

CONSERVATION AREA CHARACTER STATEMENT FOR AMWELL



January 2012



CONSERVATION AREA CHARACTER STATEMENT AMWELL

INTRODUCTION

The Civic Amenities Act 1967 empowered local planning authorities to make provision for the preservation and enhancement of areas of architectural and historic interest by designating them as conservation areas. The hamlet of Amwell was designated as a conservation area on the 19 October 1983.

Designation was based on the statutory definition which is “an area of special architectural interest, the character of which it is desirable to preserve or enhance...they may be large or small, from whole town centres to squares, terraces and smaller groups of buildings. They will often be centred on listed buildings but not always. Pleasant groups of other buildings, open spaces, trees, an historic street pattern, a village green, or features of archaeological interest may also contribute to the special character of the area.” Consultations took place with the Parish Council and local amenity societies, in addition to all local residents.

Conservation should not be thought of solely as a process of preservation and an impediment to change. The designation of a conservation area represents an opportunity to formulate positive policies to improve and enhance its environmental quality and to ensure the successful integration of any development or redevelopment necessary for its continued success as a living and working community. The St Albans District Local Plan Review (adopted November 1994) sets out the general principles which will be observed when dealing with applications for new development and redevelopment (Policy 85 – “Development in Conservation Areas”). However, the Local Plan is soon to be replaced by the Local Development Framework. This includes the Core Strategy which is currently being prepared by the Council.

The aims of this Character Statement are to show the way in which the form of the conservation area has evolved and to assess its present character; to indicate the principles to be adopted in considering planning applications in the area; and to form a framework within which more detailed proposals may be formulated.

DESIGNATIONS

CONSERVATION AREA - The settlement of Amwell was designated as a conservation area on 19 October 1983 (see map). It is tightly drawn around the historic core of the settlement.

STATUTORY LIST – Listed buildings are buildings included on a list of “Buildings of Special Architectural or Historic Interest” compiled by central government. The Council is required by the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990, when considering any application for listed building consent or planning permission which affects a listed building or its setting, “to have special regard to the desirability of preserving the building or its setting”. Applications will be assessed against District Plan historic buildings policies and government advice. There are several residential properties in the hamlet and within the conservation area, most are statutory listed buildings. These are shown on the attached map. Outbuildings within the curtilage of

listed buildings are normally protected under the main listing and are not separately indicated on the plan.

LOCAL LISTING - These are buildings which the Council feels make a positive contribution to the character or appearance of this conservation area. The proposed locally listed buildings are shown on the attached map. It is not proposed to locally list any buildings which are statutorily listed or any of their outbuildings which are listed by virtue of being in their curtilage – it is considered that such buildings do contribute positively to the character, and that ‘double’ designation is not necessary (see map). English Heritage offer guidance on what qualities unlisted buildings may possess for them to make a positive contribution to the special architectural or historic interest of a conservation area, and these have been borne in mind when drawing up the local list.

METROPOLITAN GREEN BELT – The whole of the Amwell Conservation Area is covered by the Metropolitan Green Belt, which is subject to retained Policy 1 of the District Local Plan and PPG2. These state that only very specific types of development will be acceptable, and that it should integrate with the existing landscape. Siting, design and external appearance are particularly important and additional landscaping will normally be required. Significant harm to the ecological value of the countryside must be avoided.

HISTORICAL AND ARCHAEOLOGICAL BACKGROUND

Amwell is a small hamlet which probably dates to at least Domesday times (1086), but probably developed as an amalgamation of separate farms that came together at a cross-road. It is located in the parish of Wheathampstead. The place-name derives from two elements – *hamm* and *wielle* and appears to mean ‘spring (*wielle*) by the enclosed plot’ and is first mentioned as *Hamewell* in 1272-5 in the Westminster Abbey Muniments. It was also recorded as Hamwelle in 1336 and Hamwell Heth (Heath) in 1547. It is still called Hamwell on Dury and Andrews’ 1766 map of Hertfordshire. Brewhouse Hill in Wheathampstead, which leads to Amwell, was formerly known as Hamwell Hill.

