

Blisland Conservation Area Management Plan



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1 Introduction

What is the Conservation Area Management Plan

This Conservation Area Management Plan (CAMP) is intended to stand alongside the Blisland Character Appraisal. Firstly there is general guidance on the conservation and enhancement of the key elements that contribute to the quality of the townscape. At the end of key sections is a list of best practice bullet points to aid retention of historic character and architectural quality.

It is hoped that the document will act as a reference for all who make decisions which may impact on the special character of Blisland– property owners, planners, developers, designers, local authorities and statutory undertakers. To this end it will be available via the internet and in print form through the library, Parish Council etc.

The policy context is set by the Planning Acts – especially the Town and Country Planning (General Permitted Development) Order 1995 and the Planning (Listed Building and Conservation Areas) Act 1990. National policy is supplemented by the Cornwall County Structure Plan and the North Cornwall District Council Local Plan. Some of the ideas in this CAMP may influence the future policy development for the village.

Special character is derived from the overall effect of many components and is dependent for its survival on a great number of individuals making informed choices about the management of their own piece of the jigsaw. Some control may be applied by the Local Planning Authority through Article 4(2) directions – these bring certain types of permitted development, such as replacement of windows or roofs, under Council jurisdiction.

It is of fundamental importance that owners and contractors recognise that their actions can and do have a significant impact on the quality of Blisland. Good decisions and sympathetic works take more thought and often cost more; but the rewards are great and will be appreciated in decades to come by future generations.

Article 4(2) directions

Under Article 4 of the General Permitted Development Order 1995, a local authority may bring certain permitted development rights under their control. There are two routes to serving such notice – the more usual relates specifically to conservation areas and is covered by Article 4(2).

There are a range of works that may need to be the subject of an application after as Article 4(2) direction – the most usual are alterations to windows, doors, roofs, chimneys and the like. Controlling the removal of enclosure that may otherwise be vulnerable to alteration, or the painting of certain buildings, are other examples which may be relevant in Blisland.

If a Local Planning Authority (LPA) is minded to serve such notice they must specify the buildings that have frontages facing an identified location. That application needs to have been assessed and reasons for the Article 4 direction identified. This document and the Appraisal go some way to identifying issues and locations where Article 4(2) could be usefully employed to protect the special character of Blisland. It is, however, beyond the scope of this document to actually specify exact buildings and areas that need to be covered.

2 General guidance

General Guidance

This guidance must be considered in conjunction with the NCDC Design Guide, which may be viewed at Council offices. The guidance contained in Planning Policy Guidance Note: Planning and the Historic Environment (PPG15), is also useful.

Archaeology

The history and nature of Blisland means that there is archaeological potential virtually everywhere. 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 the PPG 16 and may be subject to relevant conditions.

If work is being carried out by private owners they should be alert to pieces of artefacts, wall footings and changes in the colour of the earth. If such finds are made they should contact the Council for advice. Significant finds ought to be recorded to add to our understanding of historic Blisland.

Statutory undertakers carrying out trench work ought to seek advice before starting and agree a watching brief where appropriate – for example if cable undergrounding is carried out.

Where there are conditions attached to any planning, listed building or conservation area approval or any other relevant approval requiring archaeological investigation and recording then this work shall be funded by the applicant as it is not supplied by the local planning authority or County Council. Similarly outside the planning system any investigation will require funding.

3 Roofs

Roofs

Roofs play an important part in the character of Blisland as the use of local slate lends great homogeneity to the village. The attractive roofscape is based on the quality and patina of the materials and the variety of form. There are both hipped and gabled roofs of varying pitch and orientation. Some are rag slate and others scantle.

Chimneys punctuate the roofscape and other quality details, in the form of rainwater goods etc, add richness on closer inspection.

Slate

Slate is the prevailing roofing material and a good deal of locally sourced historic roofing slate is in evidence.

Today there are a much wider variety of products available. Artificial slates should always be avoided as they inevitably cause serious harm to the quality of the roofscape. With natural slate being imported from Spain, South America and China, great care is needed when specifying real slate. Some of these are suitable replacements on non-prominent buildings or new-build, but they are never a satisfactory replacement for historic slate roofing. New slate ought to be fixed using nails – clips are usually specified to compensate for poor slate that splits when holed as using a correct lap will prevent windlift.

Owners of buildings with rag or scantle slate must be aware that the slate may actually have a lot of life left in it but could be suffering from nail rot. Opportunistic contractors will often offer such owners 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. It is worth considering the positive financial value of traditional roofing in terms of property value when making roofing decisions.

Chimneys

Loss of chimneys is nearly always detrimental to the character of the roofscape. It is seldom necessary and ought to be resisted. Repair or reconstruction must be the first aim unless there are extenuating circumstances such as serious structural concerns. If there are such worries, seek structural advice from a sympathetic and suitably experienced engineer.

