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1 Introduction

1.1 This Conservation Area Management Plan for Woolacombe follows on from the Conservation Area Character Appraisal for the village that was adopted in March 2009.

1.2 It is hoped that the management plan document will act as a reference and guide for all those who make decisions which may impact on the special character of Woolacombe – the council, property owners, tenants, businesses, planners, developers, designers, and statutory undertakers and service providers.

1.3 The Management Plan was produced as a draft and was subject to public consultation from 30th April 2009 -until the 12th June 2009 before being amended and adopted in its current form.

1.4 The policy context for this management plan is set out in the Planning Acts – particularly the Town and Country Planning (General Permitted Development) Order 1995, as amended October 2008 and the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990, as amended April 2008.

1.5 The special character of Woolacombe is identified in the preceding character appraisal. It is the purpose of this document to lay down what actions will be taken in the future to safeguard and enhance that character. Part of this process is to inform and advise local residents and businesses so that they better understand how their actions can affect the historic character of the area.

1.6 It is of fundamental importance that owners and contractors recognise that their actions can, and do, have a significant impact on the character and appearance of Woolacombe. Good decisions and sympathetic works do take more thought and can often cost more; but the rewards are great and will be appreciated in years to come by future generations. All actions, good and bad, form part of the legacy we leave.

2 SWOT Analysis

Strengths	Weaknesses	Opportunities	Threats
Strong and prominent local character.	Restrictions on outward expansion imposed by landscape protection and National Trust land ownership leading to pressures for infill development.	Enhancement of the commercial core through an audit of unauthorised signage and appropriate enforcement action.	Pressure for infill development as there is little scope for the village's outward expansion.
Lots of open space along the cliff tops and seafront.	Large areas of land given over to parking provision that is only utilised during the summer months and lies idle the rest of the year.	Future enhancement of signage through the production of a guidance note on appropriate signage for Woolacombe.	Increasing loss of traditional joinery materials – especially to uPVC replacements.
Award winning beach which attracts many tourists and surfers.	Proliferation of unauthorised and unsuitable signage within the conservation area – particularly at the south of the area.	Encourage businesses to apply for appropriate advertisement consents and planning permission before undertaking works in future so as to avoid a repetition of the existing proliferation.	Loss or obstruction of traditional features such as the balconies along South Street.
Located in an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty.	Loss of community through the proliferation of second homes.	Situated along the South West Coast Path (Tourism opportunities).	

Strengths	Weaknesses	Opportunities	Threats
Good mixture of holiday accommodation available locally to suit a variety of needs and budgets.	Only 1 listed building in the Conservation Area.		

3 Archaeology

3.1 The historic character of Woolacombe is such that there is archaeological potential virtually everywhere within the historic core of the village – which is similar in scope to the boundaries of the conservation area, with finds of flint tools and a possible bronze age cremation pit exposed by coastal erosion in the 1930's. Roman finds include a coin and a collection of pottery fragments. Medieval activity is likely to be concentrated around the supposed site of the medieval manor house of Woolacombe Tracey.

3.2 The use of the area around Woolacombe as a training ground for American forces during World War II means that evidence from this period is likely to be found throughout the conservation area. Consequently any works that involve excavation may reveal interesting finds. Where work is subject to the planning process it will be considered within the context of PPG16 and may be subject to relevant conditions such as a period of professional quality archaeological investigation and recording.

3.3 When work not requiring consent is being carried out by private owners they should be on the look-out for features; from artifacts and wall footings to changes in colour of the earth. If anything is found people are requested to contact the Council for advice. Significant finds ought to be recorded to add to our understanding of the history of Woolacombe, and even relatively small finds that could at first glance be considered insignificant can add to our understanding of the village's history.

3.4 Statutory undertakers doing trench work ought to seek advice before starting and agree a watching brief where appropriate – for example, if cable undergrounding is carried out within the conservation area or when new service runs are being installed.

Woolacombe Conservation Area as seen from the foot of Potters Hill looking north.



4 Roofs and Roofscape

4.1 Some areas of the conservation area have a highly visible roofscape, the southern parts of the conservation area having roofs particularly prominent from the elevated areas to the north of the conservation area. Furthermore the roofs of Esplanade properties are visible from the more elevated streets behind. It is, however, not possible to identify every important view within the appraisal and the roofscape is generally of importance throughout the conservation area. The main roofing material in the conservation area is natural slate, with a mix of local Morte Slates and slates imported from Wales.

