

Hicks Mill

Conservation Area Character Statement



(front cover)

The hamlet of Hicks Mill lies on an ancient route to the west from Launceston. It is set in a steep sided valley at the point where Polyphant Bridge spans the River Inny.

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 Hicks Mill 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.

The Hamlet of Hicks Mill

Hicks Mill is situated approximately 5 km (3 miles) west of Launceston just to the north of the main A30 trunk road. It is a small linear settlement extending along the old road from Launceston to Bodmin at the point where Polyphant Bridge crosses the River Inny. The hamlet has a scenic setting, straddling both sides of the steep valley and nestling within the surrounding woodland. It offers a pleasant residential environment and most properties in the area have recently been the subject of upgrading work.

The name Hicks Mill is derived from the mill buildings on the west bank of the River Inny. There are several other mills along the valley.

The hamlet itself is quiet and pastoral with a modest amount of through traffic. There are no amenities within the hamlet itself but Polyphant Methodist Church, at the top of the hill to the west, serves the communities of both Hicks Mill and Polyphant.



On the east bank of the river, the modern appearance of Lower Hicks Mill conceals a building of older origins, evidenced by the large chimney stack. Further uphill, Hicks Mill Barn has now been converted to residential use.

Conservation Area Boundary

The Conservation Area boundary has been drawn to include Polyphant Bridge and the small groups of buildings on either side of the River Inny, together with the adjoining landscape features which are important to their character and setting. Of particular significance are Polyphant Green and the pastures to the south of the bridge bordering both sides of the river.

The purpose of this statement is threefold:

- to analyse the special character and appearance of Hicks Mill
- 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

The area has a long history of settlement. Archaeological evidence points to the existence of defensive camps in woodlands on the west bank of the river, which probably formed a frontier during the period of Anglo Saxon advances into Cornwall during the 8th century.

Hicks Mill itself lies on an ancient route, possibly a pilgrimage way. Holyway Cross, a wheel headed granite cross of pre-Conquest origin, is located at the junction with the A30, approximately 1 km to the east. The present Polyphant bridge across the River Inny dates back at least to the 17th century, but it is likely that this crossing point has been in use for many more centuries. Hicks Mill House was a coaching house before the main road was re-routed in the early 19th century to its present line via Two Bridges.

Local parish boundaries follow the line of the River Inny and the old main road. Hicks Mill is therefore split between three parishes. The area west of Polyphant Bridge lies within Lewannick. East of the bridge and north of the road is within Trewen, whilst the pastures to the south-east are included in South Petherwin.

In the Inny valley, to the north and west of Hicks Mill, are numerous disused quarries. These were the source of Polyphant stone and were worked from at least the Norman period. The stone is igneous in origin, composed mainly of magnesium and iron silicate, with a greenish tinge. It was suitable for carving and is often found in local churches where it was used for window tracery, fonts and other detailed work. Its most notable use is in Truro Cathedral.

There is confusion over which building was originally the Mill and hence many of the house and cottage names lay claim to it. However, the 1880 and 1907 O. S. maps clearly show a mill leat descending from the north to the building adjacent to Jasmine Cottage and thence returning to the river across Polyphant Green. Evidence of this is now obscured but may offer opportunities for archaeological investigation.

The Present Character and Appearance of the Village

Hicks Mill is set in a small bowl-like steep sided valley at the point where Polyphant Bridge spans the River Inny. The valley sides are wooded, opening out to pasture on the banks of the river. Trees form a strong connecting element between the two halves of the settlement. Hicks Mill has two distinct groups of buildings extending up the road, one to the west of the river, the other to the east. These are linked by the stone structure of the granite bridge and its approaches. The buildings have a strong vernacular quality.

As an aid to understanding, the village is analysed in more detail below, from east to west in the following order:

Hicks Mill House was formerly a coaching stop on the main road from Launceston. It is built of local stone with a rag slate roof and retains traditional features such as centre hung casement windows. There are also pigeon holes in the east gable.



- *East of Polyphant Bridge*
- *West of Polyphant Bridge*

East of Polyphant Bridge:

The principal approach to Hicks Mill is from the Holyway Cross junction on the A30. The narrow lane descends gently between high hedges, with occasional glimpses across to the other side of the wooded valley of the River Inny. The location is sheltered, with lush vegetation and many mature trees.

