

Polyphant

Conservation Area Character Statement



(front cover)

Polyphant Green is the central feature of the village, with many mature trees covered by Tree Preservation Orders. On the east side of the green, 18th and 19th century farm buildings at Coombe Farm have been converted to residential use.

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 Polyphant 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 Village of Polyphant

Polyphant is a small village situated about 7 km (4 miles) south-west of Launceston, just to the north of the main A30 trunk road. Its proximity to Launceston and the A30, combined with its quiet and attractive wooded setting around a village green, have made it a popular place in which to settle. Several of the old farmsteads are now divided and converted into permanent residential or holiday accommodation.

Alternative meanings of the name Polyphant are “many wells”, or “toad’s pool”. The settlement is situated between two rivers, the River Inny and Penpont Water, which converge at nearby Two Bridges. Several quarries, all but one now disused, are situated nearby in the valley of the Inny.

The growth of the village has been steady during the last 25 years. New development has taken place outside the historic core, mostly in Medrow, to the south, and at Serpells Meadow, to the north. The centre of the village, however, remains very quiet with neither shops nor Post Office, although there is a telephone box and well used notice board. Just to the north of the village centre, on the old main road, the Methodist Church is also the community centre.

Conservation Area Boundary

The Conservation Area boundary has been drawn to include the core of the village around the green and the historic buildings surrounding it.

The purpose of this statement is threefold:

- to analyse the special character and appearance of Polyphant
- 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

There is evidence of ancient settlement in the surrounding area, particularly Danish camps on the west bank of the River Inny. The river was probably a frontier during the period of Anglo Saxon advances into Cornwall during the 8th century.



Facing the green, the south range of Anneth Lowan is a 19th century extension to an earlier, probably 18th century, house. Stucco render has been stripped away to reveal its rubble construction with local Polyphant stone used for dressings over the door and around the windows. The roof is of rag slate, laid in varying widths and diminishing courses. The three over six paned sash windows are an unusual feature of the first floor.

Polyphant is recorded in the Domesday Book as 'Polofant'. The site of the old manor house was recorded as being on the west side of the village green in front of Polyphant House and a chapel is believed to have been situated in what is now the courtyard area of Darkes Farm. (The parish church is at Lewannick, about 2 km to the south-east.) Otherwise the settlement was based upon a collection of farmsteads. The old main road from Launceston to Bodmin ran through Hicks Mill and passed immediately to the north of the village.

The Polyphant quarries, mostly along the valley of the River Inny, have been worked at least since 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. Only the quarry at Blackhill is still in regular production.

During the 19th century several non-conformist chapels were established in the village. One was sited where East Lodge is now located; another Wesleyan chapel stood where the present Methodist Church car park is situated - several mid-19th century gravestones remain in situ at the east end of the site. The present Methodist Church was built in 1887, serving both Polyphant and nearby Hicks Mill.

The Present Character and Appearance of the Village

Polyphant is situated on sloping land between the valleys of the River Inny and Penpont Water, with the ground dropping away to the south east. It is a wooded setting and Polyphant village green, at the centre of the settlement, has a generous cover of both mature trees and more recent planting.

As an aid to understanding, the village is analysed in more detail below, approaching from the north and working clockwise around the village green in the following order:

- *Approach*
- *The Village Green*
- *South of The Green*
- *West of The Green*

Approach:

The principal approach to Polyphant is from the A30. The road signing routes visitors along the old main road from the turning at Holyway Cross, an ancient Celtic cross. The road drops down through Hicks Mill, where Polyphant Bridge crosses the River Inny, and then rises steeply up to the four way junction at Polyphant Methodist Church, a simple gabled hall of slate and white render, with a rose window over the entrance. Here a footpath leads north to old quarries along the River Inny whilst the old main road continues towards Altarnun. The lane to the village green drops down to the south between the stone walls of The Warren and the gable end of Anneth Lowan, a double-fronted stone house, whose mid-19th century facade overlooks the north side of the green. The converted Millstone Barn building immediately to the east is less visible.

The Village Green:

Arriving at the green, the red K6 telephone box is prominent on the east side of the green with the converted horse engine house at Coombe Farm behind. Notice boards are placed nearby. The full extent of the green is not immediately apparent due to its generous canopy of trees and changes in level - the space is planted with many mature specimens of horse chestnut, sycamore, oak and other indigenous species. There are also a few ornamental trees and recent planting on the east and south margins of the green. An informal network of vehicular tracks criss-crosses the area.