4.2 Other features such as chimneys, ridges and rainwater goods, add further interest to the roofscape in the village.

Chimneys

4.3 Loss of chimneys is nearly always detrimental to the character of the roofscape and can interfere with the pattern of the streetscene. It is seldom necessary to remove a chimney and ought to be resisted with repair often being a less costly option. Removal of a chimney should be avoided unless there are extenuating circumstances such as serious structural concerns that have been professionally identified.

4.4 Alterations damage the distinctive character of chimneys by the application of smooth, crisp render that hides stonework or flattens an uneven surface. Removal of drip slates and historic pots also detracts from the character of the area and should be avoided wherever possible.

Rainwater Goods

4.5 The majority of the historic rainwater goods within the conservation area are of cast iron. These are typically of traditional profiles, being half round or ogee. These rainwater goods add to the historic character of their buildings and enrich the streetscape, and have the added advantage that they can be painted to be in keeping with the building's wider colour scheme.

4.6 Correctly maintained cast iron rainwater goods can have a functional life in excess of 100 years, and when replacement is needed there are still suppliers of traditional gutter profiles available factory finished. Lightweight cast aluminium rainwater goods may also be suitable for use on some buildings.

4.7 Plastic is in many ways an inferior modern product for use as rainwater goods, because it can be affected by exposure to sunlight and become brittle relatively quickly. Although plastic rainwater goods can last for over 25 years it is unlikely that an entire gutter system will last this long without some sections splitting and requiring replacement.

4.8 Plastic rainwater goods do not accept paint well and are available in a limited range of colours; typically fading of the plastic occurs within the first 5-10 years. Modern box profile rainwater goods do not fit well with historic buildings as traditional guttering was never produced in these forms.

Slate As A Roof Covering

4.9 The dominant roofing material within the conservation area is natural slate. Typically this was historically a local slate such as Morte Slate or, after the coming of the railways, imported from Wales. Today many of the local sources of slate in the South West are either exhausted or no longer worked due to high costs.

4.10 A much wider variety of slate is now available in the UK, including slate imported from Spain, South America and China. Some of these imported slates may be suitable for roofing on new buildings or buildings not in prominent locations but their use on prominent historic roofs should be avoided as they have a noticeably different appearance, especially when wet. The implications of fuel miles of imported materials also favours more locally sourced slates.

4.11 New slate should be fixed to roofs using nails, as this is the traditional method. By using the correct double lap, wind lift can be avoided and so is not justification for the use of clips. With some imported slates the recommended use of clips is to disguise the fact that the slate is of poor quality and will split if holed for nailing. As such, slate from a source that recommends the use of clip fixings should be looked at cautiously.

4.12 It should be remembered that slate is a highly durable natural material and it is highly unlikely that an entire roof needs to be re-covered. In most cases slates slip because their nails have exceeded their functional life and the slates themselves can be salvaged and re-attached with new nails. Roofs that feature rag slate, or slate in diminishing courses are particularly important and are also particularly vulnerable. Opportunistic and unscrupulous contractors will offer owners of such buildings an amazingly cheap price to re-roof in artificial or imported slate, knowing that the rag or random slate they reclaim can be sold on or re-used on much more lucrative work elsewhere.

5 Walls

5.1 Woolacombe features many boundary walls, and Morte Slate can be seen in boundary walls, especially in the northern parts of The Esplanade. The White House has a particularly splendid group of Morte Slate walls and gate piers with slates arranged in a herringbone pattern.

Repointing

5.2 Repointing of historic masonry is a process that needs to be carried out over the period of a building's history. The major risk this poses to historic buildings is when an ill-informed owner or contractor elects to use modern Portland cement to repoint historic masonry.

5.3 Traditional buildings were designed to be porous, the thickness of their walls ensuring that the inner surface would not get wet and that when dry weather returns the wall could dry out again. As the traditional lime mortar was softer than the surrounding brick much of the evaporation of moisture occurred through the mortar joints. In this way the mortar itself was sacrificial, slowly weathering away and eventually needing to be replaced by the process of repointing.

5.4 When modern cement is used the method of moisture transfer is altered. The Portland cement is harder and impermeable and as such moisture transfer is forced to occur through the face of the brick, eventually causing the decay of the brick itself. Portland cement is also brittle and inflexible and while lime mortar will allow a degree of movement with a structure, cement will crack at the slightest movement allowing moisture to further penetrate into a building.

