

4. ALTON AND ENVIRONS

4.1 HISTORICAL CONTEXT

The Candidate CHL area is an *organically evolved mill village landscape as defined by the Town of Caledon: Criteria for the Identification of Cultural Heritage Landscapes* and is focused on the milling heritage which extends along Shaw's Creek through the existing village.

It is considered an excellent Candidate CHL in that it is closely associated with a number of Caledon's major historic themes. These are: *pioneer settlement; early industry – grist and sawmills along the Credit and the Railway*. Much evidence of this heritage remains today.



Alton, 1877
Source: 1877 Historical Atlas of Peel

4.2 INVENTORY

1. Physiographic Description

The area is part of the Credit River Valley and sits directly below the large morainic hill locally known as the Pinnacle. This stretch of river originally contained a long set of rapids (approximately 1 mile) with a combined fall of about 108 feet making it ideal for mill sites. The main branch of the Credit is formed just east of the village proper where the Alton Branch (referred to as Shaw's Creek) and the tributary originating near Orangeville converge.

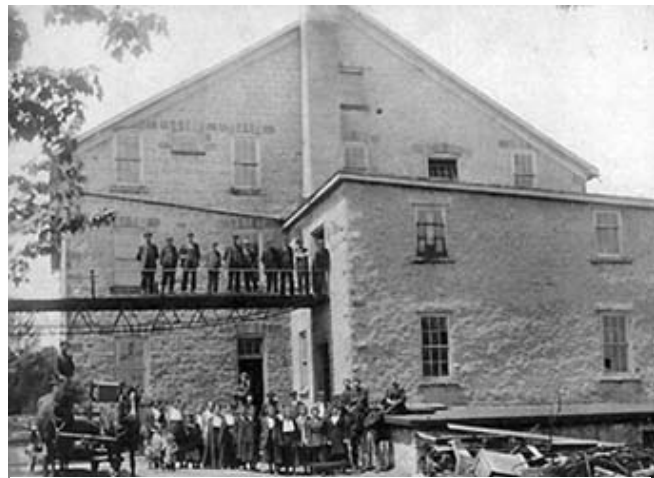
2. Processes

Land Uses and Activities

Though no archaeological survey has yet been undertaken for the area, this river valley with its associated relatively gentle hills would have almost certainly been occupied, at least seasonally for fishing and hunting, for many centuries prior to Euro-Canadian settlement.

The survey of Caledon Township was completed in 1819-1820. Thomas Russell is credited as the area pioneer having settled with his family in 1834 on the east half of Lots 23 and 24, Concession IV. In 1837 he was joined by several other families and in just over a decade an urban node had formed around grist and saw mills erected on the banks of Shaw Creek. By 1856 various plans of subdivision were registered and the village took on a form still recognizable today.

With the opening of a store by Robert Meek, the village had become an established settlement. It was granted a post office in 1855, at which time the name Alton was chosen. By 1877 the village had three churches for the Congregational, Methodist and Presbyterian denominations respectively, five stores, two hotels and a railway station and switches for the Toronto, Grey and Bruce Railway (TG&B). The long rapids noted above allowed for 8 dams which provided the head for such industries as D & L Mckinnon's flour and grist mills with four run of stone producing for export; Walter McClelland's and George Alanhams' flour and grist mills; Alanham's sawmill: the King brothers steam furniture factory as well as a tannery, axe factory and iron foundry. In the latter part of the 19th century woolen mills replaced grist and flour mills as the dominant industry and it is their legacy which is most obvious today.



Historic photo of mill in Alton



1889, after McClelland's dam burst

During the great flood of 1889, the McClelland's dam burst wiping out other dams downriver, flooding the village and causing two deaths.

Throughout the age of direct water powered industry Alton thrived, but with changing technology its role as an industrial centre went into decline.

Patterns of Spatial Organization

The survey of Caledon Township was completed by Samuel Rykman in 1819 and was one of the first to be undertaken using the double-front system. In this system the common unit of concession is the half-lot of 100 acres with each half of the 200 acre lot fronting on a different concession line road. These half lots are almost square. The concessions run essentially north-south in this region (actually northwest). At every five lots there was an allowance for a side road.

