

Alcester Neighbourhood Development Plan Local Green Space Site Assessment - August 2018

Site Address	Site Area	Site Ref
Priory Meadow (South of Abbey Field), River Arrow Nature Reserve, south of Westbury Park and east of Birmingham Rd, Alcester	Approx. 4.25ha	LGS 4

Plan



Site Description and Current Land Use

The site is part of a large wedge of green infrastructure that runs through Alcester from north to south. Connected by footpath to the Abbey Fields to the north and through the allotment gardens to the south, the site consists of open views across a natural and untended meadow. It has mowed pathways, rustic seating, the 'Queen's Oaks' sculpture is used by walkers enjoying the river corridor.

Mounds and depressions within the site are evidence of the Benedictine Abbey that once covered this land in the 12th and 13th Centuries. The site also includes the underground remains of the main Abbey buildings.

The back gardens of residential dwellings line the site's east and southwest boundaries. A small wooden bridge crosses a tributary that runs across the middle of the site from east to west. The tributary is lined to the west and south boundaries with mature trees and shrubs, including weeping willows, ash, hawthorn and beech. Wildflowers and nettles can be found along its south and east perimeters. Buzzards, crows and magpies can be seen and heard flying overhead.

Relevant Planning History

No relevant planning history found.

Site Ownership

Owned and managed by Alcester Town Council. Title Ref: WK471717

Site Constraints

The site sits within the Built-up Area Boundary and borders the conservation area to the southeast but is in a designated Area of Restraint (SDC Core Strategy CS 13) and is adjacent to/overlaps the Scheduled Monument Site (SDC Core Strategy CS 8) to the north.

The site is situated in Zone A09 of the B2 Alcester Landscape Sensitivity Study (2011). The zone is categorised as having high sensitivity to both commercial and residential development. The reports states that:

“This flat valley floor zone, mostly in the floodplain of the River Arrow, runs through the centre of the settlement separating the older part of the town to the west from the new to the east. It comprises well used and managed amenity space to the east and north west and permanent grazed pasture to the west, part of which is a scheduled ancient monument [Alcester Abbey- with no visible remains] and part of which is the River Arrow local nature reserve. The river has a winding natural course and strong riparian tree cover and with other trees and hedgerows on boundaries strongly enclose the area screening the settlement edge and acting as a setting for the town including Gunners Bridge to the south. Overall the area is either a valuable community resource or provides a rural setting for a SAM. It is therefore highly sensitive and unsuitable for housing development..” p.28

Public Access

The site is open and accessible to the public from public footpaths which link it to Abbey Field and the River Arrow Nature Reserve to the north and the Gunning Bridge Allotment Gardens to the south.

Site Photo





Ecological Significance

The site contains a variety of habitats including the river, its tributary and open grassland together with a dense thicket of mature/ semi-mature trees and shrubs lining its perimeter. It supports a variety of wildlife including insects, amphibians, invertebrates, mammals and birds. Buzzards, mapies and crows were seen flying overhead.

The banks of the River Arrow are edged with willow, alder, oak and hawthorn, which provide ideal perches for kingfishers. This mix of habitats is important for a number of birds and mammals as they provide food, shelter and nesting sites. They increase the diversity of insect species (including butterflies and bees which are currently in decline), which are a food source for bird and mammal species and can also play an important role in the pollination of plants and crops in the surrounding area. The diversity and population numbers of insects directly impacts the food chain for other fauna in the area and has a wider impact on the cultivation of crops. These are all vital for the wider food web and species diversity within the town's ecosystem.

In the town, there have been sightings of larger fauna species such as bats, birds of prey (e.g. buzzards and owls), rabbits and hedgehogs. The site plays an important contributory role in the wider ecological significance of the town.

Special Qualities and Local Significance

This large, quiet meadow with its open aspect and views has recently been acquired by ATC and is still being developed. One of the projects in this Neighbourhood Plan is to create a bridge from this meadow across the river to Jubilee Fields in order to increase accessibility and utilisation of this river corridor.

The site is locally significant because of its important ecological value and historical heritage as part of a Schedule Monument site. It is well used and highly valued by the local community for local residents, visitors and dog walkers being easily accessible from the town centre.

The special qualities of the site include its strong contribution to local character and green

infrastructure. It is also distinctive due to its natural beauty and tranquil, open aspect as well as its views to and gentle sounds of the River Arrow.

Summary and Suitability for Designation as Local Green Space

This site is well related to and appreciated and valued by the local community and makes a positive contribution to the local distinctiveness of the village.

The LGS as outlined on the above plan is considered to be suitable for Local Green Space designation in accordance with paragraphs 99-101 of the National Planning Policy Framework in that it is:

- in reasonably close proximity to the community it serves;
- demonstrably special to a local community and holds a particular local significance because of its recreational value (including as a playing field), tranquillity and richness of its habitats and wildlife potential; and
- local in character and is not an extensive tract of land.