The River Lea situated in the valley to the north would have been a natural highway for prehistoric peoples to access the higher ground. In particular, in the Late Mesolithic (c.6,000 to 4,000 BC) there are far more sites away from the river valley than in earlier periods. Amwell is set within an extensive Pre-Roman, Late Iron Age and Roman landscape to which it may have some links. For example, the area is approximately 1.5 km west of the Wheathampstead Oppidum, a site possibly made famous by the defeat of Cassivellaunus, the ruler of the Iron Age tribe (Catuvellauni) at the hands of Julius Caesar in 54 BC.

In the conservation area there are no known prehistoric monuments but a possible Roman building and environs are located in a field just north of the hamlet. Just to the south, on Nomansland Common, is a ring ditch which is possibly a henge monument. If so it would be a very significant asset as the centre of Prehistoric religious activity in the Neolithic period (2,000-4000BC). Henges were most likely used for rituals or astronomical observation rather than day-to-day activity or occupation.

In the Saxon period it appears that the surrounding landscape changed and became dominated by dispersed small settlements within a possibly rejuvenated woodland

environment, before it was opened up for agriculture again. The River Lea (situated just to the north) was itself part of a major territorial boundary for a short period when it separated Wessex/England from the Danelaw to the north. The land around Wheathampstead, including Amwell, was granted to Westminster Abbey by Edward the Confessor in 1060. After the medieval period the landscape would have been dominated by small hamlets and isolated farms some of which still survive today.

The Amwell Conservation Area boundary is tightly drawn around the very small present day hamlet located at a crossroads. It contains several cottages dating from the C16 and C17 onwards although the settlement is much older. The 1880 Ordnance Survey map shows a similar pattern of buildings as today. These cottages would have been built or adapted to house the local agricultural work force, the main local industry in Wheathampstead parish until the C20. It has also been suggested that some of the buildings were weavers cottages and one of the houses is still named Weavers Cottage. The most recent building in the hamlet was the construction of Meadow Cottages, a pair of agricultural workers dwellings, in the 1950's. They were newly built for a local farm in a small meadow but were subsequently extended and converted into a single house.

Apart from the few surviving cottages the hamlet also contains a public house now named the Elephant and Castle. When it became a licensed premises is unclear and the building probably originated as a small cottage range. It is first recorded as The Castle in 1812 run or owned by Charles Humphreys but the building is much older. Most of the older cottages would have been in multiple occupation with a larger population in the hamlet than today. However the hamlet would still have had close connections with the main settlement of Wheathampstead to the north which had a church, shops and industries.

APPEARANCE



Amwell is a very small rural hamlet, which lies approximately 8 kilometers (five miles) to the north east of St Albans and 1.7 kilometers (1 mile) south of Wheathampstead. It is situated at a country cross roads on a largely clay plateau close to the head of a shallow valley which drops gently southwards towards Nomansland Common. The hamlet is now surrounded by gently undulating agricultural land and woodland. It is approached by roads lined with trees and high hedges that create a sense of enclosure and anticipation before arriving in the hamlet, which is virtually hidden from longer views. The hamlet still retains an air of isolation largely due to the lack of regular through vehicular traffic. It is located in an area considered ideal walking territory close to Nomansland Common and it is linked by footpaths to the nearby settlements of Harpenden and Wheathampstead.



Down Green Lane

Much of the character of Amwell Conservation Area comes from its enclosed rural situation surrounded by trees and farmland. Based on the historic O.S. maps the extent of the buildings, fields and wooded areas are largely the same as they were over one hundred years ago. There are now only eight dwellings in the conservation area, grouped around the historic road layout. The houses are set amongst the wooded areas and small fields, giving an atmosphere of a peaceful rural idyll. Buildings are generally modest in scale and either one and a half storeys or two storeys high. Most of the properties are located behind high hedges which, combined with the sunken lanes, affords only occasional glimpses of the buildings or views of the roofs. The Elephant and Castle PH completes this small group of buildings.

