Contents

1 Introduction

1.1 This Conservation Area Management Plan for Witheridge follows on from the Conservation Area Character Appraisal for the village that was adopted in May 2013.

1.2 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 Witheridge – the Council, property owners, tenants, businesses, planners, developers, designers, and statutory undertakers and service providers.

1.3 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.

1.4 The special character of Witheridge 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.

1.5 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 Witheridge. 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
The Square provides both convenient areas for parking, a focus for the village and a high quality setting for historic buildings fronting the area.	The conservation area is surrounded by significant areas of low density modern housing of standard appearance.	Identifying and installing an end-user occupier for Cypress House to ensure its long-term maintenance.	Some issues with neglect of historic properties within the conservation area, risking loss of heritage assets and impacting on property prices.
Most properties retain at least some original traditional design features or building components.	Large expanses of standard highways finishes, particularly within The Square.		Loss of Cypress House (an irreplaceable, designated heritage asset) as a result of long term vacancy and owner apathy.
High proportion of listed buildings.	Cypress House, and its grounds have a negative impact on local amenity as a result of being unoccupied and poorly maintained.		
Most residents and property owners take pride in the appearance of their buildings.	Long-term boarded up windows on the Old School House detract from its character and appearance and give a negative first impression on entering the village.		

Strengths	Weaknesses	Opportunities	Threats
Survival of historic cobbled surfaces as well as some high quality re-laid modern areas of cobbles.	Condition of 21 Fore Street with patch render repairs unfinished is detrimental to local amenity and the character of the area.		
Despite outward growth of the settlement the historic core still remains largely intact and legible.			

3 Archaeology

3.1 Witheridge has some significant archaeological potential. The village is mentioned in Domesday Book and as such has a history going back at least 1000 years, most probably more. It is known that the village was well established by 1086 and must have been a significant settlement during the Saxon period. Landscape assessment has suggested the possibility that the settlement is also the location of an earlier Iron Age site, most likely a Hill Fort. There has been very little archaeological investigation within the village in the past. The limited number of archaeological finds from the area is likely to be as a result of lack of investigation rather than a lack of any evidence existing. Early finds include a significant deposit of worked flint, including arrowheads, at Upcott Farm and burial monuments can be seen in the surrounding landscape, particularly out on Witheridge Moor.

3.2 Where work is subject to the planning process it will be considered within the context of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) 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 aware of historic features; such as artifacts and wall footings to changes in colour of the earth. If anything is found people are encouraged to contact the Council for advice, or the regional Finds Liaison Officer via a local museum in the case of portable artifacts (pottery, coins etc). Significant finds ought to be recorded to add to our understanding of the history of Witheridge and its development over time, 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.

4 Roofscape

4.1 The roofscape is a prominent part of the conservation area, particularly where large open spaces allow for views from a longer distance such as within The Square. Open space within the car park of the village hall also allows good views of the roofscape along East Street.

4.2 The appraisal identifies several key views in which the roofscape plays its part, but it is not possible to identify every important view within the appraisal and the roofscape is generally of importance throughout the conservation area. Within enclosed streets, such as West Street, the roofscape plays a reduced role, however it is still apparent within oblique views along the street, with many roof slopes hidden from close up view.

4.3 Other features such as chimneys, ridges and rainwater goods, add further interest to the roofscape in the village. The main roofing materials is natural slate, often imported from Wales although some examples from Devon and Cornwall (Delabole) can be seen. Several properties retain thatched roofs and several of those with slate roofs have very steep roof pitches indicative of properties which were previously thatched.

Chimneys

4.4 Loss of chimneys is nearly always detrimental to the character of the roofscape and can interfere with the pattern of the streetscene. Indeed chimneys form a major element of the streetscape, particularly the axial chimney stacks which project from the front walls of some of the older properties in the village; although chimneys also make a positive contribution to the streetscape elsewhere.

4.5 Chimneys are also important features on buildings of formal design, particularly the symmetrical or near-symmetrical Georgian and Georgian fronted properties within the village. Sometimes the positions of chimneys can help identify where buildings have been extended or altered in the past.

4.6 It is seldom necessary to remove a chimney and this 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. The buildings within the village have retained their chimneys, but the potential threat of their removal should not be ignored.

4.7 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

4.8 There is a good degree of survival of historic cast iron rainwater goods within the conservation area. 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.