Alterations can rob chimneys of their distinctive character by the application of smooth, crisp render that hides stonework or flattens a pleasingly uneven substrate. Removal of drip slates and historic pots also detracts from the area.

Rainwater goods

Most of the historic rainwater goods in the village are cast iron. Traditional gutter profiles – mostly half round or ogee add to the appearance of individual buildings and collectively enrich whole streetscenes. With proper maintenance these items can offer good service for well over a hundred years. When replacement is needed there are plenty of suppliers of historic profiles - many are available factory finished and some in cast aluminium. Plastic is an inferior product which will not last as well or look as good – especially if it has a modern box profile. It doesn't take paint well but unpainted it soon develops a coating of algae. Like other plastic building products, when it is replaced it has to go to landfill where it will not break down for centuries, so the environmental costs deserve consideration. Extruded aluminium also has aesthetic limitations and the profiles available seldom match historic patterns.

Ridges, hips, eaves and verges

Traditional ways of edging roofs are easily lost when roofing work is undertaken. Clay ridge tiles may be replaced by concrete, mitred slate or mortar fillet hips covered by tiles, box soffits replace open eaves or moulded fascias and slated or mortared verges can be lost to boards. All of these apparently slight changes have a far greater cumulative impact.

Lead details such as hips ought to be retained and where lead flashings have never existed they should only be added if that can be executed with subtlety. All new leadwork must be treated with patination oil to prevent oxidisation and leaching.

Dormers and rooflights

Apart from the Old Smithy there is no tradition of dormers in Blisland and they should be avoided.

Rooflights can allow the use of valuable roofspace and there are good modern interpretations of low profile metal units available. Where they can be inserted with little impact to townscape views, especially on screened or rear roofslopes, this is acceptable. The smallest unit needed should be used and it ought to be a quality metal unit with a slender frame. In groups or terraces neighbours should try to use rooflights that are complementary in their size, type and location.

Solar Panels

Whilst the District Council clearly would wish to promote sound, sustainable energy systems, the choice of such systems can seriously erode the historic integrity of listed and unlisted buildings in conservation areas. Therefore careful consideration should be given to their positioning to avoid compromising the character of the historic environment. Very often there are alternative locations away from the historic building where solar panels can be fitted. This may indeed result in such equipment being fixed to less sensitive buildings

which are part of the curtilage. Alternatively, there are less obtrusive energy saving solutions available. Although solar panels can be reversible they can be most damaging to historic roofscapes and that harm often outweighs any benefits they offer.

Roofing: A summary

- Note and record detailing before starting works to enable reinstatement.
- If traditional details are missing look to similar buildings for inspiration.
- Repair local historic rag and random slate roofs or re-use in situ.
- Maintain or recreate authentic details to ridges, hips, eaves and verges.
- Repair chimneys and retain historic pot or cowl details.
- Repair or reinstate metal rainwater goods in traditional profiles.
- Avoid dormers
- Only use rooflights and solar panels sensitively and consider impact on views.

4 Walls

Walls

The historic building walls throughout the village are constructed from granite the majority being rubblestone with granite detailing such as quoins and lintels. On the larger houses the granite features are carved and chamfered. Some of the earlier buildings include massive boulders in their lower courses. Pope's Cottage, the Blisland Inn and the northern elevation of Newton House are built from ashlar granite blocks. On most of the houses the stone walls are untreated, but Lyndale, the Manor House, the Rectory and the eastern façade of Newton House are all rendered, and the walls of Churchgate, Denham House and Lemon Cottage have been painted.

Great care and understanding is needed in the repair of all traditional materials in order to prolong their useful life and protect them from decay. Careful appraisal of prevalent materials in a particular locality ought to inform and inspire the designers of new buildings so that contemporary additions enrich the area.

Choice of colour is a matter of taste, but it is worth remembering that plain limewash was the common finish in the past and only natural pigments were available. Bolder colours like blues and greens were beyond the reach of all but the most wealthy; consequently these colours often seem unsuitable on humbler dwellings.

Stonework

Although most of the stone used in Blisland is durable, these walls are still vulnerable to damage if poorly treated. All stonework must be pointed using lime mortar that flexes with the walls and allows them to breathe. Pointing should also be flush or slightly recessed, especially on wider joints, and should never project in front of the faces. A well-graded sand free of 'soft' (or fine clayey) particles is best for most work and some coarse grit may often help to match original mortars.

Render

Render covers rubble stone on a variety of buildings as noted above. Traditionally this render was always lime based and that remains the only sensible choice as cement based renders are incompatible with these building types.

