boundary.

This Guidance confirms that the Settlement Boundary policy should be enforced firmly.

2:1.e. PURPOSE OF GUIDANCE

Future development within the Settlement Boundary will be affected by the fact that the whole area within the Boundary is now occupied by buildings (mostly houses) and their attached sites. New development can occur, therefore, only by intensification of existing uses. The UDP. intention is to make intensive use of previously-developed land, in order to minimise green field land take, but it specifies minimum densities only for sites in towns. In Main Villages, it says, density will be determined by considering the character and context of the local area.

This Guidance will define the Village's character and context in detail, in order to prevent any future development from degrading the Village environment and depriving residential properties of their amenities or sufficient garden space. It will also help to ensure that new proposals are in scale with their surroundings and of a sympathetic style.



2:2. VILLAGE GROWTH

The Village has developed from 27 houses at the middle of the 20th. Century to its present 133. 45 out of the 106 new houses were built, at various times, as social affordable housing (West View, Manor Close and Mountain View) though a dozen or so of these are now privately owned. 29 of the rest (Bells Orchard) were built, as one speculation, early in the 1970's and the other 32 have been added, either custom built or as small speculations, over the whole period.

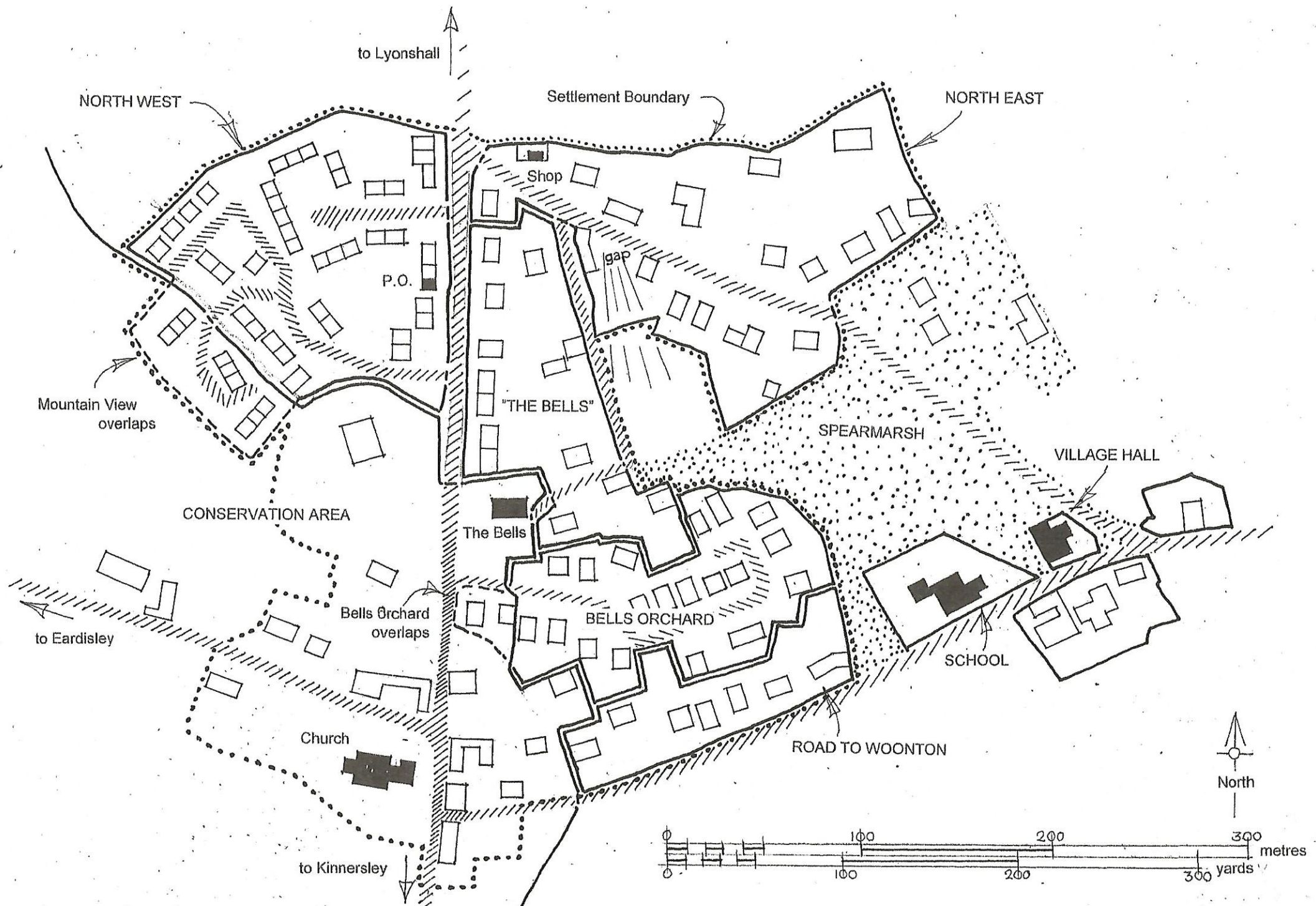
As a result, most of the Village is fairly modern and a patchwork of recent types and styles. The proportion of affordable housing is high.