The boundaries of the green are loosely defined by the walls of the various principal buildings around it. Mounding of the land and the placing of some granite boulders helps to define the trackways and prevent erosion of the edges of the grass. Some seats nestle under the trees. There are significant changes in level over the green as it drops away to the south-east.

The former Manor House was demolished over a century ago but its 18th century stable block still survives. Originally there were stables and a carriage house on the ground floor, with a loft above; now the building has been altered and extended at each end to form a house. The use of local stone is much in evidence - rag slate for the roof, rubble construction with Polyphant dressings for the walls and granite posts at the gateway.



South of the Green:

On the south-east corner of the green the converted buildings of Coombe Farm barn and the horse engine house are amongst the most prominent buildings in the centre of the Polyphant. These are mid-19th stone buildings with mitred hipped slated roofs, facing the green. Set at right angles to the farm buildings, the older farmhouse is less visible. Though dated 1744, for William Coombe, the core of the building is probably earlier. The front of the farmhouse faces towards the steep lane leading to Blackhill quarry and Two Bridges, but is largely concealed from view by hedges and another dated 19th century farm outbuilding set at right angles to the road. A new house has been built at Coombe Orchard.

On the south side of this lane are two other old farmsteads. Darkes Farm is a group of mostly 19th century stone buildings set around a courtyard, believed to be the site of an ancient chapel. These buildings are now used as holiday accommodation. The stone house facing the lane behind a low stone wall has been altered by addition of modern PVCu windows.

Further down hill, Steers Farm is another smaller group of gabled stone and slate buildings. The lane is wooded and the buildings back onto rather than face the road.

Though remodelled in the late Georgian period, it is likely that Steers Villa dates back to the 17th century.

Along the south side of the green a new house has been built on the corner of Medrow, set back from the green. Tall trees and stone faced banks line Medrow as it leads out of the village past modern houses. At the south-west corner of the green is East Lodge, a mid-Victorian building of stone with pale brick dressings, gabled first floor windows and decorative wooden barge boards. It is one of the former lodges to Bowden Derra, an estate with a large house of local stone built in 1866, which lies to the west of the village. Another, simpler, 19th century gabled cottage is situated on the other corner of the drive to Bowden Derra. This retains simple 2-pane timber casements and a planked door.

West of the Green:

The west side of the green is occupied by Polyphant House, built in 1865. This large stuccoed house is set well back in its own grounds behind the site of Polyphant Manor. The facade has tall mullioned windows in late Tudor style. The old manor house stables and coach house, built in the 18th century, are set at right angles to the road. Built of local stone with a hipped slated roof, they have been converted to residential use.

From the north-west corner of the green a grass track leads behind the trees to some of the oldest cottages in the village - Jasmine and Rose Cottages and numbers 1-3 Polyphant Green - sometimes called The Row or The Hives. All probably date back to the 17th century; Rose Cottage has two datestones - one of 1616 which has been reset, the other of 1854. They are gable ended cottages of local stone with slated roofs and casement windows. The Row faces the lane; Jasmine and Rose Cottages are set at a right angle, staggered up hill. Together they form an important group. A footpath leads between Jasmine Cottage and Polyphant House to the new houses at Serpells Meadow, with a private branch into the garden of Polyphant House.

Building Materials

Most roofs are gable ended with natural rag slate roofs. Pitched roof dormers are common. Terracotta ridge tiles are often found, but slates on hipped roofs are usually mitred at the joints rather than being provided with a tiled covering. Brick and stone rendered chimney stacks with slate droppers predominate.

Walls of dwellings are usually slatey random rubble stone, often with granite quoins, lintels and other architecture features. Greenish Polyphant stone is also commonly used as dressings. Casement windows, painted, are more common than sliding sash types. Slate sills are usual.

The plain fronted terrace of Polyphant Row is typical of vernacular cottage building. It has solid chimney stacks, granite lintels and rag slates with painted casement windows. However, the cottage at the west end of The Row has been altered by the insertion of PVCu doors and windows.

Garden walls of rubble stone are common, sometimes with granite copings. Cornish hedges - stone faced earth banks - are often found where there is a change in levels.

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.