The conservation area boundary takes in both sides of Down Green Lane, Amwell Lane and Bull Lane. Down Green Lane at this point is very narrow and single track with occasional passing places. It is lined by high hedges creating a tunnel effect. At this point the lane is partly sunken with higher verges especially on the former field side adjoining the golf course. The historic hedgerows contain coppiced hazel and holly with

occasional hedgerow trees. Amwell Lane is more open in character with wider verges and lower more recent hedges. This lane is also partly sunken suggesting a historic origin perhaps linked into the pattern of local drove roads. The unique rural character is reinforced by the scattered setting of the houses and the narrow lanes which afford only occasional views of the buildings. The only significant unenclosed area is the parking area and public garden of the Elephant and Castle PH. The field boundaries are generally hedges or trees of native species such as holly, hazel and field maple.

There is a strip of woodland adjoining the northern boundary of the Conservation Area although this is a relatively recent planting. Historic maps are marked with the symbol for orchards on most of the larger cottage plots but now most of the houses are located in well maintained gardens and in two cases with adjoining meadows or semi woodland. More recently a golf range has been established on former fields to the west. It is the spaces between and around the houses which are just as important as the buildings themselves. Any future development in the area, including extensions, should reflect this small scale of development.

Significant trees and surviving hedges are important to the rural character of the hamlet and hedges should ideally not be replaced with fencing without appropriate replanting. They are a fundamental part of the character, appearance and setting of the Conservation Area. Most trees in conservation areas are protected under the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 and require permission from the District Council before topping, lopping, felling, or uprooting. Six weeks written notice must be given of any proposed surgery or felling. The Council can make a Tree Preservation Order if deemed necessary.

There is a relatively small palette of building materials within the area. The oldest buildings are timber framed, some now rebuilt or refronted in the local red brick. For example the front wall of the Elephant and Castle PH has a dated brick of 1794 but the building is older behind. Most cottages have clay tiles on the roofs but the older ones were probably originally thatched. Local red bricks and boulder flint are also local materials and are used on the smaller cottages and garden walls. Some partly weather boarded elevations survive such as the gable on Amwell Cottage.

Front boundaries directly abut the un-kerbed, tarmac road or are set back behind high grass verges, and there is an absence of footways, which is an important element of the character of the hamlet.

In conclusion, as well as the buildings, the landscaping in and around this hamlet is a very important feature. Views between and over the houses to the landscaping beyond is crucial to the character and appearance of the Conservation Area.

LISTED BUILDINGS

Listed Buildings are buildings included on a list of 'Buildings of Special Architectural or Historic Interest' compiled by central government. The Council is required by the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990, when considering any application for listed building consent or planning permission which affects a listed building or its setting, 'to have special regard to the desirability of preserving the building or its setting'. Applications will be assessed against local District Plan historic buildings policies and government advice. There are five entries in the list of Buildings of Special

Architectural or Historic Interest which are located in the Amwell Conservation Area which are shown on the attached plan. The buildings are described as follows based on the listing descriptions:

Amwell Cottage, Amwell Lane, Grade II



Amwell Cottage from Amwell Lane

Amwell Cottage is a now a single house, built as a cottage range in the late C17 or early C18. To the left is a 1930's extension incorporating a small C18 barn and there is a c.1970 extension on the rear left to form an L-shaped plan. It is a mix of one and two storeys high. The long frontage to the road has four box dormer windows, the centre two with C19 cast iron casements. The ground floor has C20 leaded and glazing bar casement windows. The red brick front dates from the C18 and has some weatherboarding on the left hand side. The roof has red old clay tiles and has two C18 ridge chimney stacks. Internally the roof has clasped purlins.