The coating of lime renders with modern masonry paint will trap moisture over time and can cause failure of the render. This is often interpreted as the failure of an inferior old fashioned product, but it is in fact the result of conflicting technologies. Where possible historic renders ought to be repaired and retained, with masonry paint removed using specialist stripping products. Limewash remains by far the best and most effective surface coating on old buildings, but it is pointless applying it over paint.

Slate hanging

Slate hanging is not common in the village but does exist on exposed locations where penetrating damp has been a problem. It is not, however, a dominant historic feature in the village and its application as a decorative feature or as part of the design of new build should be discouraged.

Brickwork

Such was the plentiful local supply of granite that the historic use of brick in Blisland is confined to chimneys and the window surrounds of the Old Coach House. The use of lime mortars for repair is equally important for brickwork.

Walls: A summary

- Surviving uncoated granite walls should be retained and appropriately maintained
- Traditional finishes should be repaired whenever possible, not replaced.
- Compatible materials and finishes are essential on historic walls.
- Authentic finishes should not be removed or covered.
- Where traditional finishes have been lost, sympathetic reinstatement is desirable.
- Limewash allows old walls to breathe; masonry paint traps moisture.
- The choice of aggregate needs careful consideration to properly compliment historic mortars. Try to ensure that historic mortar is being replicated, not 20th century re-pointing.

5 Joinery

Joinery

Authentic joinery adds to the historic character and visual quality of any Conservation Area. The extent of survival is often indicative of the percentage of listed buildings; but also of the value local people place on the historic fabric of their town. Like many other places Blisland has a mix of original joinery and replacements, some sensitive but some that is poorly detailed.

At present the replacement of windows and doors is not controlled on unlisted buildings. The Local Planning Authority (LPA) will consider Article 4(2)* directions to prevent harmful alterations 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.

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.

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. Detail may have been lost by years of painting but great care needs to be taken when stripping paint though as historic paints contained lead. 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 PVCu has significant ecological issues in production and disposal - it cannot be recycled.

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 PVCu windows accumulating at recycling centres in the absence of satisfactory means of disposal.

Windows

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.

The intrinsic value of the view through an historic window is appreciated by many sympathetic owners. They enjoy the elegance of the glazing bars and enthuse about the distortion and play of light in imperfect historic glass. With care, old glass can be salvaged and re-used; where it has been lost, modern equivalents can be sourced from specialist suppliers.

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 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 fake. 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 most significant heat loss through old windows is due to poor fitting and lack of draught-stripping. There are proprietary systems that retro-fit draught excluders and greatly reduce the amount of air changes and so heat loss.
- Sills – Traditional sills should be retained unless beyond repair.

Doors

Doors are just as vulnerable to insensitive replacement as windows. The conservation principles summarized above can be applied equally to doors. Most traditional door types allow for individual expression by painting and attractive ironmongery etc. Unfortunately many owners choose to express their individuality by replacing a serviceable vintage door with an off-the-peg unit in stained hardwood or PVCu. The application of gratuitous cosmetic ironmongery and other paraphernalia does not make a new door look old, or make an historic door more attractive.

Joinery : A summary

- Historic joinery items add character and quality to the village and ought to be retained and repaired if at all possible.
- When replacement is necessary, this ought to be in exact replica.
- Where joinery has been lost in the past and reinstatement is desirable, look at similar properties in the vicinity for inspiration.
- Design, mode of opening and colour of finish are the most important considerations on unlisted buildings.
- Authentic, functional door furniture adds interest; but unnecessary and poor quality items do not.

6 Enclosure and space

Enclosure and space

In the past enclosure was about demarcation and also keeping out passing animals. The spaces generated by enclosure can be of considerable historic interest in their own right, especially where they have a strong association with a particular use such as allotment gardens behind cottages or the landscaped gardens of larger houses. Although the planning system rightly encourages the use of brownfield land and infill sites there are gaps and spaces which deserve protection from development. Sometimes this may be due to specific historical associations such as with religious groups in other cases it may simply be the contribution a green space or garden makes to the streetscene and the setting of significant buildings. The potential significance of any space must be fully considered if development proposals are made. The desirability of preserving or enhancing the conservation area is the fundamental judgment that must be applied; in many cases this will mean that a space is integral to the special character of the place and there should be a strong presumption in favour of protection.

Historic enclosure is threatened with change by the desire for greater privacy – leading to the addition of timber fence panels for example. Alternatively it may be removed to provide parking. Walls or other means of enclosure more than 1m high fronting a highway (and 2m elsewhere) cannot be demolished without Conservation Area Consent. New walls of those dimensions cannot be erected without Planning Permission.