Rendering

5.5 Render was traditionally applied to buildings for a variety of reasons, either to cover up a poor quality building material which was visually unpleasant, or to protect a particularly porous building material against damp ingress. Traditionally render was lime based, in the same way that mortars were lime based. Re-rendering a building in modern cement based renders or applying modern barrier paints can cause similar problems to repointing in modern cement mortars.

5.6 Movement within a building almost invariably leads to cracking of the brittle cement render allowing moisture to get in through the cracks, the impervious nature of the cement render will trap this moisture within the wall and force it deeper into the building causing internal damp problems.

5.7 Unrendered buildings should not typically be rendered for purely aesthetic reasons. Instead render should be applied only where there would be a technical advantage to doing so and when this is necessary materials must be compatible with the construction of the building. For historic buildings this invariably means lime based materials.

Morte Slate Boundary Walls

5.8 Throughout the northern parts of the conservation area and along the Esplanade the local Morte Slate has been put to a variety of uses, and the most widespread and visible example is the use of the material in boundary walls. The local slate is laid in a variety of ways, including a decorative herringbone pattern, which add variety and visual interest to the conservation area.

5.9 Due to the lack of an active quarry for Morte Slate many new developments have attempted to use alternative materials to produce similar boundary walls, often with a good degree of success, although the exact colours and the laminar nature of the Morte Slates is difficult to find a good match for. This makes it difficult for the Council to specify a like for like replacement or repair, which is in this instance often an unworkable specification.

5.10 Identifying possible sources of reclaimed Morte Slate, as well as the possibility of re-opening a quarry for a short period could be investigated to maintain a supply of this important local material.

Elaborate walls of herringbone slate, with matching gate piers are amongst the most striking examples of morte slate walls within the conservation area.



6 Joinery

6.1 Historic joinery can add significantly to the character of an area and the extent of its survival is typically representative of the proportion of Listed Buildings in an area, but is also dependent upon the value that people place on the historic value of their village. Like most places Woolacombe has retained a degree of historic joinery which sits alongside sensitive replacements as well as unsympathetic, poorly detailed modern joinery.

6.2 At present the replacement of windows and doors is not controlled on unlisted buildings in use as private dwelling houses. Buildings in other uses, including apartments and retail units require planning permission for alteration and replacement of windows and doors. North Devon Council will consider Article 4(2) directions to prevent harmful alterations to dwelling houses in the future. It is always preferable, however, for owners to recognise that sensitive maintenance adds value to their own property and contributes to the sense of place.

6.3 Historic joinery ought to be seen as antique furniture that changes hands as part of a larger deal and can easily be overlooked. It only takes one inconsiderate owner to destroy the historic appearance of a building by ill-considered renovation; with property changing hands as frequently as it does today there is a steady stream of buildings whose luck has run out. There are few people who would throw a 200 year old chair or table in a skip – their potential value is usually appreciated – yet it happens to windows and doors regularly. These artefacts are a finite resource that embodies the craftsmanship of earlier generations and records the materials and techniques they used.

6.4 Unless badly neglected over a long period of time, traditional joinery is rarely beyond repair. In many cases the timber used was so well sourced and seasoned that it is far more durable than any modern alternative. If repair is not possible, replica replacement is the next best thing; though replacement requires the use of primary resources and energy that makes it a less sustainable option. The use of imported hardwood from unsustainable sources ought to be avoided and uPVC has significant ecological issues associated with its production process and later disposal. From a sustainability standpoint timber windows made from managed sources of timber are more environmentally sound than uPVC which does not decompose in landfill and produces chlorine based by-products and gases during manufacture.

6.5 There is no product that is maintenance free. Timber needs painting every few years, but each time the result looks fresh and new. After a hundred years or more sash cords or hinges may need renewal; this is quite easily done and gives the unit a new lease of life. When modern opening mechanisms or double glazed units breakdown the answer is replacement of the whole unit – hence the piles of uPVC windows accumulating at recycling centres in the absence of satisfactory means of disposal.

Windows

6.6 The size, type and design of the windows in an historic building reveal much about its age or development, its use and the status of its occupants in the past. Humbler buildings often have casement windows that vary in design according to age, use and local custom. Sash windows also vary in size and detail according to age and use. The enduring popularity of sash windows reflects their versatility in providing controlled ventilation.

6.7 Historic glass survives in some windows and should be retained where possible, however installing modern glass that has been treated to give it the appearance of historic glass is not to be commended.