It may well be that Thomas Russell chose his property with an eye to its potential as a mill seat(s). Shaw's Creek tends roughly east-west through Lot 23 with its long run of rapids, and it was along this stretch that the first mills were located. A road (Queen Street) was then laid out south of this stretch of the river for the commercial and residential needs of the expanding mill work force and their families, intersecting Third Line West, which eventually became Main Street. This established the main commercial intersection of the new settlement. While the area north of the river was originally mainly industrial, in 1856-57 extensive further residential subdivision took place on both sides of Shaw's Creek necessitating an increased number of bridges. By 1859 the village had taken on a form still recognizable today. The schools, churches and public buildings were concentrated south of Queen, either on, or just off of, Main Street.

The shape of all development was influenced by the presence of the Pinnacle, which rises steeply from the north side of the creek and restricted growth to its base. The shape and size of the millponds has varied over the decades, influencing the form of the northern section of the village. The extant Lower pond, much broader than that shown in 1877, at some point eclipsed the area north of the river which had been subdivided as part of the original village plan between the northern extension of Emeline and William Street. The historic village pattern remains largely intact.

Circulation Networks

The internal village road system with its series of bridges was connected to the main concession road grid via Queen Street. The original lay-out of streets is generally intact except as noted above and where slightly reworked at the Millcroft Inn property. Later the

TG & B Railway established a station on the eastern outskirts of the village and ran several switches to the lime kilns of Jamison and Carroll as their lime was very much in demand for construction purposes in Toronto. By 1877 the Credit Valley Railway (CVR) had been graded through Alton eventually establishing a station on Station Street. The line has been activated once again to accommodate sightseeing excursions through this scenic area though the original station has been moved off site.

Boundary Demarcations

The Candidate CHL area is bounded by the footprint of the historic village as identified on the Peel County Atlas map of 1877 to the south, east and west and by (and including) the hill known as the Pinnacle which served to define/constrain the shape of the village and serves as its northern scenic backdrop.

Within the village lots are defined by hedges, windrows, the location of driveways as well as a variety of fencing types, mostly of wood and ranging from pickets to lattice-topped privacy fences.

Vegetation Related to Land Use

Although much altered over time, the vegetation throughout the village alludes to its historic settlement patterns, and retains windrows, hedges and other domestic landscape features. Many of these elements are likely in original locations. Some mature trees remain along the streets and on residential properties. Riparian vegetation, willows and cattails exist in association with the millpond, marsh and creek system.

Buildings, Structures and Objects

*Note: *Denotes properties designated under Part IV of the Ontario Heritage Act.*

A high percentage of heritage structures remain in the village, concentrated along Queen Street north of the river west of Main, as well as Main Street south of Queen. The structures listed below predominantly focus on the village's water-powered industrial heritage and the Queen Street properties, though several other designated properties are included as well.

*** 55 John Street (Millcroft Inn)**

Property includes both the upper mill (now the main Inn structure) and the 'little' mill (currently the Conference Centre). These stone buildings originally constituted the Ward-Dods woolen mills. The upper mill dates from c.1880, constructed by Benjamin Ward on the site of William McClelland's c.1845 timber frame grist mill. The County Atlas indicates that the mill was still owned by the McClellands in 1877 and had "two run of stone" at that time.

The 'little' mill was originally a warehouse connected to the upper mill via a steel catwalk. The ruins of the associated dye house are also on the property. Gutted by fire in 1917, the structures were revitalized in the 1970's through an ambitious adaptive use project which has produced a successful hotel/conference operation while preserving this important component of the area's milling heritage.

***The Manor House, Millcroft Inn (see above)**

Originally the mill owner's house occupied by the Ward and later the Dods, families. Fine polychromatic brick structure with extensive gardens preserved and incorporated into the Millcroft complex.

***1402 Queen Street W
(The Alton Mill Studios)**

The other important late 19th century woolen mill (Beaver Woolen Mills) in Alton constructed by William Algie in 1881 of local stone. It retains its original relationship to its picturesque 3 acre millpond and has recently been converted into artists'/artisans' studios. The dam, remains of the sluiceway, wheelhouse and catwalk to Queen Street, all remain on the site.



Former Algie Woolen Mills

The Miller's House

This large red brick house with 'wraparound' verandah and balcony solarium located up the hill from the Algie Mill, looks out over the mill pond and the former Algie woolen mill complex.

The Palmer House

Originally built as the Dixie House, it is the only building remaining of five Alton hotels. The hotel was rebuilt after being substantially damaged by fire in 1890.