Elephant and Castle PH, Amwell Lane, Grade II

The Elephant and Castle Public House has an early C18 timber frame although the chimney stacks possibly date from the C16. The front was cased in red brick in 1794 (dated brick). There is a C20 extension on the right and to the rear. The building is single storey with one plastered and timber-framed dormer dated 1714 set in a plain tile covered roof. The windows in the older part comprise two glazing-bar casements, the left one under a segmental headed brick arch. There are two entrances with C18/19 wood door frames and with modern gabled door hoods. The interior has single bays either side of the large stack on the left of centre. There is a flint-faced well, possibly dating from the medieval period, exposed inside.

Amwell End, Down Green Lane, Grade II

Amwell End is a house with an C18 timber frame and with red brick casing. To the rear is a C20 extension to form L plan. It is two storeys high with attics. The plain tiled roof has two C18 ridge chimney stacks. There are four timber framed dormers windows, that on right centre with the date 1756. The windows are wood glazing bar casements, the three on the ground floor with segmental heads. There are two C20 small porches on the front.

The building is set back from the road on a large plot.



Amwell Barn, Down Green Lane

Amwell Barn (formerly Cats Amwell), Down Green Lane, Grade II

Amwell Barn is a two storey house probably dating from the early C18. It has a later C18 red brick front with a floor band and dentilled brick eaves. On the left is a barn extension. The main block has two gable end chimney stacks and a plain tiled roof. Two C18 casement windows either side of door with moulded wood frame and cut bracket hood. The casements are three-light with square leading, spring catches and wood mullions. A small timber-framed bay on the right side has brick infill and one similar casement. The barn on left previously had modern plastered brickwork and an exposed timber frame but is now boarded for protection.

The front boundary is an old flint and brick wall.

The Homestead, Down Green Lane, Grade II

The Homestead is an early C18 timber framed two storey house, refronted and extended on the right in the late C18. The elevations are now painted brick with dentilled brick eaves. Plain tiled roof with central ridge stack. The front door opposite the chimney indicates a lobby entrance plan. The front elevation is four windows, those of ground floor segmental-headed and with original lead casements in oak frames. C20 gable porch. Interior has chamfered floor beams and joists.

LOCALLY LISTED BUILDINGS

Three of the remaining unlisted buildings in the conservation area are considered together with the listed buildings to make a positive contribution to the character and appearance of the conservation area and are termed 'locally listed'. They largely date from the C19 or have been extended and altered in the C20.



Laurel Cottage, Amwell Lane

Laurel Cottage, Amwell Lane

A two storey, three window wide, mid-Victorian substantial cottage faced in white painted brick with a clay tiled roof. To the left is a single storey range and garage and the enclosed porch is likely to be a later alteration. A building is shown in this location on the 1880 OS map divided into two or possibly three units. Laurel Cottage is an attractive Victorian building and occupies a prominent location half way between two listed buildings.

Amwell Corner, Down Green Lane

Originally built as a pair of small Victorian cottages they have been converted and extended into a single dwelling. The building is prominently sited on the road edge. Like Laurel Cottage it is a reminder of the gradual development of the settlement in the C19.

Weavers Cottage Down Green Lane

Weavers Cottage is a modest two storey cottage, dating from the early C19 with later alterations and probably incorporating older fabric. It is faced in local red brick with a clay tile roof and central chimney stack. A building is shown in this location on the 1880 OS map divided into two or possibly three units. It is also a reminder of the gradual development of the settlement in the C19 and it also occupies a prominent location half way between two listed buildings.

OTHER BUILDINGS



Little Meadow, Bull Lane

Little Meadow, Bull Lane

The remaining house, Little Meadow, was originally built as a pair of farm workers cottages (Meadow Cottages) in 1956. They were later converted into one house and extended in the 1960's. Whilst relatively modern and not of any particular historic interest the building, both in scale and materials (painted brick and tiles), fits well into the area. It is set back from the road behind a high hedge and attractive cottage garden.