4.9 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. With improved modern paints, maintenance periods can stretch to several years. Lightweight cast aluminium rainwater goods may also be suitable for use on some buildings.

4.10 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 or warping and requiring replacement.

4.11 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 where exposed to direct sunlight. 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

4.12 Natural slate and thatch are the two dominant roofing materials within the village. Much of the slate arrived by sea from Wales, although some examples of Delabole slate remain. Several properties, such as The Old Shop have steep roof pitches which are indicative of roofs once covered by thatch.

4.13 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.

4.14 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.

4.15 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 or timber battens have exceeded their functional life and the slates 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 have been known to 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.

4.16 Artificial slate can be seen on several properties within the village and is often easy to identify. Artificial slate usually has a very smooth and glossy surface, especially noticeable when wet as well as very crisp and regular edges which set it apart from traditionally produced natural slate. With slate or tiled roofs the labour of fitting is a significant element of the cost and the relatively small cost saving between artificial slate and natural slate is more than balanced by the lower lifespan of artificial slate.

Turnerised Coatings

4.17 Many of the slate roofs in Witheridge have been sensitively repaired over the years. So far none have been treated with waterproof bituminous coatings applied over hessian, in a process called 'turnerisation'. This process was first developed in the 1880's and as such is not a new technique, although the process is still carried out with some refinements having been developed over the years.

4.18 The nature of this type of repair is a short term one as the coating softens in hot weather and becomes brittle in very cold weather, and after 10 years or so the coating begins to fail. This means that either the process must be repeated and an additional coat of the treatment applied at further cost, or the roof must be repaired in some other way.

4.19 The major drawback of the process is that once applied it is difficult, time consuming and costly to remove. A repair of a slate roof may be more expensive but will last significantly longer (easily 80+ years) and the majority of the slates can often be reused after this period, with only the timber batons and nails needing replacement. After turnerisation it is almost always the case that all of the slates must be discarded, leading to a much higher cost as new slates must then be purchased.

4.20 With people moving home more often than in the past the temptation to make cheap, short term, repairs might appear increasingly attractive, however in most cases this option is a false economy.

4.21 Property surveyors will be only too aware that the presence of turnerised coatings will potentially have future cost implications for buyers as the coating implies that the roof covering itself was defective and the repair has only a limited lifespan as well as damaging the prospect of recycling the existing roofing materials. As such turnerisation may also have a negative impact on resale value of properties.

Thatched Roofs

4.22 Thatched roofs make a positive contribution to the character and appearance of the village and their loss or alteration would have a significant impact upon the appearance and character of Witheridge, particularly where several neighbouring properties are thatched, such as along the north west side of West Street. Within The Square thatched properties stand out from their neighbours and draw the eye emphasising the historic nature of the village.

4.23 Most of the thatched buildings which remain in the village are also listed buildings. As such consent would be required to change the roofing material, including changing from the traditional long straw thatch to water reed. A consent for change of thatching material is only granted in exceptional circumstances. For example if a series of poor harvests left a shortage of long straw for thatching then consideration may be given to allowing a temporary change of material; next time the roof required re-thatching the presumption would be to revert back to the use of long straw thatch.

Concrete Interlocking Tiles

4.24 Modern concrete interlocking tiles can be seen on several properties in the village, including Swift Cottage. These tiles have a ridged profile unlike any traditional roofing material and are also a very heavy roofing material. The coloured varieties often fade noticeably after short periods of 5-10 years and they only have a relatively short functional life of 30-40 years.

4.25 As with artificial slate the majority of the cost of re-roofing is labour and as such a cost saving on materials with a functional life in the region of 1/3 that of natural slate is more than off set by the reduced life of the roof.

4.26 When considering re-roofing in interlocking concrete tiles, consideration should be given to their greater weight and the impact this might have on the structure of the roof.

5 Walls

5.1 Witheridge possesses a mix of buildings constructed of a variety of materials. The majority of buildings are rendered, either applied over local stone or possibly cob. Exposed stone is usually limited to boundary walls, or the lower halves of walls, or exposed chimney stacks but does feature on buildings such as the Old School, 10 West Street and The Mitre Inn. Brick sometimes features as dressing or detailing but is not widely used, with only numbers 3 and 13 West Street remaining as exposed brick buildings. Repointing is a major long-term maintenance consideration on the brick and stone buildings and boundary walls, while maintenance and repair of render is the largest issue with the majority of buildings which have been rendered.

