

Camelford

Conservation Area Character Statement



INTRODUCTION

Conservation Areas are designated by local planning authorities under the Planning Acts. Section 69 of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 defines a Conservation Area as *an area of special architectural or historic interest, the character or appearance of which it is desirable to preserve or enhance*. North Cornwall District Council, as the local planning authority, has a duty to designate appropriate parts of its area as Conservation Areas. At present there are some 8,500 Conservation Areas in England of which 29 are in the district of North Cornwall. During the preparation of the North Cornwall District Local Plan the centre of Camelford was identified as a potential Conservation Area. Following public consultation it was designated as a Conservation Area by North Cornwall District Council on 3 February 1997.

In the main street, the predominant lower, older two storey building forms are punctuated by higher Victorian and early 20th century properties. Unifying features are Delabole slate roofing and vertical sash window styles.



Camelford Town

The old borough town of Camelford is set on the steep banks of the River Camel on the north western edge of Bodmin Moor. It lies astride the A39 midway between Bude and Wadebridge. The name Camelford arises from the Cornish 'cam' meaning crooked (a reference to the nature of the river) and 'alan' - beautiful. The English suffix 'ford' was added later.

Today this small town serves a large but relatively sparsely populated hinterland. Commercial services include a solicitor, accountant, banks, an industrial estate and numerous shops. Social and community provision comprises schools across the range of ages, a health centre, ambulance and police stations and a county bus service. There are modern sports and leisure facilities, several churches, a library, a museum and a function hall. The Indian King Arts Centre now provides a focus for cultural and intellectual activities - there are active musical, writing and political groups in the town.

(front cover)

Camelford Town Hall forms a landmark in the heart of the town. The hall was built over the market in 1806 and is constructed of local stone with granite dressings. The weathervane on the cupola is topped by a golden camel motif.

Conservation Area Boundary

The Conservation Area boundary has been drawn to include the historic settlement core of the town close to the river crossing - Fore Street, Chapel Street and Market Place. It extends to take in the immediate riverside

setting including Enfield Park and Jacksons Meadow, and the eastern and southern approaches to the town along the north side of Victoria Road and the east side of High Street. New developments within the historic area such as Anvil Court are also included.

The purpose of this statement is threefold:

- to analyse the special character and appearance of Camelford
- to outline the planning policies and controls applying to the Conservation Area
- to identify opportunities for enhancement

THE CHARACTER OF THE CONSERVATION AREA

Historical Context

Bronze Age stone circles on Rough Tor and other archaeological remains on the edge of nearby Bodmin Moor are indications of early settlement in the area. By the medieval period the small town of Camelford was well established at a convenient crossing point of the River Camel on the old trading route from Stratton to Michaelstow. In 1259 Henry III confirmed a charter permitting the holding of a weekly market and annual fair. To serve a growing population, a chapel of ease dedicated to St. Thomas of Canterbury was established in 1312.

At this time Camelford was effectively on the main road from London to Falmouth, and was a busy traffic route. Originally the river was forded at the centre of town (hence Camel ford). Then a timber bridge was built followed some centuries later by a stone bridge. Records indicate a stone bridge in existence from at least 1521. The present bridge is of modern construction.

The market trade would principally have been in agricultural produce and livestock. This stimulated the growth of other industries within the borough including a brewery, corn mills for grinding grain, and tucking mills for processing woollen cloth. There were also other agricultural related industries e. g. a brewery, a slaughter house, and a tannery. Place names such as Mill



The road through Camelford was formerly the main route westward from London. The Masons Arms is an old coaching inn dating back to the 16th century. The arched cart entry and planked hayloft doors above are a reminder of its historic function.

The Darlington Hotel is another historic inn, which was re-fronted during the 19th century. Much of the building was again reconstructed in 1996 following a serious fire. The old slate hanging had been painted over, but, as part of the restoration work, the replacement second-hand slate was left in its natural state.



Lane, just off Market Place and Outground Mill (near the river, south of the centre of the town) indicate the location of old mills.

The town continued to thrive and by the 16th century was an established centre with the population gradually increasing. Slate and granite quarries in the vicinity were very busy during the 16th and 17th centuries which marked a period of extensive church and then domestic rebuilding throughout the country.