2:3. VILLAGE LAYOUT

The main street is formed by a quarter of a mile of the road from Kinnersley to Lyonshall, running Northwards up the hill and rising 20m. The major part of the Village lies in blocks on either side of this street and is flanked on its Eastern side by Spearmarsh Common.

The road from Eardisley comes in from the West near the bottom of the street and the road from Woonton comes in from the East almost opposite. The three roads form the original cruciform shape of the Village.

A side road to the East, right at the top of the main street, runs across the top of that side of the Village, emerges on to Spearmarsh Common and has more recently been extended down the East side of the Common to meet the Woonton road at the Southeast corner of the Village.



2:4. PARTS OF THE VILLAGE

2:4.a.

CONSERVATION AREA

There is a group, mainly of old buildings, around the road crossing and the lower half of the main street.

The Church stands in the Southwest quadrant, with the remains of the Castle below it and a half-timber house, Manor Cottage, to the West of it. Castle Frome, a large Listed half-timber house, is 200m. South of the Church and there are 2 large farms, The Bridge (with a Listed barn) and The Whittern, just South of that.

Almeley House, the only 3-storey house in the village and also Listed, stands in the Northwest quadrant. Beyond it are 4 newer houses and then Almeley Manor, a splendid, Listed half-timber house with red brick infill. In the Southeast quadrant is Motte House, a combination of 2 old houses which was formerly a pub.

In the Northeast quadrant is Church House, the Listed Church House Barn, now converted, the War Memorial and The Old Shop, a half-timber house (Ancient Monument ?), together with 2 newer houses and a new bungalow behind.

Further up the West side of the main street is the Victorian Old Vicarage, in a large garden with many trees. On the East side, above the entrance to Bells Orchard, is "The Bells" pub., an old but altered building with a car park. All these are within the Almeley Conservation Area which, as explained earlier, extends up The Batch to Almeley Wootton.

The designation of the Conservation Area is well-merited and should be retained. A review is contemplated ; while this might result in an extension (see below) it should certainly not result in a reduction.

Two developments in the Conservation Area have been allowed in recent years. One, the "exceptions" social housing at Mountain View, has a pleasant quality, but it has an uncomfortable relationship with the older Manor Close bungalows immediately behind it and it encroaches on the valuable open space at that edge of the Village. The other was the development of the garden of Church House. This is of poorer quality, badly related to surrounding buildings and thus does not meet the requirement of UDP. policy HBA.6., to preserve and enhance character and appearance.

In view of these experiences and the small size of the conserved group, no further development should be allowed in the Conservation Area.

Several of the un-Listed buildings in the Area are as important and venerable as the Listed ones, namely Motte House, Manor Cottage, Church House, The Old Shop, "The Bells" and The Old Vicarage, and demolition of them should be resisted.

The Old Vicarage and its garden – particularly the trees on its public boundaries - are an important component of the character of the Conservation Area .

Many of the other trees in the Conservation Area are important to its character and to the good appearance of public roads, particularly the group between the entrance to Bells Orchard and "The Bells" car park, and their removal should be resisted.

The unsightly overhead cables which stand on the North side of the Church should be removed.

2:4.b. NORTHWEST
SECTOR

North of the Conservation Area and West of the main street is a block containing 4 private speculative houses and a converted coach house and 45 houses and bungalows built as social housing. They are reached via the West View, Manor Close, Ashcroft and Mountain View culs-de-sac. One of the houses on the main street frontage accommodates the Post Office.

Only a limited amount of off-street parking was provided, especially in the older parts, and this has led to intensive on-street parking and a certain amount of conversion of garden ground. The cramped provision, and some of the crowding of the communal parking spaces has led to stress between neighbours and access difficulties for service vehicles.

Although much of the social housing, especially Mountain View, was intended to be affordable accommodation for local people, the letting policies have recently not achieved this to as great an extent as was hoped.