The first building to be seen from this direction is Millbrook, a white rendered cottage somewhat altered by recent renovation work. It has a simulated slate roof and modern windows. The local smithy was formerly located here. Immediately behind, Hicks Mill Barn is set at right angles to Millbrook and separated from it by a small stream. This stone shippon has been converted to residential use. Traditional outbuildings have been reused for garaging and domestic storage.

Dropping down towards the river, the scene opens out. Lower Hicks Mill is set back from the lane. A long two storey rendered cottage with modern glazing, it has recently been extended. The large chimney is indicative of a building with much older origins than its present appearance suggests.

The bridge abutments have a tubular railed fence supported by substantial granite posts and bases. To the south is an open view along the river's edge and across the meadows beside it. The sweep of the land up the valley side highlights its bowl-shaped setting. The river bank and old field boundaries are marked by lines of trees and shrubs, and the constant sound of running water is an important factor contributing to the appreciation of this scene.

The shape and character of the valley floor, with open grazed fields alongside the tree lined river and steeper rough ground with gorse or mature trees, is very important to the setting of the community.

West of Polyphant Bridge:

Polyphant Bridge consists of two stone spans of slatestone rubble construction with dressed slate arch rings and a rounded granite coping. The eastern span is the oldest, the western span having been rebuilt in 1847, following serious flooding all through the Inny valley.

At the bridge, the immediate scene is generally more enclosed by trees situated on an island in the river and lining the riverbanks. Polyphant Green, on the north bank, is largely concealed behind the trees lining the road. This area is now used for grazing. On the south side, a break in the hedgerow affords a view south-westwards across the pony grazing areas leading up towards Hicks Mill House, where stables have been established. Oak woods beyond form a backdrop to this area. A seat on the north side of the lane faces the hedgerow rather than being positioned to enjoy the view.

The road curves gently as it rises up hill to the principal group of buildings. On the south side is the complex of Hicks Mill House. This comprises a stone-built, rag-slated farmhouse facing the road, with a later attached barn at its east end and an adjoining cottage to the west (Ivy Cottage - formerly the coachman's cottage). The farmhouse probably dates back to the 17th century and was used as a coaching stop. This group has been little altered externally and traditional features such as pigeon holes survive in the east gable end. Another separate white painted building, Hicks Mill Cottage, completes the group, set at right angles to the road on the west side of the yard.

Opposite is Jasmine Cottage, a 19th century cottage of stone rubble and rag slate with stone and slate chimney stacks at the gable ends. The old mill, a small hip - roofed building of stone rubble and slate, is immediately to the west. These buildings are being carefully restored.

Beyond Jasmine Cottage, three more cottages step up the hillside. These are probably of 19th century origin (Hill Park Cottage was built in 1830) but have a more modern appearance due to progressive alteration. Though glazing patterns have been altered, the use of white render, slate hanging and stone boundary walls helps to blend them into the context of the settlement. From the rear of these properties there are good views across the valley of the River Inny. Opposite Hill Park Cottage, a planked round headed gate set in granite posts leads to a small secluded wild garden. From the top of the hill where the road bends away to Polyphant, there is a viewpoint down to Hicks Mill House and into the valley.

Building Materials

Random rubble stone and slate roofs are the prevalent building materials. Some cottages are painted, rendered and painted, or slate hung. Porches are a feature, some with simple slate lean-to or gabled roofs. Many chimneys are robust stone, especially those at Hicks Mill House and Jasmine Cottage.



On the steep hillside to the west of the river are cottages dating from the 19th century. Though modernised, the use of stone boundary walls, granite gateposts, and traditional finishes such as slate hanging and white painted render serve to blend these buildings into the context of the settlement.

Windows are traditionally centre hung timber casements with 6 panes and painted e.g. Jasmine Cottage and Hicks Mill House. Some properties have modern styles of replacement windows.

The boundary walls are often vertical stone hedging, granite posts with simple railings between - as at the bridge - or random rubble walling with granite gate posts. Some huge granite boulders sit in the stone hedging outside Hicks Mill Cottage.

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.

Hicks Mill is also subject to particular policies which are described in more detail in the North Cornwall District Local Plan. It is set within the western edge of an Area of Great Landscape Value. Hicks Mill is not a settlement designated for any further development.