PROPOSALS FOR ENHANCEMENT

It is important that any new development is of a high standard of design, sympathetic to its surroundings and the Conservation Area as a whole. It should not detract from the setting of nearby existing buildings, its form should have regard to the surroundings and the existing balance of buildings and landscape, and should be of good quality, normally built with traditional and natural materials. Existing houses are generally small scale, and this should be reflected in any new development or extensions.

Opportunities for enhancement include the retention and re-introduction of traditional materials and techniques of repair. Any new development or change of use should respect the grain, setting, scale, materials and use of existing development or land. Hardstanding materials should reflect the hamlet's rural character, gravel being particularly suitable, whereas block paving has too harsh an appearance, being more suited to urban use, and will not be considered favourably.

Boundaries comprising native hedgerows and trees should be retained and enhanced or replaced with similar whenever possible. The introduction of any inappropriate boundary treatment detracts from this otherwise rural area and creates alien and obtrusive features and should be avoided. Hedges, low fences and walls, and timber gates are the predominant boundary treatment fronting the houses, which have an informal rural character. Modern railings, elaborate metal gates and other urban or non-traditional boundary treatments should be avoided. Planning permission is required for the erection of means of enclosure in the curtilage of listed buildings

UPVC windows and doors lack the finish and details of traditional joinery. They should be avoided and will not be acceptable for listed buildings, conversions or new development. Painted timber windows of the appropriate style will be encouraged.

St Albans District Council leaflet 'A Householder's Guide to Living in a Conservation Area' provides general guidance on best practice within Conservation Areas.

SUMMARY

It is the Council's policy to encourage the retention of those features which make the conservation area special; including historic buildings, their historic and architectural features and their settings, trees, hedges, verges, gravelled driveways. In addition the Council demands a high standard of design and materials for any new development in the Conservation Area.

STATUTORY LISTED BUILDINGS

Amwell Cottage, Amwell Lane Grade II
Elephant and Castle PH, Amwell Lane Grade II
Amwell End, Down Green Lane Grade II
Amwell Barn (formerly Cats Amwell), Down Green Lane Grade II
The Homestead, Down Green Lane Grade II

LOCALLY LISTED BUILDINGS

Laurel Cottage, Amwell Lane
Amwell Corner, Down Green Lane
Weavers Cottage, Down Green Lane

OTHER SOURCES OF INFORMATION

Planning Policy Statement 5: Planning for the Historic Environment, Department for Communities and Local Government

St Albans District Local Plan Review 1994

Conservation Area Practice 1995, English Heritage

Wheathampstead and District Preservation Society

Conservation Area Appraisals, English Heritage, March 1994

Guidance on conservation area appraisals, English Heritage, February 2006

BIBLIOGRAPHY AND FURTHER READING

Victoria County History Hertfordshire Volume 2 1908

Harpenden and St Albans Branches of the Workers' Educational Association, About Wheathampstead, Wheathampstead and Harpenden I-IV

Isobel Thompson Extensive Wheathampstead Urban Survey Project Assessment Report 2002 HCC