During the Civil War the Camelford area supported the Royalists. As a mark of Royal favour a new Charter was granted to the town in 1669, following the restoration of Charles II. This permitted three fairs, each of three days long, to be held annually in addition to normal market days - a great boost to local trade. Camelford continued to grow steadily and remained in an important geographical position on the coach routes from Stratton and Launceston to Wadebridge and Truro. From 1769-1869 this was part of the main turnpike route west from London and a regular stop for Royal Mail stagecoaches. The Camelford/Wadebridge/St. Columb Turnpike Trust erected many granite milestones along the highway, some of which survive today. Because of the generation of traffic and the width of coaches, some buildings in Fore Street above the Darlington Hotel were demolished in 1865.

The 18th century was notable for the growth of religious non-conformism in the area - John Wesley often preached in Camelford and several former Methodist chapels survive in the town. As a 'rotten borough', Camelford lost its direct representation in Parliament following the Reform Act of 1832, and suffered from a period of decline. However, with the coming of the railway in the late 19th century, modest growth recommenced which has been sustained through the 20th century. Despite the transfer of the livestock market to nearby Hallworthy, Camelford retains a wide range of amenities.

The Present Character and Appearance of the Town

Camelford is an extended town lying along the A39 route at the point where it crosses the River Camel. The steep hills on the east and west sides of the valley are a backdrop to the tightly built up town whilst to the north and south the landscape is more undulating. As an aid to understanding, the town is analysed here sequentially from north to south in the following order:

- *Victoria Road*
- *The Riverside*
- *Town Centre: Market Place and Fore Street*
- *Chapel Street*
- *High Street*

Victoria Road:

The approach from the east down Victoria Road is enclosed by trees and hedges and the garden walls of the long terrace on the north side. This 19th century terrace of two storey double-fronted stone cottages is set back with long front gardens. Some of the houses have been rendered or finished with pebble dash, and raised window surrounds. Each has three sash windows on the first floor and two below with central entrance. A Bethel Chapel (former Bible Christian Chapel) and School is incorporated into the terrace, its lean-to roof hidden by a distinctive stone facade.

Further down the hill, the present Anglican Church of St. Thomas of Canterbury is a single storey building of slate and green stone constructed in late 1930's. It has a roof of very small scantle slates. Views here open out and greenery predominates around the church where there is attractive landscaping, including the scree and rockery planting in the south west corner of the car park.

Manor House, by the flat bridge over the River Camel, is a fine two storey late 16th century house remodelled in the 17th or early 18th century with, unusually, stone arches over its ground floor sash windows. While the gables are of stone, the other elevations are rendered and painted. It has a rag slate roof, fine projecting eaves and granite mullioned windows to the partially hidden lower storey. The level of the lower ground floor is indicative of the original ford level before the bridge was built.

Opposite, on the corner of College Road, Bridge House has a fine portico and Georgian railings. Behind is an intimate group of small two storey cottages flanking the road. Bridge Cottage at No. 2 has sash windows with marginal



Buildings step up Fore Street, hard on the back edge of the narrow pavement. Until traffic can be eliminated from this area, noise and fumes, as well as overshadowing, will detract from the quality of the environment here.

tripartite glazing (a style popular in the 1830's) and No. 3 a daubed render finish to its walls. Further south along College Road beyond the District Council offices the vista opens out and there are stunning views westward towards the town centre across the valley of the River Camel.

The Riverside:

North and south of the bridge are important open areas bordering the River Camel. The environment and character of the town is significantly enhanced by the green wedges of Enfield Park and Jackson Meadow alongside the River Camel in the heart of the town. The quiet riverside walks, grassy banks and mature trees are valuable elements of town life.

To the north, a path leads off along the river through Enfield Park. A children's play area is set away from the road; the planted areas and plentiful mature trees offer peaceful surroundings close to the town centre. The wooded areas are in marked contrast to the more windswept upland vegetation higher up the top of the valleys around the town.

Immediately to the south of the bridge there is as yet no direct access to the riverside, but walks can be accessed via College Road or through the alleyway between 3 & 5 Fore Street (Walkey's Shoeshop and Halletts DIY Store). In the town centre the riverside is largely hidden from view but from Market Place and Fore Street there are keyhole vistas through several alleys (known locally as opeways) of the river and meadows beyond. From the top of Fore Street the scene opens up to a fuller extent with views eastward across the river valley.