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.
- 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 provision of substitute windows, doors and materials to walls and roofs has occurred in some cases. 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.

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 Hicks Mill 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 Hicks Mill 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.

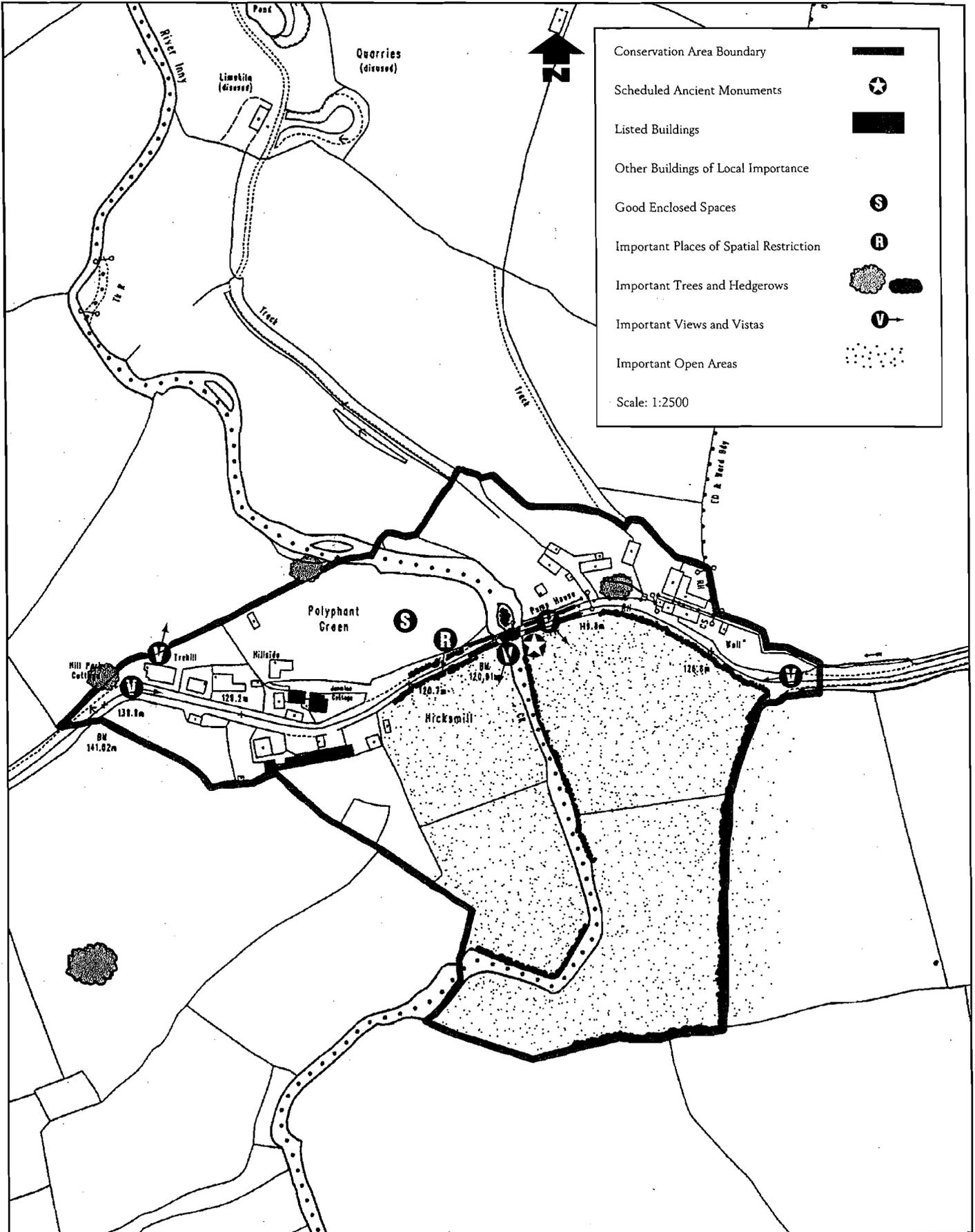
- There is scope to relocate the bench seat near the bridge to a point from which more views can be enjoyed
- The co-operation of statutory undertakers will be sought to reduce the impact of overhead lines.

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

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HICKS MILL CONSERVATION AREA



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