



Lower Almondsbury Conservation Area

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Introduction

A conservation area is an area of 'special architectural or historic interest, the character or appearance of which it is desirable to preserve or enhance'. Once designated, the local planning authority has a statutory duty to ensure that any proposed development will preserve or enhance the character or appearance of the conservation area and its setting.

Lower Almondsbury was designated a conservation area on 30th July 1975. A Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) appraisal leaflet was published following the conservation areas designation. This document is not a review of such, but sets out the information as produced in an accessible format supported by current policy context, pictures and mapping.

Policy Context

Local authorities have had the ability to designate locations of 'special architectural or historic interest' as conservation areas since 1967 when introduced as part of the Civic Amenities Act. Section 69 (2) of the Planning (Listed Building and Conservation) Act 1990 legislates that authorities are to carry out reviews of existing conservation areas from 'time to time'. Section 72 also states that 'special attention shall be paid to the desirability of preserving or enhancing the character or appearance of that area'. Guidance on conservation area appraisals and the management of conservation areas is produced by Heritage England.

The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) sets out national planning policy and must be taken into account in the preparation of local and neighbourhood plans, and is a material consideration in planning decisions. The NPPF defines conservation areas as 'Heritage Assets' and sets out in Para 126 that local authorities should 'recognise that heritage assets are an irreplaceable resource and should conserve them in a manner appropriate to their significance'. Para 127 states that when designating conservation areas local planning authorities should ensure the area justifies this status because of its special architectural or historic interest.

South Gloucestershire has 31 conservation areas, and there are a number of policies within the Council's Local Plan documents that are relevant. South Gloucestershire Local Plan 2006 saved policy L12 requires development within or affecting the conservation area to preserve or enhance its character or appearance. Further to this policy L13 states that development affecting the setting of a Listed Building will not be permitted unless 'the building and its setting would be preserved'. South Gloucestershire Core Strategy 2006-2027 sets out in CS9 that the 'natural and historic environment is a finite and irreplaceable resource', and expects that new development will conserve, respect and enhance heritage assets.

The emerging Policies, Sites and Places (PSP) Plan policy PSP18 states that development should 'serve to protect, and where appropriate, enhance or better reveal the significance of heritage assets and their setting' and 'development within their [listed buildings] setting will be expected to preserve and, where appropriate enhance...their special architectural or historic interest'. It should be noted the PSP Plan is currently a material consideration and at this time very limited weight is given to policies.

Setting

The village of Almondsbury is situated 7 miles north of Bristol, near the M4/M5 Almondsbury Interchange, the first four-level motorway crossing in Britain. Almondsbury lies within the Bristol & Bath Green Belt. The village falls into two distinct parts divided by the A38, with modern ribbon development to the east and the old nucleus of Lower Almondsbury clustering beneath the steep and wooded Almondsbury Hill. Spectacular views across the Severn Estuary are afforded on the descent from new to old Almondsbury (see figure 1).



Figure 1. Views looking north from Over Lane

History

Almondsbury was originally, as its name implies, the 'Bury' or camp of Alomond, a Saxon chieftain. The steep limestone scarp would have provided an excellent defensive site and signs of entrenchment can still be seen. Almondsbury Hill is a vantage point affording superb views across the Severn Valley to the Welsh Hills beyond.

Medieval Almondsbury lay on the main route between Bristol and Gloucester and a market was established in 1285. For centuries, Almondsbury was a close-knit agricultural community under the patronage of its great manor houses of Knole Park, Over Court and Gaunts Earthcott. The Manor of Almondsbury belonged to St Augustine's Abbey in Bristol until the dissolution and was granted to Sir Arthur d'Arcy in 1553. It was sold to Thomas Chester in 1569 and his heir, William Chester built Knole Park as a family seat. The original manor house was at Court Farm (grade II listed, see figures 2 and 3) in Almondsbury village but Chester chose the splendid hilltop position half a mile to the south with a magnificent view over the Bristol Channel for construction. A 15th century octagonal tower on this site was retained and incorporated into the house. Unfortunately, all that remains of the original house is the tower, reduced in size and incorporated into a modern dwelling.