6.8 When new windows are needed there are a number of issues to consider:

- Proportion and subdivision – The glazing pattern of the original windows ought to be retained, (or restored if lost), as that is a critical part of the whole building. It indicates the size of glass available or affordable at the time of construction.
- Mode of opening – The introduction of top hung or tilt-and-turn opening lights is always visually jarring and harmful to historic character. Overlapping ‘storm-seal’ type details are an entirely modern introduction and are unnecessary if flush fitting units are properly made. Spring loaded sashes are an inferior replacement mechanism compared with properly weighted double-hung sashes.
- Glazing – Traditional glazing bar profiles, properly jointed and glazed with putty, (or glazing compound), rather than beading, will give a genuine appearance.
- Thermal insulation – Double glazing cannot be achieved within traditional multiple pane designs without bars being either much too thick or false. Beading is nearly always added which further detracts from the appearance. Attempting to introduce double glazing into a traditional design usually means a small air gap that hugely reduces the insulation properties anyway. The use of shutters and/or insulated curtains can greatly reduce heat loss without the need for window replacement.
- Draught-proofing – The majority of heat loss from historic windows is often through draughts caused by ill-fitting frames. Draft proofing systems are available that can be fitted to existing windows in situ and can be highly effective in reducing draughts and heat loss.
- Sound insulation – Cutting down noise is often given as a reason for replacing existing windows with double glazed units. However tests have shown that secondary glazing is actually more effective at reducing transmitted noise. It is often less costly than fitting double glazed units and also allows for the historic windows to be retained.
- Sills – Traditional sills should be retained unless beyond repair, when they should be replaced with replicas in terms of materials and details.

Shopfronts

6.9 Woolacombe retains few significant historic shopfronts that survive in anything approaching their entirety, although some examples do retain traditional features such as stall risers.

6.10 There are significant issues relating to shopfronts that can have a profound impact on the character of a place:

- Retention of features – An important element of retaining traditional features is that they should remain visible, which is a particular issue along West Road where balcony railings to the upper floors are sometimes obscured by secondary signage that is often unnecessary.
- Signage – There was a time when the emphasis was on quality, legibility and illustration of function. Today the approach to shop signage seems to be to achieve the largest and brightest advertisement. Clumsy box fascias and totally obscured windows draw attention in the wrong way and detract from neighbouring businesses. Illumination should only be considered for businesses that trade at all hours and then should be limited to that needed for identification.
- Design – New shopfronts and signage require planning permission, and/or advertisement consent – North Devon Council will expect these elements to be competently designed to suit their context.

Windows obscured by printed images and banners obscure upper floor balcony railings that form an architectural feature of the row of shops, as an example of poorly conceived shop signage.



7 Streetscape Features

Surface Treatment

7.1 The approach to surface treatment within the conservation area shows a lack of consistency. Tarmac, bedded irregular slate and brick pavers can all be found in various parts of the conservation area, often with sudden changes of material at seemingly random positions.

7.2 Although the majority of pedestrian surfaces are in good condition, some vehicular carriageways are in poor condition with surfaces cracked and beginning to break up, particularly those along Rockfield Road, Sunnyside Road and Bay View Road.

Trees

7.3 There are not many trees within the Woolacombe Conservation Area, largely as a result of its exposed seaward location.

Signage

7.4 The single biggest issue affecting the appearance and character of Woolacombe conservation area is the proliferation of signage. This is especially a problem around South Street where the majority of the village's shops are located. Much of the signage has been erected without advertisement consent and is displayed on a seasonal basis. The issue now is that there is such a large number of signs that it is difficult to determine which have consent and which do not, and the temporary nature of the signs makes it difficult to enforce against them.

Excessive, poorly designed and inappropriately located signage erodes the character of the conservation area.



7.5 As part of the operation of the management plan it is intended to perform an audit of signage within the village on a day during the tourist season, when the majority of the unauthorised and inappropriate signage will be present and then to take steps to have the unauthorised signage removed.

7.6 For this area guidance could be produced which would highlight the style and form of signage that would be appropriate within the conservation area. As a result the standard and appearance of future replacement signage can be improved so as to enhance the local character, not to detract from it.

Parking

7.7 Due to Woolacombe's nature as a tourist destination a great amount of space has been dedicated to parking for cars and coaches, and during the summer months this is barely adequate for the number of visitors who choose to visit the village.

7.8 Unfortunately during the winter the number of tourists visiting Woolacombe falls dramatically and these car parks are locked. As a result there is demand for extending the available parking provision, yet for half the year there is no call for the level already available. Laying over more ground with tarmac is not in the best interests of the conservation area's character and the car parks already constructed are visually distracting, especially those at the southern end of The Esplanade.