***1334 Queen Street W (Algie – Hall House)**

Situated at the edge of the mill pond on property associated with the Algie Mill it appears to have been built as the home for a mill worker of some importance. Though much altered with a modern mansard roof, the fine original stonework remains evident.

1398 Queen Street W – Science Hall

Built by William Algie in 1885, it became the village cultural centre - the site of musical and theatrical events and lectures. Now a private residence.

***1565 Queen St. E (Wright-Didd House)**

Regency style stone house constructed c.1860 apparently for Thomas Wright, a miller at one of Alton's mills. (Also a village merchant).

***1456 Queen St. W (Alton Mechanic's Institute and Library)**

William Algie (see above) very much believed in furthering the education of his mill workers and helped finance the construction of this institution in 1882. It is the last Mechanic's Institute remaining in the Town of Caledon.

***1422 Queen Street W (Dods-Long House)**

Dichromatic, hipped roofed brick house constructed on property associated with the Algie Mill.

1341 Queen St. W

Fine example of the quality of Alton's mid 19th century residential stonework.

***42 Charles Street (Fead-Fendley House)**

***10 Station Street (former Alton Baptist Church)**

***19739 Main Street (former Alton Congregational Church and Town Hall)**

Settlement Clusters

The subject area is itself a settlement cluster.

Archaeological Sites

Though no archaeological survey has yet been undertaken in the Candidate CHL area the presence of water, the abundance of fish, game and wild edibles as well as the ease of transportation virtually guarantees at least seasonal occupation by the First Nations and their ancestors. A reasonable comparison would be with the Silver Creek area where several aboriginal sites have been found on tributaries of the Credit River.

4. **Site Context**

The dominant site feature is the large hill known as the Pinnacle. The village, and particularly all the historic milling operations which were its raison d'être, are nestled at its base. It looms over Alton and has been continuously depicted throughout the village's history in both paintings and photographs. As well from its slopes and summit it has provided fine views of the village and the surrounding landscape. It has been a favourite picnic spot for Alton residents since the 19th century, and, as well as several formal trails, there are many footpaths up its slopes known only to villagers. The other key physical feature establishing context for the village is the confluence of Shaw's Creek with the Orangeville headwaters tributary to form the main Credit River just east of the village.

4.3 EVALUATION

To be identified as a CHL an area must clearly embody both heritage significance and integrity. The following Significance Criteria are excerpted from the *Town of Caledon: Criteria for the Identification of Cultural Heritage Landscapes*, and are provided here for reference.

Significance

Significance Criteria

While any landscape upon which humankind has left their imprint is a cultural landscape, only those cultural landscapes that have a deep connection with the history of the jurisdiction can be identified as cultural heritage landscapes. To be considered significant from a heritage perspective it must be demonstrated through the Inventory Report that the Candidate CHL meets one or more of the following criteria:

- A. Is associated with events that made significant contributions to the broad patterns of area history, i.e., strong association with central themes.*
- B. Is closely associated with the lives of individuals and/or families who are considered significant to the history of the area.*
- C. Embodies the distinctive characteristics of a particular settlement pattern or lifeway whether derived from ethnic background, imposed by the landscape, was the practice of a specific historic period or a combination of the above.*
- D. Manifests a particularly close and harmonious long-standing relationship between the natural and domestic landscape.*
- E. Has yielded or is likely to yield information important to prehistory or history.*
- F. Is strongly associated with the cultural and/or spiritual traditions of First Nations or any other ethnic and/or religious group*

Integrity

A CHL must be able to be justified as distinct area of contiguous heritage integrity. The key individual elements which constitute the cultural heritage landscape and the way in which their interweaving makes a unique 'place' must still clearly reflect the historic period and/or organic evolution from which the heritage significance derives.

Conclusions:

The preceding Inventory Report clearly demonstrates that this Candidate CHL area fulfills Significance Criteria A, B and C. The importance of water-powered industry to the development of Caledon cannot be overstated and Alton was, in its time, one of the most important (and one of the earliest) industrial centres in the Township. It certainly retains the greatest material evidence of its milling heritage.

The original village lay-out and its relationship to the two extant mills remains generally intact though the road network, north of Queen Street has been changed historically due to millpond expansion, flooding etc. and more recently, but only slightly, around the Millcroft Inn. Development historically centred along Queen Street and Main Street (originally Third Line West) and it is along these two streets, as well as the banks Shaw's Creek, where the surviving historic resources are concentrated. While there are other important properties on the side streets, several of which are already designated under Part IV of the Ontario Heritage Act, the historic fabric is much more fragmented. The buildings tend to be modest houses of a much more recent period, though not generally incompatible in size and scale, and typically built within the original village lot divisions.