The Town Centre:

Market Place and Fore Street:

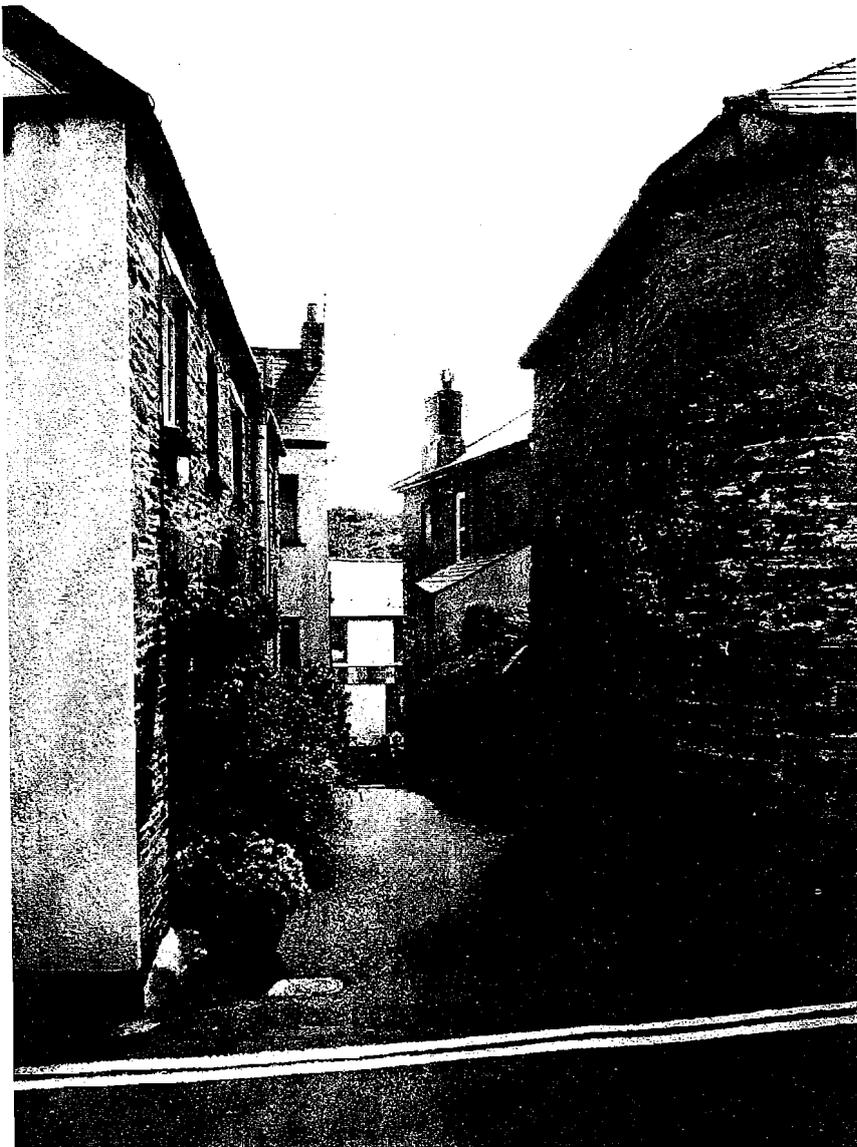
The flat river bridge leads via a small open area at the entrance to Enfield Park into the town centre, a narrow curving space with the Library as its focus. A further space beyond the Library forms a foreground to the Darlington Hotel, behind which Chapel Street leads off steeply up the hill. This residential street is a quiet backwater.

The buildings in the centre of Camelford offer a rich variety of size and character, reflecting piecemeal development of the town on individual sites over the centuries. Near the river most are modest two storey terraced properties with stone or rendered walls, sash windows and rag slate roofs - for example the two rows of shops adjoining the bridge. Like Manor House on the other side, they are sited at low level in relation to the carriageway reflecting the position of the old ford. The frontage is punctuated with taller and larger two and three storey properties of a later date, such as Parkway Estate Agents and the Conservative Club, where the facade has been altered by the addition of hardwood bay windows. This mixture of style and scale continues in Market Place, the common denominator being the materials, and the use of sash windows with granite lintels over.

Several important buildings occupy the Market Place. On the east side, the rendered and painted 16th century Masons Arms was formerly a coaching inn - its arched cart entrance and other architectural features such as the planked

hayloft openings survive as evidence of its original function. Nearby the Methodist Church dates from 1837. It is constructed of stone rubble with granite dressings. It has a raised ramped entrance with granite paving and iron railings and basement grilles.