STATUS OF THE DOCUMENT

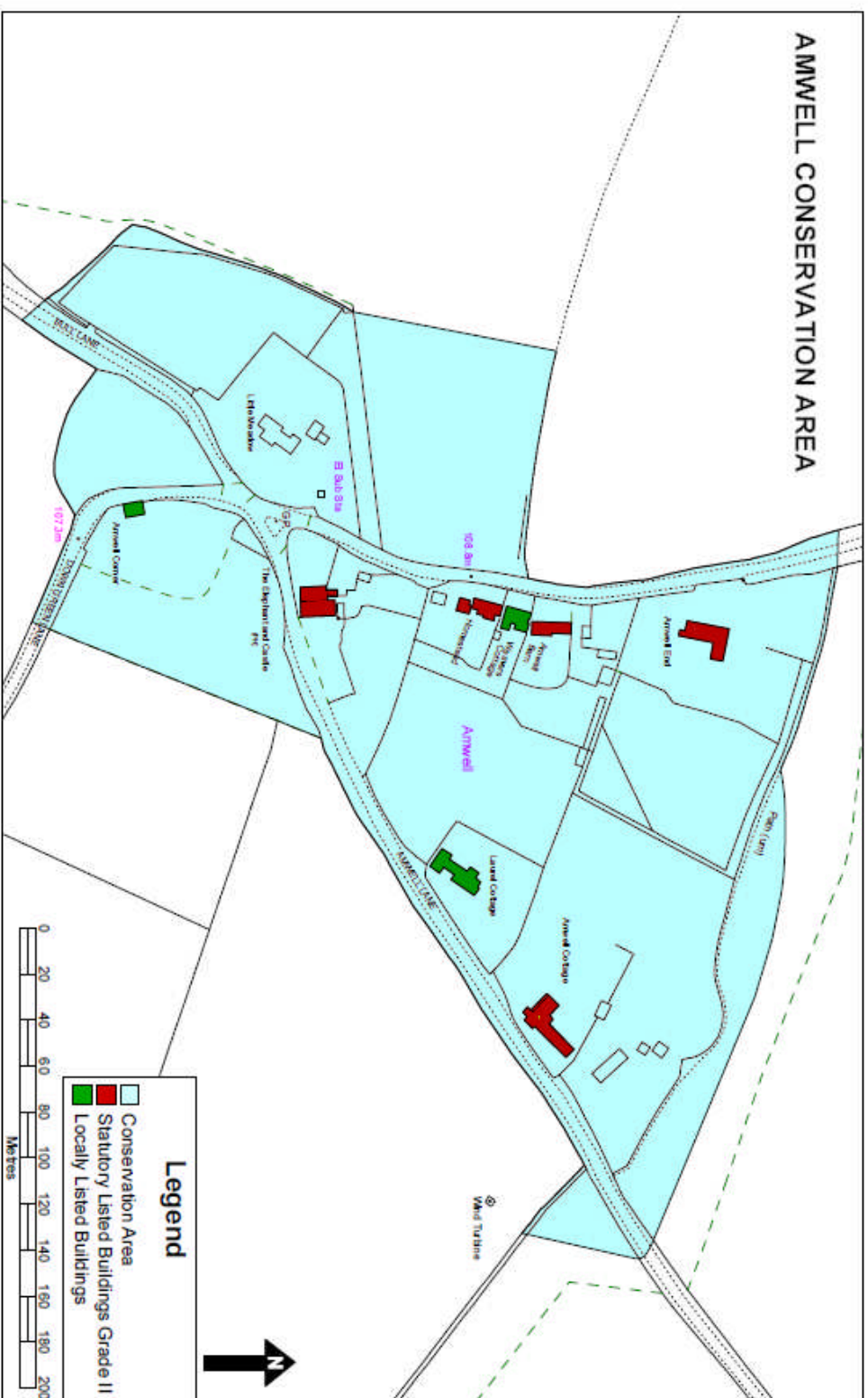
This document should be read together with saved Policy 85 of the St Albans City and District Local Plan Review 1994. It has been produced as part of DPR Project 9: Policy Statements – Conservation Areas.

The Planning and Conservation Portfolio Holder agreed on the 27 January 2011 that the draft Amwell Conservation Area Character Statement should go out to local consultation. Consultation took place from 4th February to 18th March 2011 with the following: local residents, the Wheathampstead Local History Group, the Wheathampstead & District Preservation Society, the Parish Council, Ward Councillors and Planning (Development Control) Committee North.

As a result of this consultation comments were received and addressed but no alterations were made to the text, as agreed by the Planning and Conservation Portfolio Holder on 19 January 2012. This version forms the Amwell Conservation Area Character Statement January 2012.

If further advice or guidance is required please contact the Department of Planning and Building Control, St Albans City and District Council, Council Offices, Civic Centre, St Albans. Herts. AL13JE. Tel. St Albans (01727)866100.