Thus the historic core of Alton is recommended for identification as a CHL being an excellent example of a mill village, its primary focus being the landscape of water-powered industry along Shaw's Creek and its directly associated manifestations such as the mill workers' and mill owners' housing, and the Mechanics' Institute. As well, many of the anchor buildings of community life through the 19th and early 20th century remain in place, including the historic church structures, Town Hall, Mechanics Institute, and Science Hall.

4.4 STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

In 1834, Thomas Russell settled on the site of what became the village of Alton. His property included a section of Shaw's Creek with a long run of rapids (with a combined fall of 108 feet) and thus outstanding opportunities for obtaining water power. In just over a decade flour/grist and sawmills had been established. These formed the catalyst for further settlement and by 1856 a formal village plan was in place and the hamlet had been granted a post office. The village grew around the newly laid out Queen Street, the key east/west thoroughfare, just south of Shaw's Creek and its mills, and its intersection with Third Line, which became Main Street within Alton.

A succession of mills and factories operated along the river over the course of the latter half of the 19th century including a furniture factory, woolen mills, axe factory, iron foundry, sawmills and a number of flour and grist mills. At one time eight mill dams existed along this section of Shaw's Creek and its course was braided with sluice ways. With industry came growth and the associated institutions including a school and churches for the Baptist, Methodist, Congregational and Presbyterian denominations. As a flourishing urban node Alton was chosen as a station point on both the TG&B Railway and CVR Railways.

The prosperous mill owners built fine homes for themselves and more austere but serviceable housing for their work force in close proximity to the mills themselves. The earlier timber framed

mills were often destroyed by fire. In 1889 the McClelland dam burst causing much destruction downstream, including two deaths.

The existing mill structures, all of local stone (Inglewood) date to the latter part of the 19th century. Thus the existing industrial landscape featuring the Ward-Dods mill (now Millcroft) and upper mill pond and the Algie Mills (now Alton Mill Studios) with its 3 acre mill pond is largely a product of that period. Together with the ruins of associated and/or earlier outbuildings, the bridges, miller's, mill owners' and workers' housing, the Mechanic's Institute etc., this period landscape is remarkably complete. The village grew around the mills and the mid 19th century village plan remains readily discernible with a large degree of surviving heritage fabric from the milling era (c.1850 – c.1920.) As well, the relationship of the Pinnacle to the village and to Shaw's Creek itself remains intact.

Character-Defining Elements

- A-1 *55 John Street, Millcroft Inn,
- A-2 *The Manor House, Millcroft Inn (see above)
- A-3 1402 Queen Street W, The Alton Mill Studios,
- A-4 The Miller's House
- A-5 *1334 Queen Street W, Algie – Hall House
- A-6 1398 Queen Street W, Science Hall
- A-7 *1565 Queen St. E, Wright-Didd House
- A-8 *1456 Queen St. W, Alton Mechanic's Institute and Library
- A-9 *1422 Queen Street W, Dods-Long House
- A-10 1341 Queen St. W
- A-11 *42 Charles Street, Fead-Fendley House
- A-12 *10 Station Street, former Alton Baptist Church
- A-13 *19739 Main Street, former Alton Congregational Church and Town Hall
- A-14 the upper mill pond and dam (Millcroft)
- A-15 the lower mill pond and dam (Alton Mills)
- A-16 Bridge over Shaw's Creek

Others (not mapped)