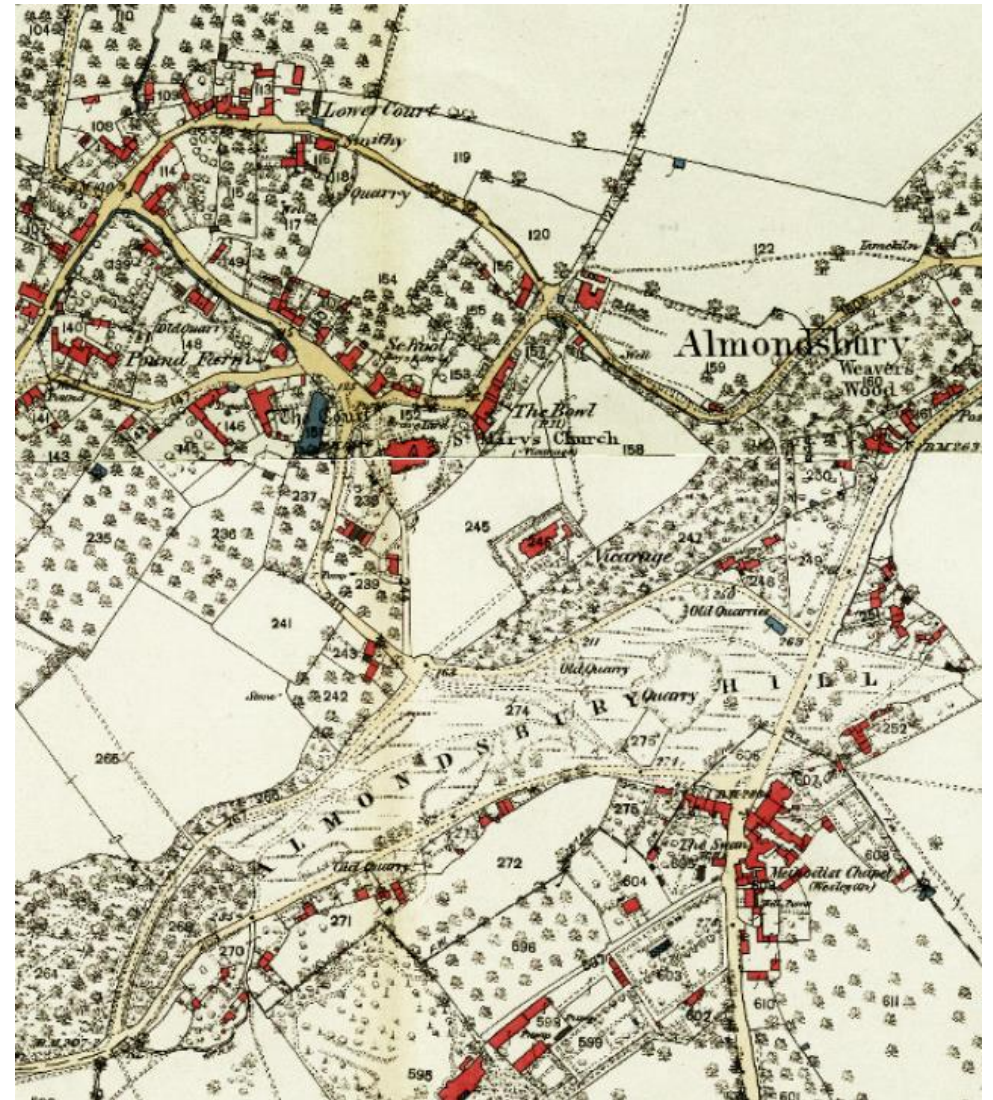
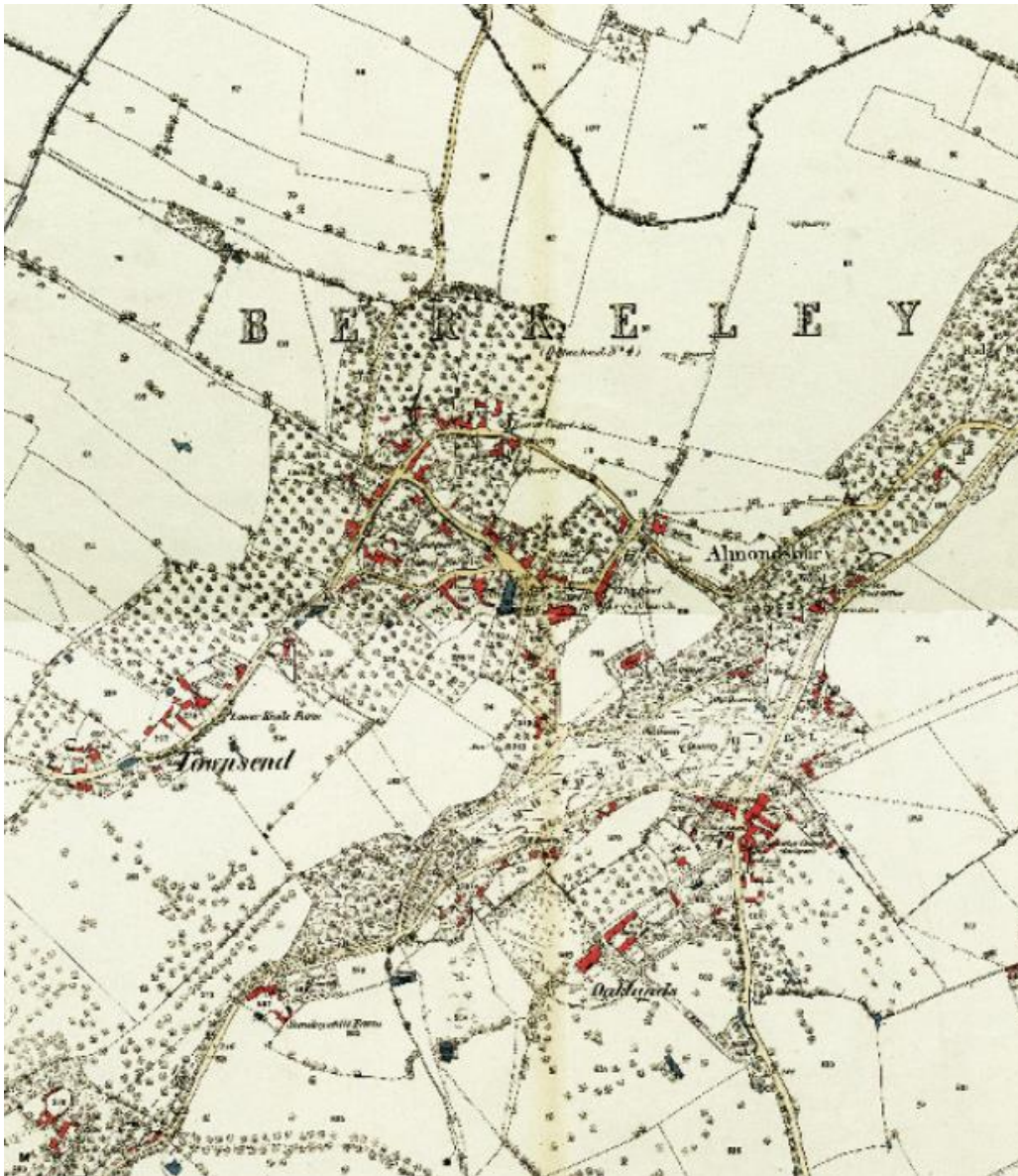
Figure 2 and 3. Court Farm and associated buildings