Opposite, the old Town Hall is the principal landmark of the town. The hall was built over the market building in 1806 and is topped by a cupola containing the town clock and a distinctive camel design weathervane. Now occupied by the Library, the hall has tall round headed windows and an external entrance stair at the rear. Either side of the Library are two intimate spaces used for parking, with a small planted area and seats. Together with the area at the entrance to Enfield Park, this is one of a few public sitting out spaces where people can gather. Despite the noise and fumes of passing traffic, they are still pleasant sunlit areas.



A feature of the town centre is the system of opeways - narrow alleys which form lateral connections between the riverside, Fore Street and Chapel Street. There is scope for some improvement to the maintenance and surfacing of these ways.

Fronting onto Market Place, behind the Library, is a row of two and three storey buildings. These range in date from Warmington House, a fine house of 17th century origins later given a Georgian front, to the present day Barclays Bank. Each has a dignified character befitting the town centre. The facade of Warmington House has a Georgian portal with reeded pilasters, 8 panelled door with segmental fanlight, and 12 or 16 pane sliding sash windows.

Clease House and the North Cornwall Museum form important local landmarks at the top of Chapel Street. The mitred hipped roof is a traditional detail used prior to the late 19th century, when red clay hip tiles began to be imported into Cornwall.



At the fork of Fore Street and Chapel Street is the Darlington Hotel, which forms another local landmark. The building dates back to circa 1600, but its present external appearance is more reflective of an early 19th century remodelling and a recent restoration following fire damage. This L-shaped building embraces an open area of parking with some seats and planting. The slate hanging, black window frames and white casements are all characteristic features of local building.

The road narrows abruptly at the entrance into Fore Street and rises uphill. Here Fore Street is flanked by taller buildings with only narrow pavements. Traffic dominates in an uncomfortable way - noise and fumes are very evident and the street is often shaded. Buildings on the east side vary in style and scale though sash windows rather than casements predominate. Building height generally diminishes as the street rises up the hill and widens slightly. A notable landmark building halfway up Fore Street is the Indian King Arts Centre - this is a large three storey building with sliding sash windows and pitched dormers. The north wing is of ashlar masonry whilst the southern section is rendered with a return elevation of rubble construction, recently carefully repointed. Toward the top of the hill there are less distinguished new buildings set back from the pavement, and the Anvil Court sheltered housing scheme. On the west side of Fore Street plain two and three storey terraced buildings with sash windows step up the hill and continue to define the road edge up to the junction with Clease Road.

An important feature of the town centre is the system of interconnecting paths and flights of steps forming lateral link ways between the main streets and the riverside. In this area several little alleys or opeways crisscross between the river, Fore Street and Chapel Street, and give access to private spaces between the two roads. These include the footpath to Advent southwards along the riverbank, a peaceful area which dramatically contrasts with the heavily trafficked Fore Street. Whilst some of the opeways are well kept and inviting, others are untidy and slightly intimidating.

Chapel Street:

Chapel Street rises from the fork with Fore Street at the Darlington Hotel. It is a largely domestic street flanked by two storey buildings and garden walls, either stone or rendered. There are no pavements but cobbled gullies and slate bridges create an interesting scene reminiscent of Boscastle and St. Stephens Hill in Launceston. This attractive scene is however interrupted by the presence of very many overhead wires, particularly evident when looking downhill.

The houses are mostly terraced and date from the 18th and 19th century. Some properties have lost their original glazing especially at first floor level which tends to disrupt the architectural integrity of the terraces.

Set back half way up Chapel Street is the former Methodist Church and Old Sunday School, both now converted to other use. Unfortunately replacement windows to the Old Sunday School have somewhat diminished the character of this building.

There are plenty of mature trees and gardens just off Chapel Street, including the gardens to Marlborough House and the Methodist graveyard behind the Chapel which form a particular quiet and serene oasis.

On the other side of the street, the gardens in the wedge to the rear of Fore Street and to Chapel Street are simple cottage style gardens which help to create a rural sense within the town. Some are overgrown and disused. In this area also, Nos. 9-17 are a group of stone outbuildings, some with rag slate roofs, flanking the road. These workshop buildings make a strong individual contribution to the character of Chapel Street.

Beyond the former Methodist Church on the west side is a solid row of early 19th century houses stepping up the hill, with sash windows and slate hipped roofs. Near the top Peak Cottage, a Victorian stone building with brick quoins, has an unusual glazing pattern in the sash windows facing the street and which is repeated in the first floor windows of the War Memorial Institute building in Market Place.