The density in this sector of the Village is about 23 / Ha. and in view of that, greater intensification seems unlikely. In view of the already high proportion of social housing, further provision seems unnecessary, on condition that the letting of the existing housing could be directed more reliably towards the needs of local people.

The small open spaces within this sector should be protected and the clutter around the Village Notice Board should be tidied.

Development along the top road leading to Spearmarsh Common contains 6 of the older, pre-war village houses and 11 more recent houses and bungalows, all mixed together. The East end extends along the edge of the Common as far as the end of Kymin Lane. The house at the West end, on the North side, incorporates the Shop, and has a car park right on the corner. Planning consent has been given for a free-standing shop building along the East edge of the car park, which would enable the shop to vacate the room which it now occupies in the house. Brick House, half way along the South side of the road, has a barn and a short length of open frontage to its upper paddock.

Density in this sector is about 9 / Ha. and there is ample private off-street parking. It is thus one of the sectors vulnerable to intensification.

2:4.c. NORTHEAST
SECTOR

To ensure that any new development respects the character of the area, the environment and the context of the site, as required by UDP. Policies S.2. and DR.1., it should :-

- a.)..... **avoid overlooking or overshadowing of existing development. In this sector, this will require special care with the relation between single and two storied buildings.**
- b.).. **enhance overall architectural character. It is not sufficient to take the present mixed quality as an excuse for adding to the confusion. There is a consistency in the scale, design and delicacy of detailing of the older houses and in their use of traditional facing materials and this should be taken as the starting point for increasing the presence of these qualities within the sector.**
- c.)..... **have a good reason for its physical relation with the road frontage, based on the position of its neighbours. The existing buildings have a great variety of position, from being directly on the carriageway edge to total invisibility behind hedges, and this has created a lively streetscape, which should be enhanced.**

2:4.c. NORTHEAST
SECTOR
(continued)

d. retain the frontage gap at Brick House, which is an important Village feature, giving a long glimpse into the open back land and the Common, around which the Village was founded.

2:4.d. "THE BELLS"
SECTOR

This sector is the East frontage of the main street above "The Bells" and the land behind it, served by Bells Lane and Bull Lane.

The main street frontage contains 7 bungalows. The back lanes, which are unadopted, contain two more bungalows and 5 older houses and lead on to Spearmarsh Common.

The bungalows on the main street present a coherent frontage, different from but as coherent as the social housing frontage almost opposite. The houses on the back lanes are placed very irregularly, and are more varied.

The density of the whole block is about 10 / Ha., but this is due to the larger plot size of the older houses – the density of the bungalows is nearer 21 / Ha. The back lane plots may thus also be vulnerable to intensification, although the complicated overlaps and odd placing of buildings makes this difficult without some demolition.

The back lanes, and the Southern part of the previous sector, look on to the lower paddock attached to Brick House. This paddock adjoins Spearmarsh Common and is outside the Settlement Boundary. It is a relic of much earlier sporadic development of this part of the Village and illustrates the advantage of a convoluted fringe for a village in giving open aspect to a greater proportion of the dwellings.

It would deprive the Village of some richness of character if the larger plots in this sector were replaced by smaller ones, and a large increase in the number of plots on the back lanes would lead to demands for their adoption, which would require them to be widened, leaving less space for development and thus being self-defeating.

It may be worth considering whether the fragments of the early Village development in this and the previous sector, together with the paddock, could become the subject of a new Conservation Area, or some other indication of conservation status

2:4.e. BELLS
ORCHARD

This is the speculative development of bungalows around a cul-de-sac which was the larger part of the 1970's private growth of the Village. It has been added to recently, by filling in a few patches of vacant land at the Eastern end. There are now 21 dwellings in the cul-de-sac, all bungalows.

The density is about 17 / Ha. The plots are quite small but there is ample on-plot parking, which keeps the narrow carriageway uncongested.

It seems unlikely that there will be further development in this sector, but if there is, it should be single-storey in the interests of neighbourliness.

2:4.f. THE ROAD
TO WOONTON

There are 7 dwellings along the North side of the Woonton road within the Settlement Boundary, and the School, the Village Hall and another dwelling outside it at the East end. On the South side of the road there are 3 dwellings opposite the Village Hall

The row of dwellings within the boundary sits quite high above the road and looks out across open fields to the mountains. 5 of the row are single-storey, while at the Eastern end is a new 2-storey house and Peartree, an old 2-storey cottage recently extended. The ensity of this row is roughly the same as that of Bells Orchard, so intensification may be unlikely.