Polyphant 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 minor village capable of absorbing only very limited residential development. It is also set within an Area of Great Landscape Value.

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. Most trees in the centre of the village are additionally protected by Tree Preservation Orders.
- 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 Polyphant 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 Polyphant 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 co-operation of the owner will be sought to bring the vacant Listed Building at the east end of Polyphant Row back into use.
- 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*

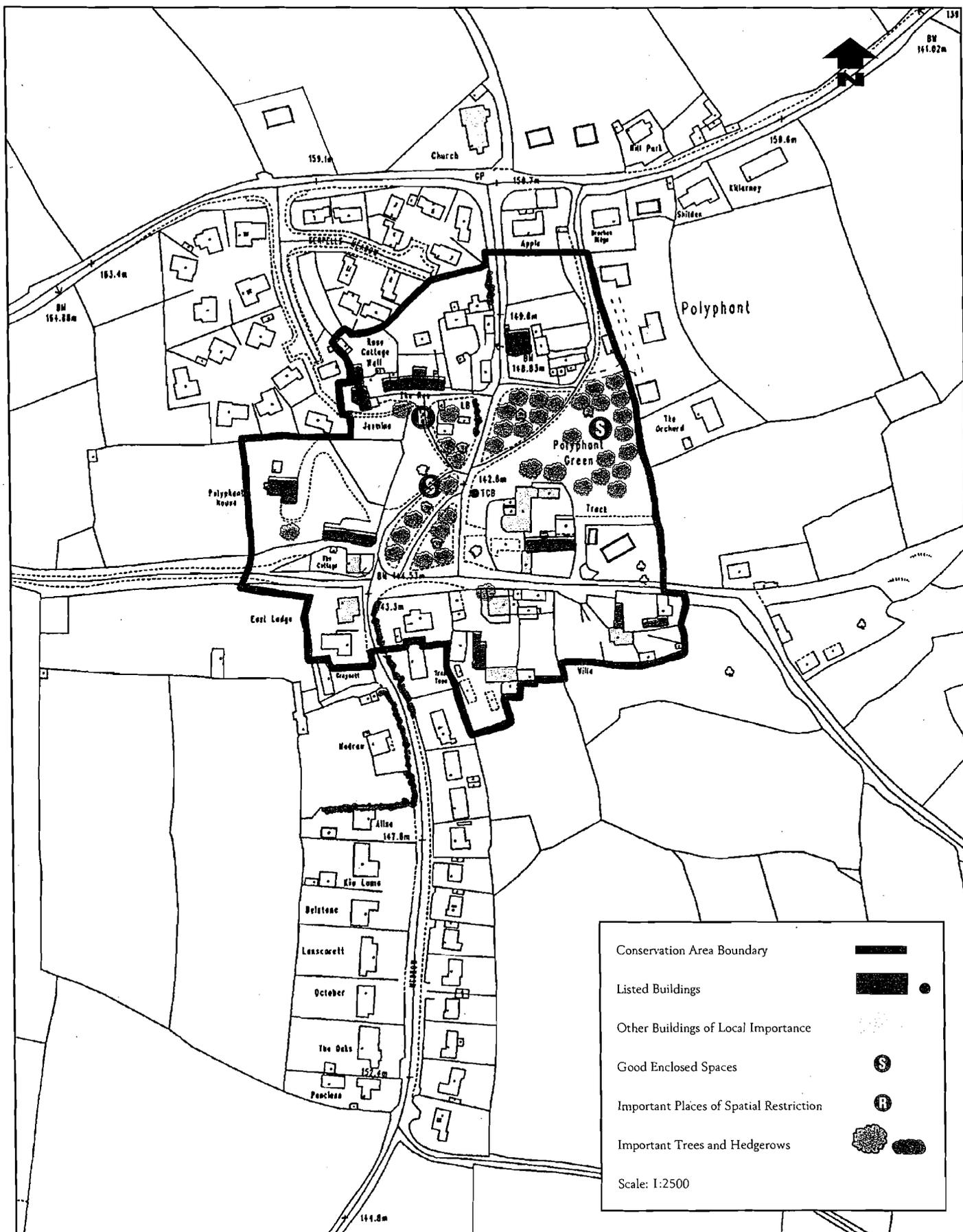
Lake's Parochial History of the County of Cornwall, Vols. 1-4, 1867-72

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

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POLYPHANT CONSERVATION AREA



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