

Alvechurch Parish is an area of much-valued and beautiful landscape with extensive views. It has especially good tree cover, and excellent footpaths giving opportunities to access the countryside. Farming is small-scale and mostly pastoral, which encourages a good variety of wild life. The Parish is all Green Belt with the exception of Alvechurch village itself.

Landscape Character Assessment

Alvechurch Parish is mainly classified as Principal Timbered Farmlands, with some being Wooded Estatelands and Wooded Hills. Main characteristics are:

- small fields and mixed farming
- winding lanes and scattered settlements
- large and small woods, copses and hedgerows
- remnants of old hunting estates (Alvechurch and Bordesley Parks)

The landscape includes:

The River Arrow and its lowlands and feeder brooks: higher ground around West Hills, Weatheroak, Rowney Green, and Cobley Hill giving extensive views; Bittell reservoirs and the Birmingham and Worcester canal.

Farming & horticulture

The land is predominantly Grade 3 agricultural land.

- Mostly heavy clay, with different soils round Rowney Green
- Low lying land with hilly stretches
- Mostly pastoral: sheep and some cattle
- Small amount of arable - cereal and rape - around Alvechurch.
- Horses predominate around Rowney Green and Weatheroak.

There is one farm shop, a fishery, one garden centre, new allotments in Alvechurch and no significant market gardening

Woodland and trees

Larger woods include Peck Wood, Newbourne Hill and Grovely (Hopwood) Dingle. There are numerous small dingles and copses and lines of ancient trees along hedgerows. Oak is the dominant species, with ash, field maple, sycamore, cherry, blackthorn and hawthorn, and stands of poplar. Many new woods and plantings include Withybed Wood, Mick's Wood, new trees in Peck Wood, Alvechurch St Laurence churchyard and the schools. Newbourne Hill has public access, Peck Wood opens one week in the year, and at other times for youth groups. Grovely Dingle is not open to the public.

The villages have many superb specimens of ancient trees, especially oaks, some up to three hundred years old. Within Alvechurch, non-native trees are much planted - attractive species of maple and fine old Wellingtonias.

Management of woodlands varies: Peck Wood is an excellently managed old wood: Newbourne Hill, though a local nature reserve, is not. Many small dingles and copses are neglected. Trees along the canal are significant but not well-managed: those along the railway are disappearing. There is good planting of native broad-leaved trees on Alvechurch bypass

Water

The River Arrow flows through the Parish, only publicly accessible for short stretches in Alvechurch. The Birmingham and Worcester Canal has a towpath, a marina at Alvechurch and other mooring areas especially at Bittell, and is used for narrowboats, fishing and walking. Bittell reservoir is used for fishing and sailing by club members but has no public access.

There are numerous small ponds, mostly former marl-pits, used for taking clay, and now attractive pools. Some landowners manage these to encourage wildlife, and some are fishing ponds.

There are many small brooks, some of which are taken through culverts when they reach roads and habitation. There are areas prone to flash-flooding because the culverts cannot take the volume of water in very heavy rain.

Wildlife

Special designations

There are two SSIs (sites of special scientific interest): Grovely Dingle, an example of old native woodland trees and ground flora, and the north shore of Upper Bittell reservoir with rare shoreline plants.

Newbourne Hill is a local nature reserve owned by Worcestershire Wildlife Trust.

Special Wildlife Sites:

- Bittell reservoirs
- Meadow near Foxhill farm above Withybed Green
- The Meadows in Alvechurch
- The old fish ponds in Alvechurch
- Peck Wood
- Rowney Green

There is also a private nature reserve at Hopwood Service Station

Wildlife includes most common garden, woodland and water birds, mammals include badgers, deer, hedgehogs, hares, rabbits, and bats, some rarer species include water voles and great crested newts. Older pastures have interesting old meadow flowers, bees and butterflies. Some woodland has ancient woodland flora. The Meadows in Alvechurch has a rich wildlife. Gardens in the traditional settlements are good wildlife havens. Biodiversity is hampered by wildlife corridors (verges and hedges) often being over-mown and cut

Footpaths and access

There is an excellent network of public footpaths and bridleways, well-maintained by Alvechurch Village Society. The North Worcestershire Path skirts the northern end of the Parish Footpaths are generally through fields, though some are old byways, such as Birches bridleway, the old "Salt Way" to Droitwich, and Pestilence Lane. Most footpaths are not accessible to people with limited mobility. Access to wooded areas and the reservoirs is very limited.

The towpath along the canal is muddy and unstable in places. There is no seating or signposting.

Icknield Way is a Roman road, used for cycling and riding, leading up to the a rather neglected picnic site and open space at Forhill. Walking, cycling and horse riding along by-roads is not easy, due to fast traffic and no usable verge, except between Alvechurch and Hopwood.

Green Space

The Parish has 23 hectares of outdoor playing space, including

- Sports pitches at Alvechurch, Hopwood, and Rowney Green
- Children's playgrounds at Alvechurch, Hopwood and Rowney Green
- The MUGA in Alvechurch Crown Meadow
- General green spaces, such as The Meadows and George Road and a small green behind the Church in Alvechurch

The Meadows provide wildlife-rich space for walking and leisure. Villages have grassed areas along streets There are good trees and hedges between houses and along village streets

Energy and recycling

There is some generation of renewable energy through solar panels on private houses, but nothing large scale. Bromsgrove District Council provides a recycling collection. There is a controversial animal waste

recycling plant at Hopwood. It is possible to recycle clothes, though there are no charity shops within the Parish or any other schemes to encourage re-use.

Despite the siting of local facilities, the Parish has an above average car ownership per household, especially of more than one car. There is public transport to Redditch and Birmingham, but little to Bromsgrove, or from Rowney Green

Light, Noise and Air Pollution

Large areas of the Parish suffer noise pollution from the M42. There is considerable light pollution in the Parish, with no areas being truly dark. This is the combined effects of Birmingham, Redditch and the main road/motorway system. Street lighting is not excessive and many parts are unlit. There is some air pollution from the M42 and A441. Diesel pollution is made worse by over-cutting of the hedgerows, so there is not enough foliage to absorb the particles. There are also concerns about the animal rendering plant at Hopwood. Efforts have been made at the M42 service station to absorb any possible contamination from fuel spillage.

Minerals

Alvechurch is situated in the Worcestershire "area of opportunity" for clay, though this is not expected to be used for some decades. There are no plans for mineral extraction in the parish.

References

A new look at the Landscapes of Worcestershire WCC 2004

Planning for the soils of Worcestershire WCC 2010

Sites of special scientific interest www.naturalengland.org.uk

Worcestershire local sites partnership www.worcestershire.gov.uk

Woodland trust www.woodlandtrust.org.uk

Worcestershire wildlife trust www.worcswildlifetrust.co.uk

Bromsgrove District Council: Leisure and Culture www.bromsgrove.gov.uk

Worcestershire minerals local plan 1997 (saved policies) and emerging local plan 2013