2:4.f. THE ROAD TO WOONTON (continued)

If any attempt is made to increase the height of any buildings in this row, consideration should be given to the effect on the outlook of the dwellings to the North of them.

The School stands on what was once part of the Common and was provided as a school site by Miss Foley in 1859. It is a thoughtful Victorian Building and must be one of the earliest purpose-built village schools. At present it is intensively used and has very strong support from the Parish. There is a case for substantial extension of the building and there is ample room on the site to do this.

2:4.g. THE SCHOOL

If the School is extended, it should be in a manner which is sympathetic to the original building. The present "temporary" class room should be removed. To respect the strong character of the original building need not require any great amount of stone walling, but should use the same pitch of slate roofs.

The Village Hall also stands on part of the Common which should, strictly, revert to Common use if the Hall is ever removed. However, the Hall is well patronised and, far from disappearing, may well need extending again.

2:4.h. THE VILLAGE HALL

The original 1920's structure was given a more durable exterior at its last extension and any further extensions should continue this, including the same type of pitched roof.

There are 4 more houses in this road, beyond and opposite the Hall. Being outside the Settlement Boundary, they are unlikely to be added to, but they make a group, with the Hall, which establishes this point as one of the entrances to the Village. Rainbow Cottage is the smallest of the 4 and the most venerable.

Spearmarsh Common is the largest Common in the Parish and is an important recreation facility. The centre part is maintained as a cricket ground by Almeley Cricket Club, who have a pavilion just off the Northwest side. The outer fringes are maintained by the Parish Council. The School uses parts of the cricket outfield for physical training and residents use it informally when cricket is not being played. It is a Registered Common and surrounding landowners have various Commoner's Rights, some of which were waived when the Common was converted to a playing field in the 1960's.

2:4.i. SPEARMARSH

Spearmarsh House is a large, older house with outbuildings and some land, outside the Settlement Boundary on the Northeast side of the Common. 2 new houses were built on part of its grounds recently.

The Common is thus surrounded closely by buildings on two of its sides and partially on the other two, yet it retains its open aspect because of the gaps between buildings and the breadth of the distant view of the mountains which can be obtained through them.

2:4.i. SPEARMARSH
(continued)

The Common should continue as an open space, of course, and encroachments should be allowed in only the most unusual circumstances. The present gaps in the built-up frontages should all be preserved. Overhead cables and their supporting poles should be removed. The Hall and School authorities should collaborate to control the parking of vehicles and prevent erosion of the grass. Bordering owners should manage surrounding hedges sympathetically. Thought should be given to establishing a tree belt along the Northwest side.

2:5 FRONT GARDENS

A prominent characteristic of the Village as a whole is the prevalence of front gardens and the elaborate planting of them. This gives a verdant and attractive appearance to the Village and serves to harmonise the otherwise discordant mixture of building styles and materials. Almost all the buildings are detached or semi-detached, so there are numerous gaps in the built frontages which allow glimpses of other planting and trees in back gardens

This asset is due to the skill and good will of householders, and it is hoped that this will continue. In most cases, any new development should encourage continuity by requiring sufficient space in front of dwellings for a substantial amount of gardening as well as any car parking which is needed.

2:6 INTERNAL VISTAS

The differing characteristics of the various sectors of the Village, described above, show that the public roads also have different characters. It is worth considering each of them as a whole because they form the “face” of the Village and are all vulnerable to disruption, or improvement, by the actions of frontagers, by developers, and by the public authorities.

2:6.a. MAIN STREET

The main street has a very pronounced shape, even though it is almost straight. At the bottom, by the Church, there is a very positive sense of enclosure, produced by several buildings and trees which are right on the edge of the carriageway, but the space is irregular and interesting because of the setting back of the Church and the War Memorial and by the ends of the roads which join on there.

The street passes uphill through a cutting up to 3m. deep which is too narrow for two cars to pass safely and which is emphasised by walls and overhanging trees. This pinch point has some practical value by sometimes slowing traffic, and it has an important visual effect by separating the open space below from the one above. The narrow slit provides a dramatic frame for the view of the mountains, looking downhill. The narrowing is continued usefully up the hill by the trees in the Old Vicarage garden on the West side and the trees below “The Bells” car park on the East.

The street then widens considerably between the frontages of West View and the bungalows opposite, where there are open grass verges and lower planting in front gardens. This has the potential to be a central Village space, having the pub., the notice board and the telephone kiosk, but it never quite makes it because the features are just too widely spread.