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 ensured that the inner surface would not get wet and that when dry weather returned 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 within the building fabric, cement will crack at the slightest movement allowing moisture to further penetrate into the building along these cracks.

5.5 The use of angle-grinders or disc cutters for removing old mortar prior to re-pointing is not advised. The tools give limited control and can cause considerable damage in a fraction of a second. The tools are often too large, particularly for raking out the shorter vertical joints in brickwork.

5.6 Re-pointing is often recommended long before it is required. Joints may have weathered back 2-4mm or so over a period of 100 years or more. Given that there will usually be over 80mm of depth, 2-10mm is really nothing to be overly concerned about provided that the mortar face is still in sound condition and not of a loose and crumbly consistency.

Rendering

5.7 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, such as cob, against damp ingress. Equally during the late 18th and early 19th Centuries, wars with France had led to the high cost of building materials, and using poor quality stone or brick and using render to give a more aesthetically pleasing result became common.

5.8 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 by changing the way in which moisture moves around the fabric of the building.

5.9 Movement within a building almost invariably leads to cracking of the hard but 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 and the potential for damage to the fabric through the transfer of soluble salts from the cement itself.

5.10 Some rendered buildings feature external decorative features which make a significant contribution to the character of a building. When re-rendering buildings it is important to try and ensure that existing render decoration is replicated. It should also be noted that historic render was far from crude and achieved smooth high quality finishes. The trend for textured render, rough finished showing float marks, to give a 'rustic' or 'historic' look is misguided and does not achieve the desired effect but rather harms the appearance of a building.

5.11 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 using lime based materials.

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 Witheridge 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, guest houses and retail premises 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 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 artifacts 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.

6 Joinery

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 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 the 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 matching sills in terms of both materials and details.

Doors

6.8 Doors can add to the character of the streetscene in much the same way. It is worth remembering that a little time and money spent on periodic maintenance and painting can allow a good quality historic hardwood door to remain serviceable for many years.

6.9 It should also be remembered that traditional timber doors may hold 'door furniture' such as knockers, knobs, letterboxes and hinges which are still serviceable even when the door itself has been allowed to decay beyond salvaging. If a replacement timber door is sourced these older pieces of door furniture can be, and often are, re-used on the new door. By their nature uPVC doors come with letterboxes, hinges and handles ready fitted, often moulded as part of the unit and the sensitive, and sustainable, re-use of historic features is not possible.

Shopfronts

6.10 There are a good number of traditional shopfronts within Witheridge Conservation Area that survive relatively intact, with several along West Street, some redundant and some still in use as shopfronts.

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

- Retention of features – Where historic and traditional features such as stallrisers survive they should be retained. It is also important that surviving features are not unnecessarily hidden by modern additions and signage.
- 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. Internally illuminated signs are not considered appropriate within historic shopping areas.
- 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.
- Standardisation – National retailers and companies with standardised shop signage may be required to vary from their standard design so at to be better in keeping with the character of the conservation area. Many national retailers will have a 'conservation' variant of their standard signage which will be more appropriate.

7 Article 4(2) Directions

7.1 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.

7.2 These rights were granted by the 'Town and Country Planning (General Permitted Development) Order 1995' (as amended October 2008) and cover activities such as changing windows and doors, erecting satellite dishes and, most recently, some installations of on-site renewable energy generation equipment.

7.3 As well as granting these various rights of development, the order also provided opportunities 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.

7.4 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 being carried out.

7.5 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.

7.6 The possibility of utilising Article 4(2) directions within Witheridge 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.

7.7 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.

8 Action Plan

Management Aim	Time	Agencies
Use the character appraisal & management plan as material considerations in determining planning applications within and adjoining the Witheridge Conservation Area.	ongoing	NDC
Investigate the options and practicalities of Article 4(2) directions to control unsympathetic alterations.	Dec 13	NDC
Implementation of the above if considered practical and appropriate.	June 14	NDC
Use the Character Appraisal to inform the design, architectural character and built form of any new development.	ongoing	
Listed Building Enforcement action to rectify the boarded up windows on The Old School House		NDC
Section 215 Notice to require the tidying up of the unsightly incomplete rendering at 21 Fore Street.		NDC
Action of Cypress House to ensure its future restoration and occupation.		NDC