The tendency towards close-boarded fencing is one that is having a very tangible visual impact. Apart from being a characteristically modern approach, these fences are quite expensive, require regular maintenance over the years and make it difficult to establish planting due to overshadowing and wind damage. Timber fences also tend to be stained in eye-catching colours that are often unsympathetic to an historic setting.

Garden structures can also be jarring elements if poorly located, badly designed or brightly coloured.

Walls

Granite walls are the most common means of enclosure in the village. Appearance varies with age and function but the consistency of material gives a unity to the streetscape that can be easily taken for granted. Dry stone banks with slate laid in vertical or chevron patterns also features. Mortared rubble stone walls are more commonplace and usually have a simple coping.

For new enclosure in much of the village granite stone walling is likely to be the most suitable option, provided the height and style relates to any established local trend.

There are no historic brick walls and brick should not be used on new work.

Hedges

In the more rural parts of the village and where property adjoins farmland, hedges are characteristic. A mixed deciduous planting of hawthorn, field maple, hazel, holly, beech and other indigenous species is most traditional. Within a few years such a hedge can be laid to form a dense and effective boundary that is a wildlife resource that can draw insects, birds and small mammals into gardens.

Single species plantings of beech, yew, laurel or box may be appropriate in some circumstances but are not a practical solution for most places and they demand more maintenance than a rustic mixed hedge.

Modern coniferous hedges support little wildlife and can often be unattractive and not very neighbourly.

Hurdles

The traditional approach to fencing is making something of a comeback in recent years. Hazel hurdles would have been a familiar sight in the past and can now be purchased in ready-made panels for quick and effective enclosure. Hazel and willow can also be bought bundled for the more enthusiastic person to weave their own fence.

As well as being made of more sustainable materials without chemical treatment and keeping an old craft alive, these fences are more permeable to wind making them less likely to blow over and allowing plants to establish more readily.

Garden structures

The siting of sheds, summerhouses, decking, gazebos or other structures should be sensitively located. If visible locations are unavoidable, good design and naturally painted materials should be used to make the structures less jarring.

Garden structures nearly always need planning permission within the curtilage of a listed building. There are also size restrictions for permitted development within the conservation area so it is wise to consult the LPA when considering such works.

Enclosure : A summary

- Spaces, gardens and yards add to the special character of Blisland and ought to be retained if development would mean the loss of an historic and/or attractive element of the townscape.
- Retain historic enclosure wherever possible.
- If enclosure has been lost, consider the locality and use an appropriate replacement.

7 Townscape features

Townscape features

In addition to the buildings and walls that give Blisland its special character there are other items that make a significant contribution to the overall appearance. There are attractive items that need to be cherished and retained and in some cases repaired or enhanced.

Floorscape

In keeping with its rural ambience there is very little paving in Blisland. There are however a few areas of traditional paving, cobblestones and granite gullies. Where these survive they should be left uncovered and well maintained.

Carriageways are blacktop and it is better to use this honest and established surfacing rather than introduce manufactured pavements or other surface treatments. The area of blacktop directly outside the Blisland Inn, however, could benefit from a more sympathetic surface treatment.

Seating

There are some thoughtfully located seats throughout the village where the pedestrian can stop a while and enjoy the place. The benches should continue to be maintained.

Signage

In order to avoid clutter and a down-at-heel atmosphere more thought could be given to the placing of signs and the use of better quality materials and design. This said the fingerposts in the village are a huge asset. The informal pasting of signs on trees and poles should be avoided and flyposters confined to a village information board.

Lighting

The practice of using existing poles to carry the street lighting should continue. However, the lights themselves should be of a design and materials more suitable to their sensitive surroundings. The Parish Council may wish to consider whether removal or reduction in night lighting would restore traditional rural character.

Overhead Cables

Consideration should be given to the feasibility of under-grounding cables. Otherwise they should be appropriately sited in order to impact less on the surrounding historic and natural environment.

Planting

Trees and hedges are an important element of many significant views and their retention is often of considerable importance. Work to trees in conservation areas is controlled and owners or contractors must contact the LPA for advice before embarking on felling, topping or lopping works. A formal notice will usually be needed before any significant works are undertaken.

Decorative planting has its place in the public realm, but needs to be well planned and maintained to be a positive feature. On private land owners can enhance their little bit of the village with suitable planting – it can often be the finishing touch that makes a location really special. Traditional cottage planting at the base of walls can help to remove unwanted moisture from the footings of an old building.

Street ephemera

The informal elements of the townscape such as the troughs, the granite boulders which fringe the green, the tethering post and telephone box whilst small features in themselves greatly enhance the character of the village. Any attempts at their removal or replacement should be strenuously opposed.

Any new additions or ornaments should be carefully considered as an abundance of introduced replica items such as post boxes, fake water pumps and the like can diminish the value of the real heritage.