Over Court, an Elizabethan Manor house 2 miles south west of Almondsbury, built about the same time as Knole Park on the site of a 14th century house has also sadly been demolished, again to be replaced by new housing development.

The Church of St Mary (grade I listed, see figure 4) is said to have been consecrated by four bishops in 1148. In the mid-13th century there was considerable rebuilding when the chancel, crossing and transept were reconstructed. The church was heavily restored in the 19th century and the most notable features are its Norman north porch (see figure 5) and font and its elegant, distinctive diagonally patterned lead spire (see figure 6), one of only three in the country.



Figure 4. Top, St. Mary's Church. Figure 5. Bottom left, Norman North Porch. Figure 6. Bottom right, diagonally patterned spire



Circa 1880 Ordnance Survey map Lower Almondsbury
Source: <http://maps.bristol.gov.uk/knowyourplace/>

Character

The village of Lower Almondsbury nestles below the steep wooded Almondsbury Hill which shelters and largely obscures the village from above. This landscape feature provides an attractive backcloth to the village and contributes significantly to Almondsbury's character. The woodland is protected by a Tree Preservation Order. The top of this hill provides a superb vantage point with views across the Severn where both bridges are clearly visible (see figure 7).



Figure 7. View looking north from Over Lane, St Mary's church and beyond.

If one enters the village via Sundays Hill or Hollow Road the steep and wooded descent is attractive and enclosed, gradually opening up by the Forge (see figure 8). St Mary's Church dominated the village from its position at the foot of the escarpment and its splendid spire rises up revealing its position from the ridge (see figure 9). The small but picturesque village green with pump in the foreground of the church provides a typical village scene (see figure 10), enhanced by cottages of local stone nearby. Almondsbury village is rich in variety and style, with stone walls lining the narrow roads which are especially attractive in the spring and summer being covered in overhanging vegetation and blooms (see figure 11).



