

Section 2 Historical Background

The way New Alresford's Conservation Area has developed.

A Sense of Continuity

New Alresford was originally developed as a sustainable market town and its' economic history has determined the way it has developed. Each major period of development has left a visible mark on the townscape that people value and wish to protect.

2.1 The Church

The liberty of Alresford was granted by Cyneigils (King of Wessex) in the 7th century when baptised and the Parish boundaries agreed in those charters and later registered in the Domesday Book, have not changed.

The Church of St John the Baptist (New Alresford) was built on the high knoll south of the river Arle opposite St Mary's, Old Alresford. St. Johns has been rebuilt several times, most notably after the great fire of Alresford in 1689 and then in Victorian gothic style in the 1890's.



St John the Baptist Church

2.2 Economic and Social Background

A Pre 17th Century



12th Century De Lucy Bridge

In and around 1200 the Bishop of Winchester, who was the land-owner, sought to increase further the rents and capital wealth of his diocese by building a new market town. He provided standard plots for 40 burgesses to establish their homes and businesses. These burghage (or burgal) plots measured 11 by 110 yards, and the outlines of many of them are still extant. He built the Great Weir and a bridge across the marshland and ford, which also survive.

They conveyed a threefold benefit:

- Road improvements,
- A large fishpond,
- A good head of water to power the mills.

All these contributed to the towns success and the now well-placed market town with its' wool mills and the re-routed road from Winchester via Alresford crossing the weir and the De Lucy Bridge to Bighton, Farnham and London – and from Alresford to Basingstoke raised a large toll income for the diocese.

The road routes remain and one fulling mill dating from the 14th century can still be found along the riverside.

The town received grants of Privilege from King John in 1200 and 1202, and in 1294 became a Borough with two members of Parliament.

The broad market place ran north to south from the river Alre and is now known as Broad Street, with East and West Street forming a T-junction at the top which are still the commercial hub of the town.

The St Giles Faire in Winchester added New Alresford as a follow on venue in the 12th Century, and a fair still visits the town on the week closest to the 11th October. Permission was granted for a market three days a week for drovers when bringing sheep through the town.

By the fourteenth century New Alresford was one of the country's major wool markets and was still entered via Drove Lane and the toll road to the west, via Sun Lane from the east, and the De Lucy Bridge at the Soke from Basingstoke, Farnham and London.



Annual Faire

B The Fires of Alresford

The war torn 15th century, cramped conditions, hot summers and straw roofs caused many small fires in the core of the town and during the English Civil War parts of East Street and West Street were destroyed and re-built many years later.

In the seventeenth century there were very hot dry summers, resulting in serious fires. The worst was in 1689 when in three hours 117 houses, the church, and the Market House were burnt to the ground.

Only the Fulling Mill and a few 13th century houses survived near the 12th century Bridge at the bottom of Broad Street.

In the Survey responses people said looking up Broad Street towards the Church of St John was their favourite view, and their second favourite view was looking down towards the 13th century houses, 12th century Bridge and the Soke.



Broad Street properties

King George 3rd asked Parliament for a Royal Brief to re-build the town. This resulted in two thirds of the cost of re-building being donated by other cities in the country and provided new houses with more space to avoid over-crowding.

The buildings were Georgian in design with colour-washed brick and render finish and were constructed using vernacular materials and construction methods. Lime mortar and slate roofs predominate and some flint, wattle and daub was also used as described in the Section on the Conservation Area.

C Agriculture, The Railway –Victorian and early Edwardian Development of the Town

There was then a period of agricultural boom and property remained bright and well looked after. Transport became easier with the opening of the new turnpike road. In the late nineteenth century cheap agricultural imports had a devastating effect, resulting in an agricultural slump and this is reflected by very little new build until the coming of and effective running of the railways and gas industries.

The gas company for the town and the railway connecting Winchester with London were opened in 1853 and 1865 respectively. The export of watercress helped the economy a little but the main result of nineteenth century technology was the opportunity for light industry to develop.

This upturn led to some municipal improvements, new building, and refurbishment. A huge mill, the station and goods shed (still in fine condition), and characteristic rows of Victorian cottages were built. A similar mix of industrial building and cottages developed in the Dean and a brewery built on the north side of West Street.

D The Edwardian development

The Edwardian development of the town was mainly south of the railway bounded by Grange Road and Jacklyns Lane. Built by a successful entrepreneur (Mr. Baker of Broad Street) and mainly occupied by people moving out from the by then cramped conditions in the center of the town to more airy spacious housing. These houses define this period of construction in New Alresford and are now a major defining feature of the character of the Jacklyns Lane and Grange Road areas, described in Section 5. . Centrally placed is the Stratton Bates Recreation Ground. This affords walkers the long reaching views through the gardens and over the roofline of the Edwardian bungalows in Grange Road given in the survey responses as a favourite view.

Between the First and Second World Wars there was another farming depression and a series of worldwide depressions culminating in the world depression of 1932. There was very little new building during this time.

E Post WW2 Development.

In the post 1950's Alresford's prosperity grew as it had become an attractive place to live. People had better transport and sufficient retirement income to be able to support the development of a wide-ranging variety of bungalows and houses. These are described in the character area East of Jacklyns Lane in Section 5.

The railway closed in the 1970's as a result of the Beeching Report in the 1960's and is now manned by volunteers and contributes to the prosperity of the town as a tourist attraction.

F The Non Economic Contribution of the Population to the Look of the Town (Conservation Area)

New Alresford has always been a welcoming English market town and visited by people from continental Europe – some of which made their homes there.

More recently, French prisoners of war were housed in Alresford during the Napoleonic Wars, and during the Second World War the town housed Italian prisoners of war. Some of both groups remained contributing Mediterranean dimension to the towns homes and population.

2.3 Town Trustees

Until 1883 the local government authority was the ancient self-perpetuating body of burgesses, headed by a Bailiff. When they were replaced, by an elected Council, some of their duties relating to markets and communal lands, were taken over by Trustees. This arrangement continues.

The Town Trustees, own the roadside area on both sides of Pound Hill and The Avenue to the junction with Drove Lane. They are the only Hampshire Town Trustees to have retained their legal status to modern times.

The Trustees help keep the character of the town by maintaining the market area and trimming the trees and grassed areas along The Avenue and Broad Street. The Trustees have a bus and provide a door-to-door service with volunteer drivers for the benefit of the elderly and those with mobility problems, maintaining this aspect of the town's kindly, friendly and polite way of life.



The Avenue

2.4 Summary



New Alresford's sense of continuity is embedded in peoples' minds, and forms their vision of how the town should develop. They value its green and tranquil setting and historic role as a resting place for traders, and pilgrims alike. They also appreciate and like to keep alive the sense of permanency given by the town being in a broadly similar form as a small market town to that originally constructed, and the colourful appearance given to it when rebuilt after the 1689 fire due to its' popularity in Georgian times.

The town's history is a record of how the local community, town trustees, and local council have adapted to, or managed change over centuries and how Alresford developed as a balanced society.

The current challenge is to meet current accommodation needs and the needs of industry for 21st century employment, without destroying the way the town was developed to give people light healthy airy homes with glimpse of wildlife and trees between them.