Chapel Street rises steeply from the town centre with views across the town to the east. A feature of the street is the extensive use of Delabole slate for all kinds of detailing - rag slate roofs, window sills, steps, crossovers, wall copings, forecourts and drainage channels.

From the very top of Chapel Street near the Museum there are views eastwards across the slate rooftops and southwards to surrounding countryside and Bodmin Moor. The enclosed section of Chapel Street terminates at Clease House and the North Cornwall Museum, a former coach maker's works beside the old cattle market. Clease House is a substantial two storey stone building with sash windows, granite lintels and hipped rag slate roof. It turns the corner into the Clease, a grassed area surrounded by a stone wall and crossed by a public footpath.

High Street:

At the junction of Fore Street and Clease Road, the steep hill of Fore Street levels out into High Street as it leads out to the south towards Bodmin and Wadebridge. At the supermarket, the road is tightly constrained by terrace of houses at 3-15 High Street, which are hard up against the carriageway.

Buildings along the east side of the street are mainly 2-storey stone built simple 19th century cottages. Some have been painted or rendered and the traditional glazing pattern of predominantly sash windows has been altered by the introduction of modern glazing styles in some properties. Services to the houses are provided by overhead lines which detract from the appearance of the street. Towards the end of the High Street, a public footpath leads to fields overlooking the Camel Valley affording good views eastward.

The west side of the street comprises modern buildings set back behind grassy banks; this area is not included in the Conservation Area.

Building Materials

Rubble stone with granite dressings is the basic construction of most older buildings in the Conservation Area. Granite usually comes from the quarries at St. Breward and is mostly used for structural work - posts, arches, lintels, gateposts, arches etc. The use of roughly hewn granite as the stop ends of the bench seating in St. Thomas of Canterbury Church grounds is an interesting example of the use of this material.

The other main building stone is slate, from nearby Delabole. Slate is much in evidence for roofing, slate hanging, paving, sills, porch canopies and boundary walls. Slates for roofing range in size from massive rag slates down to small scantle slates. All types are usually laid in courses of random widths, diminishing in size towards the apex of the roof. The slate crossovers to the cobbled gullies to the properties at the top of Chapel Street are an important and unique feature.

Brick and terra cotta is not indigenous to the area but appears on buildings from the Victorian period onward in the form of chimneys, dressings and ridge or hip tiles.

Walls are often rendered or painted. Prevalent paint colours on domestic buildings are mostly cream or white. Some other buildings are painted in shades more reflective of their function e.g. blue on the Conservative Club

Slate hanging is often used to weatherproof the exposed gable ends of stone buildings but in this case it probably conceals a timber framed structure.





19th century stone built houses with characteristic sliding sash windows. The earlier buildings usually have smaller paned windows. Modern windows with different methods of opening can significantly alter the appearance of a terraced group.

building. On rendered elevations raised stucco window surrounds are sometimes used. Rendered sills are also found.

Timber framing appears to be used in one or two buildings, the most notable example being the Hawkins Newsagents in Fore Street, a four storey building clad with slate hanging, boarding and rendering. It is possible this form of construction is used in buildings that now appear otherwise. Wooden sash windows are almost universally used but the number of panes varies depending on the age of the building i.e. more small panes in Georgian buildings, larger panes in the Victorian period.

There are a few areas of surviving cobbling such as at the top of Fore Street and, in particular, the gullies on either side of Chapel Street.

PLANNING POLICIES AND CONTROLS

All planning authorities are required by Sections 71 and 72 of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 to *pay special attention to the desirability of preserving or enhancing the character or appearance of Conservation Areas*. Local planning authorities - in this case North Cornwall District Council - have a duty to *formulate and publish proposals for the preservation and enhancement of any parts of their area which are Conservation Areas*. This statement seeks to respond to that statutory duty.

Guidance on planning policies in Conservation Areas is provided at a variety of levels. Government guidelines are given in *Planning Policy Guidance Note 15 Planning and the Historic Environment* (PPG15). English Heritage also publishes advisory leaflets. At county level, the Cornwall Structure Plan provides a strategic policy framework in its Countryside and Built Environment chapter. At local level the North Cornwall District Local Plan forms the basis for planning decisions. The policies contained in the *The Historic Environment* section of its Environment chapter are particularly relevant. Supplementary planning guidance is provided by this Character Statement and by the North Cornwall Design Guide.