Dam and sluice ruins and former bridge abutments

The Palmer House

The north and east slopes of the Pinnacle as seen from the village

The Shaw's Creek rapids

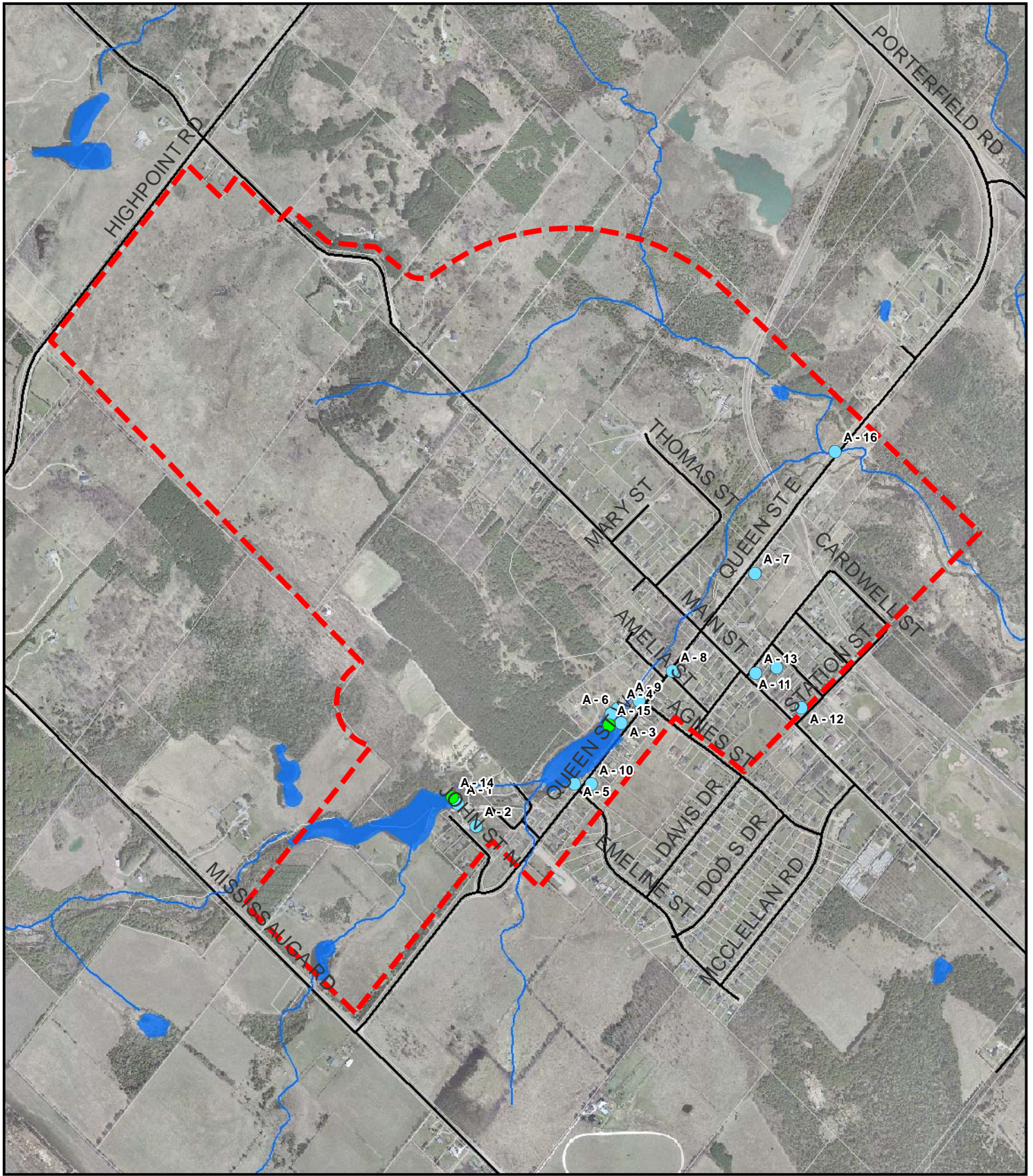
It is thus recommended that the Candidate CHL referred to as Alton Village be identified as a CHL.








4.5 BOUNDARIES

The original Alton Village Plan, extending southward, from its industrial origin at the river and northward, around the foot of the Pinnacle, remains essentially discernible to this day. It is the core area of the original plan centred on the intersection of Queen and Main Streets, extending along Queen and the riverbank, south along Main and including Edmund and Station Streets, where the key historic resources are concentrated.

The village of Alton is very much tied both visually and, in terms of its historic evolution, to the Pinnacle. This large landform needs to be included in the Alton CHL. Drawing a boundary which includes the Pinnacle will also mean the inclusion of a large number of much more recent structures but these, while certainly not historic resources, do not diminish the over all heritage character of the 'place'.

It is recommended that the boundaries of the Alton CHL be consistent with the historically built upon area of the historic village plan with the inclusion of the south and east slopes of the Pinnacle which have formed the backdrop to village life and become ingrained in the community consciousness.



- Character Defining Elements
-  Built
 -  Landscape
 -  CHL Boundary
 -  Road
 -  Rivers / Streams
 -  Lakes / Ponds
 -  Property Boundary (2006)