Figure 8. View from Sunday's Hill towards the forge and the spire St. Mary's Church



Figure 9. Entering the village from Sunday's Hill

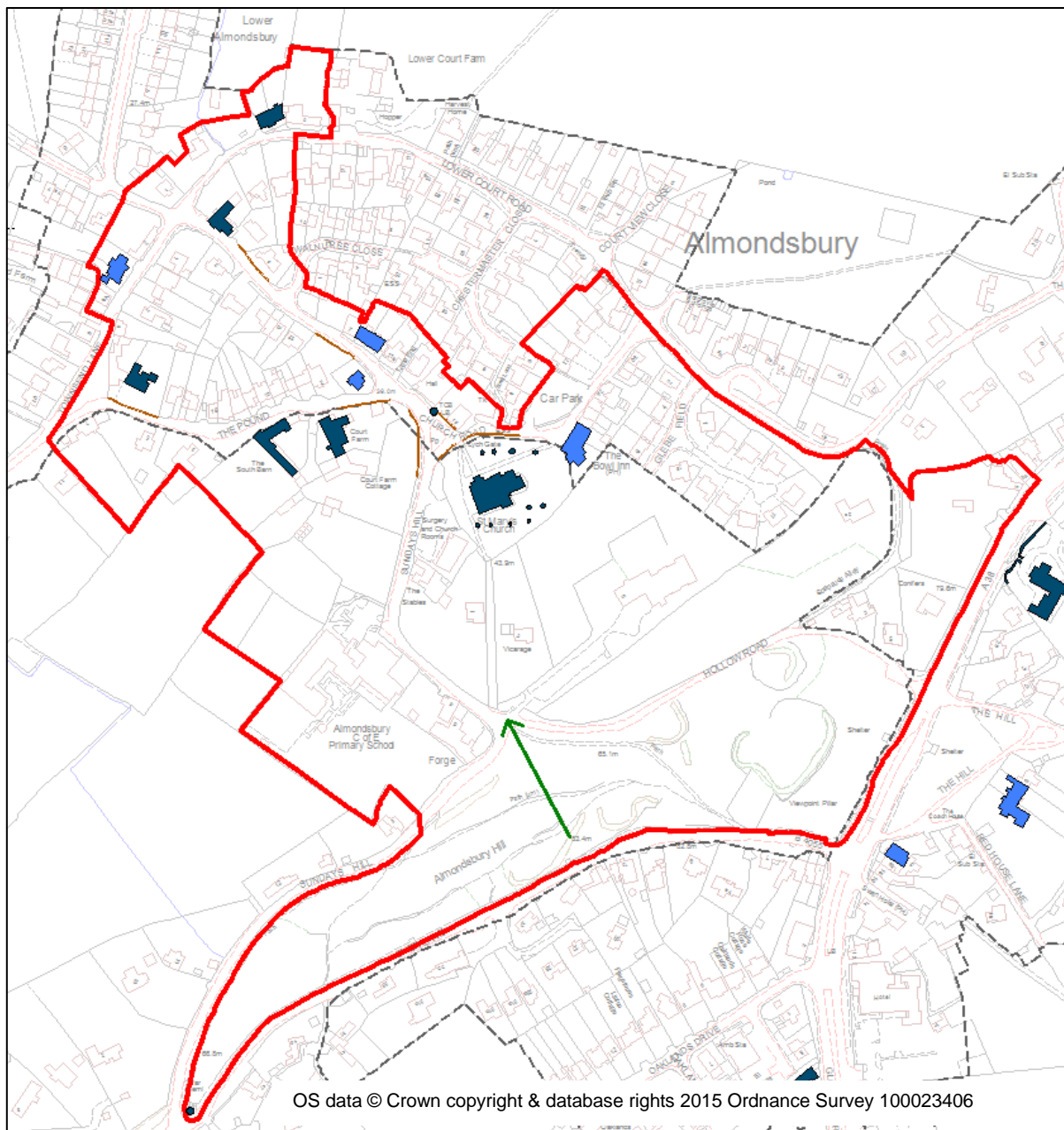


Figure 10. The village green and pump



Figure 11. Examples of stone walls lining roads in Lower Almondsbury

Summary map



KEY	
	Key views
	Prominent boundary walls that contribute towards a sense of enclosure
	Locally Listed Building
	Listed building
	Village green
	Conservation area boundary
	Point
	Settlement boundary

Contacts

The council is keen to work with the local community and other parties to help preserve and enhance this special area. If you wish to assist in any manner or have any further suggestions, please let us know.

For further information or advice please contact:

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