Camelford is also subject to particular policies which are described in more detail in the North Cornwall District Local Plan. It has been identified as a town where some further development would help to reinforce its role as an important service and employment centre for a large geographical area, albeit a sparsely populated one. In the longer term traffic problems in the town centre are planned to be addressed by the provision of a by-pass. Camelford is also close to an Area of Great Historic Value which highlights the area's archaeological potential. The presence of many sites of antiquity and the historical records of the town show that significant finds are possible. In this context Camelford has also been designated as a Historic Settlement.

Owners of property within the Conservation Area should be aware that the designation of a Conservation Area automatically brings into effect additional planning controls and considerations which include:

- The demolition of buildings is not permitted except with the prior consent of the District Council.
- Tighter limits on 'permitted development' allowances.
- Restrictions on felling and other tree work. Owners must give 6 weeks notice to the District Council of proposed work to trees. Important hedges and trees are shown on the accompanying character map. Trees in Enfield Park and at the Methodist graveyard in Chapel Street are additionally covered by a Tree Preservation Order.
- The District Council must publicise development proposals.
- A presumption that new development should preserve or enhance the character of the area
- Outline planning applications will not be accepted.

The pace of change to private property has so far been modest in its impact on the historic character of Camelford. However, the provision of substitute windows, doors and materials to walls and roofs has occurred in some places. This is considered to be detrimental to the character of the Conservation Area. The future use of PVCu, or other inappropriate window, door or wall styles or materials is discouraged. This includes the use of manufactured slates or tiles on roofs or as cladding. As a general rule repair rather than replacement is preferred. Where repairs are necessary the use of traditional materials and styles which maintain the architectural detailing of the Conservation Area is recommended. The North Cornwall Design Guide gives further details including guidance on shopfronts and signage for business premises.

Listed Buildings

Some buildings are listed by the Secretary of State as being of special architectural or historic interest in their own right. The interiors and exteriors of these buildings are protected by law and prior listed building consent is usually necessary from the District Council before any works of alteration, demolition or extension can be carried out. Such works could include re-roofing, rendering or painting walls, the alteration of doors and windows, replacing rainwater goods, the removal of internal fixtures or structural changes. Permission is also required for the erection of small buildings such as garden sheds within the grounds of a listed building, or for changes to gates, fences or walls enclosing it.

Buildings in Camelford which are listed as being of special architectural or historic interest are shown on the accompanying character map.

AREAS OF OPPORTUNITY FOR ENHANCEMENT WITHIN THE CONSERVATION AREA

There are some features of Camelford Conservation Area where there is scope for enhancement work. Responsibility rests with both private owners and public bodies. The suggestions below have been identified in conjunction with local people and are set out for consideration as opportunities arise. The District Council will take the lead in encouraging their implementation.

- The presence of heavy traffic is a pronounced negative factor. The elimination of heavy through traffic is to be encouraged in the long term. Meanwhile measures to ameliorate the adverse impact of traffic should be considered.
- Recent infill housing on the west side of Fore Street is stepped and complementary in its scale, preserving the form of the street. Recent buildings on the east side are less in keeping, being set back and not following the traditional street pattern. Any further development in Fore Street needs to follow the existing street character closely.
- Planting is desirable to lessen the impact of the mass of Anvil Court when viewed from the east.
- Chapel Street is largely unspoilt but will need careful control if its character is not to be changed by inappropriate development of some of its presently under-used buildings.
- Redecoration would be desirable to improve the appearance of some buildings and lessen the impact of modern alterations to some others e.g. at the Conservative Club .
- The District Council will work with the Town Council, the Town Forum and other local interests to seek improvements to street furniture, signage, lighting, surfacing and its own buildings.
- The co-operation of statutory undertakers will be sought to reduce the impact of overhead lines.



19th century stone and rendered cottages line the High Street at the top of the hill. Overhead lines are a noticeable and less attractive feature in this part of the Conservation Area.

FURTHER INFORMATION

Documents and policies referred to above include:

Department of the Environment/Department of National Heritage,
PPG 15 : *Planning Policy Guidance: Planning and the Historic
Environment*, HMSO 1994

English Heritage, *Conservation Area Practice*, October 1995

English Heritage, *Development in the Historic Environment*, June 1995

Cornwall County Council, *Cornwall Structure Plan*

North Cornwall District Council, *North Cornwall District Local Plan*

North Cornwall District Council, *North Cornwall Design Guide*

Lake's Parochial History of the County of Cornwall, Vols. 1-4, 1867-72

O. J. Padel, *Cornish Place Names*, 1988

Camelford Town Trail

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