Street Lighting

7.9 Along the Esplanade street lighting is provided by traditional styled lighting units with mock ladder bars and lantern style lamps. These units add to the character of the streetscape in a more positive way than standardised aluminium or concrete lighting units would and as such they should be retained and correctly maintained.

8 Infill Development

8.1 The potential for the outward expansion of Woolacombe is limited by the large amount of land surrounding the village under the stewardship of the National Trust, effectively blocking the development of this land.

8.2 The temptation for the development of 'gap-sites' between existing buildings is high in this type of situation, however if the buildings (and the conservation area) are to retain their character they must remain in the context of these open spaces. The density and style of development within Woolacombe, being large villas set within generous plots with good separation between neighbouring buildings, is an identified key feature of the character of the conservation area. The construction of infill buildings would damage this important relationship of buildings and open space, especially on the Esplanade but in other areas of the village also, and as such should not be permitted within the conservation area.

8.3 The long expanse of open ground along the cliff edge to the west of The Esplanade is a potential area for future development that should be left in its current state if the character of the conservation area is to be preserved. The water pumping station already located in this area is regrettably sited but as the facility still has a considerable period of operational life ahead there is little scope for its removal in the short term.

8.4 A recently produced Infill Development Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) identifies areas within the Woolacombe Conservation Area as being particularly susceptible to pressure for infill development. In part this is due to the limited potential for the outward expansion of the settlement, combined with the relatively high level of open space contained in the plots of existing detached villas.

8.5 The SPD elaborates on the advantages and disadvantages of infill development and the criteria which such development should meet in order to be considered acceptable within its setting. Chiefly this is that the new development should respect the established pattern of building, including plot width, plot size, building heights, building materials, textures and colours.

9 Article 4(2) Directions

9.1 Perhaps the greatest threat facing conservation areas in the UK is development not controlled by the planning system. The majority of these ‘permitted developments’ affect private dwelling houses and allow for minor works to be carried out without the need to apply for planning permission.

9.2 These rights were granted by the ‘Town and Country Planning (General Permitted Development) Order 1995’ and cover activities such as changing windows and doors, erecting satellite dishes and, most recently, some installations of on-site renewable energy generation equipment.

9.3 As well as granting these various rights of development, the order also provided provision for revoking them under certain circumstances, primarily within architecturally, or historically, sensitive areas. The section of the order dealing with repealing permitted development rights is Article 4. For a direction to be enacted under this article certain conditions must be met.

9.4 For example if the local authority wanted to prevent homeowners in an area from replacing windows without planning permission that area would have to contain some surviving historic windows that would be protected by the measure. Equally the area would have to contain some inappropriate modern replacement windows – as this demonstrates that there is a threat from inappropriate works carried being carried out.

9.5 Article 4 directions do not remove all permitted development rights, rather they are targeted at specific forms of permitted development and the developments they target must be justified.

9.6 The possibility of utilising Article 4(2) directions within Woolacombe will be investigated as a result of this management plan, and if considered appropriate and practical may be implemented within the conservation area. Community consultation would precede any adoption of such a scheme.

9.7 It should also be noted that if a planning application is required exclusively as a result of an Article 4(2) direction then no application fee will be applicable.

10 Action Plan

Task	Timeframe	Agency
Use the character appraisal & management plan as material considerations in determining planning applications within and adjoining the Woolacombe Conservation Area.	Ongoing	LPA* / PC**
Use adopted SPD and planning policies to prevent inappropriate infill development that would detract from the character and appearance of the conservation area.	Ongoing	LPA / PC
Provide local businesses in the commercial centre and local sign manufacturers with a copy of "Outdoor Advertisements & Signs: A Guide For Advertisers" which will advise on when advertisement consent is required.	3 Months	PC
Identify and enforce against unauthorised signage within the conservation area, and invite applications for any unauthorised signage which are considered likely to have acquired consent had an application been made.	12 Months	LPA / PC
Produce a signage guidance note for Woolacombe & Morteheo so as to guide the design and siting of future signage within the conservation area. This document will supplement an updated version of the district-wide Shopfront Design SPD which will also be produced.	18 Months	LPA
Investigate the options and practicalities of Article 4(2) directions to control unsympathetic alterations.	9 Months	LPA
Implementation of the above if considered practical & appropriate.	18 Months	LPA

* Local Planning Authority (Currently North Devon Council)

** Parish Council

This management plan is to be reviewed and updated on a 7 year basis, with the next revision intended for mid 2016