The street then narrows slightly as it reaches the top, but not enough to make a visual termination of the Village. The gradient flattens above the Village, so that the road appears to open into the sky, which may be what gives drivers the urge to accelerate. The road does bend to the left almost immediately, which presents an opportunity for a traditional closing of the vista – perhaps well-placed trees on the right hand side might do this one day.

2:6.a. MAIN STREET
(continued)

It is important to preserve the shape of the street, particularly by keeping the trees which are in the Conservation Area, and it would be useful to enhance the shape by some closing of the vista at the top. Any traffic calming measures which may have to be contemplated in the future should not introduce brightly coloured signs or structures which detract from the spatial effect

This short stretch rises and falls over a long hump and is terminated very effectively at its East end by the War Memorial. The buildings here are widely spread and at very different distances from the road, so the effect is very broken and informal.

2:6.b. ROAD FROM EARDISLEY

It would be best to keep it that way, as it forms a good showcase for 3 of the Village's grandest buildings.

This is on a long, slow curve, with its North side like a bulwark of buildings above the high bank and walls, reinforced by thick garden planting, while the South side, after it has climbed a little way from the junction with the main street, is wide open to the distant view. The road thus has a fairly constant character along most of its length, only becoming enclosed on both sides for a short distance when it comes to the School.

2:6.c. ROAD FROM WOONTON

This is an appropriate character for a road which is so emphatically the bottom edge of the Village and it should not be eroded by any more building on the South side. The Leominster District Plan contained a specific provision to keep these Southern fields undeveloped and it is hoped that the UDP. descriptions of them as Open Countryside and Landscape Least Resilient to Change will have at least as strong an effect.

The sudden surprise, at the West end of this road, of confronting the Church at close quarters on passing through the narrow gap between buildings, is one of the most dramatic features of the Village, and should be retained. Drivers of big vehicles complain of the sharpness of the turn, but the road across the Common was laid specially to provide them with an alternative and is well signposted.

This road is built up on both sides, but in an un-even way which gives it a good deal of interest. It, too, has a gentle curve and the vista is stopped by buildings at both ends, which gives it a comfortable, enclosed feel.

2:6.d. ROAD FROM THE SHOP TO SPEARMARSH

Any other buildings along the frontages should be placed to enhance the liveliness, rather than being aligned too carefully, which could produce monotony.

If the frontage is filled further, this is all the more reason to retain the contrasting gap by Brick House.

2:7 VILLAGE FRINGES

2:7.a. SOUTH

The wide hollow to the South of the Village contains 2 large farms to which buildings are being added. They have prospered to the extent that the combined group of their buildings is now almost as wide from East to West as the Village itself. Most of the buildings are in the hollow, which diminishes their impact on the distant views from the Village, though looking the other way, North towards the Village, they are very prominent in the foreground.

In view of the UDP. approach to landscape character and the setting of settlements, (Policies LA.2, 3 and 6,) it would be appropriate to consider, perhaps in conjunction with any further applications for planning consent, a landscape scheme which would relate the installations more sympathetically to their surroundings and to the Village. A few substantial blocks of trees, perhaps introduced as thickenings to existing hedgerow lines, could be useful in relieving the long line of buildings.

2:7.b. WEST

The Batch and its trees screens the Village on this side. The approach road plunges into the railway cutting and the dingle, so that the Village appears to be at the top of a green hill, with some of the Mountain View houses showing above the crest.

This is a pleasant view, which the Conservation Area is intended to protect, and is a good reason for not allowing development to spread any further down the slope towards the road.

2:7.c. NORTH

Because of the slope of the land down from the top of the Parish, the Village is not visible from the approach from the North side until one is almost upon it. The Northern edge is the longest of any of the edges of the Village. Its outlook on to open farmland provides a good amenity for about 20 of the existing dwellings which stand along that side. There are only 2 isolated dwellings between this edge and Almeley Wootton.

The clear definition of this edge is one of the reasons for the popular support for the Settlement Boundary.

2:7.d. EAST

The East side is also bordered by open farmland. Kymin Lane is a well-used footpath which leads from Spearmarsh to Hopleys Green and provides striking views of Burton Hill. The road to Woonton goes in a similar direction, but runs further South. The road has a pair of sharp double bends just outside the Village, where 2 half-timber cottages and a farm form a tiny suburb.

The open land on this side of the Village was also specially protected in the Leominster District Plan and it is hoped that this protection, along with that on the South side of the Village, will be continued by the UDP. It should be emphasised that a village of this small size and with an outline with many re-entrants like this, provides an open outlook for a high proportion of its dwellings, (in this case, just over half) which is much prized.