AMWELL CONSERVATION AREA



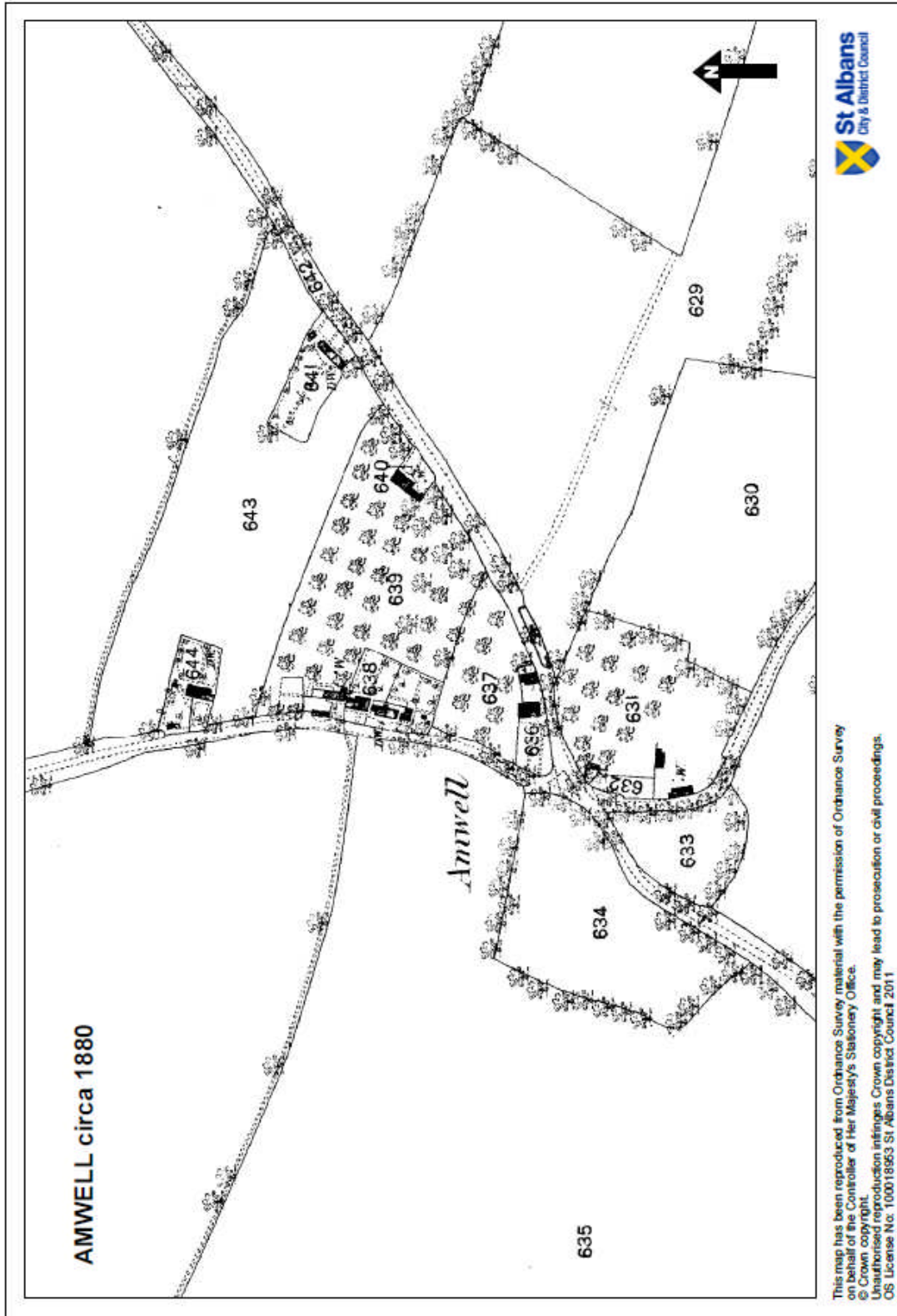
Legend

- Conservation Area
- Statutory Listed Buildings Grade II
- Locally Listed Buildings



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