

Draft material for Alvechurch Parish Neighbourhood Plan

Working and Shopping in Alvechurch Parish

The usual resident population of Alvechurch Parish aged 16 to 74 who are in employment numbers 2,748 people (compared with 46,251 for Bromsgrove District as a whole). This Alvechurch figure from the 2011 census shows a reduction of over 1,100 when compared with the comparable group in the 2001 census. Currently around 600 Parish residents are aged 75 and over with the total number of all usual Parish residents being about 5600.

Looking at the proportions of the Alvechurch Parish population in different types of occupation in 2011, over 14% (the largest percentage) are employed in health and social work, with 13.3% being engaged in wholesale and retail trade's activity. The next highest proportion is in education at a little over 12%. This is followed by 10.5% in manufacturing and just over 8% in technical work. Only 27 people are shown as working in agriculture, fishing and forestry work.

With reference to 2011 census data on the actual occupations of Parish residents as a proxy indicator of socio-economic status, over 1,000 of the residents at work are variously in professional occupations or categorised as "managers, directors or senior officials". Relatively small numbers are found in service occupations like leisure and care, (number 186), in sales and customer service (151) and working as machinery operatives (118).

Looking then at socio economic status for Parish residents according to the Acorn profile produced by the County Council research department and projected for 2011, 42% of the area's population are categorised as "wealthy achievers", 47% are described as "comfortably off", 5.5% are of moderate means and only 3.4% are "hard pressed". Data like these point to the relative affluence of the Alvechurch Parish population. A source of further confirmation comes from data on the household deprivation dimension measures used in the census for 2011. These show that over 1,100 households in Alvechurch Parish are not deprived according to any dimension from a total of nearly 2,300 Alvechurch households. Only about 57 households in the parish are identified as experiencing three or more of these deprivation dimensions.

We can see that large numbers of the Alvechurch Parish population who are in work are in jobs with rates of pay that provide their households with a comfortable or better standard of living. To get work with such benefits means invariably travel outside of the Parish boundaries. Given the position of the Parish relative to major employment centres like Birmingham and Redditch, high rates of commuting from the Parish to work can be expected. The 2001 census data show over 65% of Parish residents at work travelled more than the 5 kilometres to their workplace, with nearly a half of the total working 10/20 kilometres and upwards from the Parish. (NB: 2011 census data on this measure not found)

These data support a conclusion that for many of the Alvechurch population the Parish serves as a place in which to live but not usually to find work. There is little to change that view in the emerging Bromsgrove District Plan (Consultation version Sept2013). This identifies Bromsgrove town and Longbridge as the centres for business growth within Bromsgrove District. Any increase in job opportunities within Alvechurch Village, categorised as a larger settlement in district plan terms, is limited to the continuation or emergence of small scale business and office developments, convenience and retail shopping as well as local services.

Our initial consultation work with the Alvechurch population suggests there is no desire for a larger scale business to be located in the Parish and no great wish for green belt land to be given up for business purposes. With the motorway access point in the Parish (Junction 2, M42), major A roads travelling towards Birmingham, Redditch and Bromsgrove and rail services of an improving kind, large scale business in the Parish is likely to be neither missed nor desired.

Matters might not rest there. That motorway proximity within the Parish, coupled with the A road links, could lead in the midterm, and in a pattern seen elsewhere where road links to major centres are favourable, to developments between Junction 2 and Junction 3 of the M42 and on the associated A441 Alvechurch by-pass for warehousing and light industrial activity. (This constitutes a development corridor under consideration in the Birmingham and Solihull local enterprise partnership).

As with business opportunities and the associated jobs that lie close -by in Birmingham, Redditch and other urban centres and attract our Parishioners, so it is with shopping opportunities. In particular Redditch, Bromsgrove and Longbridge all have major supermarkets and other shopping offers within a relatively short drive for residents in any part of the Parish. Now and in the future and to cater for every day needs, the main parish shopping centre and location of other personal services is found in Alvechurch village itself. As well as a varied selection of shops in addition there are medical and other personal/family services facilities along with pubs, fast- food outlets and a restaurant.

A number of buildings in and around the village centre are occupied as office premises which ,while adding to the opportunities for local employment, put some limit on expansion of the shopping offer should that be desired. There is no land immediately available in the centre area and clear for development. In that context however, the current uncertainties about the site occupied by the Alvechurch Sports and Social Club poses a challenge. The site sits well in the existing arrangement of the shopping centre and offices. Any change in its use towards general housing would be detrimental as would the loss of the club's car park available for public parking by day. This adds to the ease of travelling by car from all parts of Alvechurch Parish to the village centre in the knowledge of car parking spaces being available on the road-side, at the club's car park or at the slightly more distant, District Council car park.

Car parking and pedestrian safety do not necessarily fit well with the current road configuration which brings vehicles passing through the village centre at a legal 30mph into contact with slow moving vehicles negotiating car parking places and pedestrians moving across the roadways from shop to shop. A development plan for the Alvechurch village centre which examines shopping needs and opportunities alongside pedestrian and vehicle access and movement is a short to midterm requirement.

The Parish geographical location with its proximity to major urban centres and its own combination of settlements both large, (Alvechurch) and small (Rowney Green, Hopwood, Bordesley) might lead to the view that business and employment outside the parish and shopping and local services within the parish, capture in strategic

planning terms, all that is needed .However, Alvechurch does have a substantial rural hinterland and in the words of the emerging district plan could be part as what is termed “rural renaissance.” This is to recognise the continued relevance of farming and related agricultural work along with businesses providing sport and leisure activities like horse riding and canal cruising which take advantage of an area’s rural features. For the additional business opportunities they provide and for the recreational value the latter can also offer to the resident population, they deserve continuing support in terms of current and future land use in Alvechurch Parish.

Jc/ NP Feb 2014