

Exmoor National Park
Historic Environment Report Series No 11

PORLOCK WEIR CONSERVATION AREA: APPRAISAL DOCUMENT



Adopted July 2022

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Summary of Significance

Porlock Weir, in its remote coastal location, is one of the most picturesque and historically interesting settlements within the National Park. The village is grouped around a small harbour with an attractive tidal inlet, which can be controlled by lock gates. Above and to the west, it is largely enclosed by ancient woodland forming a dramatic backdrop and containing the historic Worthy Manor. There are striking outward views across the curving shoreline of Porlock Bay towards the hills that terminate at Hurlstone Point. The woodland, beach and immediately adjoining coastline contribute greatly to the setting of the Conservation Area.

The settlement's historic significance lies in its former importance as a port. While much of the earlier industrial use is not immediately evident some elements survive and on the west side of the lock in particular, the former working character of the harbour still seems close to the surface.

In spite of relatively few buildings appearing on the statutory list, there are many with great intrinsic character, by virtue of their construction and location. The manner in which two of the early cottage rows have been built virtually out on to the beach is a particularly distinctive feature. Porlock Weir is undoubtedly an area of special architectural and historic interest and fully justifies its status as a Conservation Area.

1. Introduction

1.1 PLANNING FRAMEWORK

Porlock Weir was first designated as a Conservation Area in 1973. The statutory definition of a conservation area is 'an area of special architectural or historic interest, the character or appearance of which it is desirable to preserve or enhance.' The object of designation is not to prohibit change but to manage it in ways that maintain or strengthen the area's special qualities. Section 71 of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 places a duty on local planning authorities to formulate and publish proposals for designated conservation areas. To comply with this duty, local authorities are encouraged to undertake appraisals every five years to evaluate and record the special interest of the area and provide a framework for development control and the creation of initiatives to improve the area.

This document updates the appraisal of Porlock Weir Conservation Area undertaken in 2014 which was never formally adopted. Its aims are to identify:

- the influences that have given Porlock Weir its special character
- what chiefly reflects this character and is most worth conserving
- what has suffered damage or loss and may need reinstating
- what should be considered in guiding future changes
- visual features that particularly need safeguarding.

1.2 DEVELOPMENT IN A CONSERVATION AREA

Conservation Areas give broader protection than listing individual buildings and all the elements within the Area are recognised as contributing in some way to its character. Anyone considering undertaking works to a property, or developing land that lies within a Conservation Area, is advised to contact the Historic Buildings Officer or the Development Control Officer, at Exmoor National Park Authority for assistance at an early stage.

This Appraisal will assist in the formulation of appropriate design strategies for proposed new development, which should be fully articulated within a Design and Access Statement accompanying any planning application. Specific guidance relating to Porlock Weir is in Section 7. Appendix A contains a brief overview on planning within conservation areas.

1.3 PREPARATION AND SURVEY LIMITATIONS

This Conservation Area Appraisal was largely researched and written during March and April 2012. This version was never formally adopted and has there been revised in 2021 prior to adoption. It updates the appraisal carried out for Exmoor National Park by John Fisher in 2004.

It is important to note that this document cannot be regarded as fully comprehensive. Some aspects of the survey information are limited to those areas which can be reasonably recorded from the highway and other publicly accessible land. Failure to mention any particular building, feature or space, should not be taken to imply that it is of no significance and irrelevant in the consideration of a planning application.

1.4 COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT

As no boundary changes are proposed no public consultation was undertaken. It is recommended in the Appraisal that Article 4 directions are introduced. Article 4 Directions are used to remove certain permitted development rights to help ensure characteristic features of buildings, streets, and settlements are maintained. These will require public consultation.

2. Topographic and Historic Background

2.1 LOCATION AND LANDSCAPE SETTING

Porlock Weir is a small harbour-side settlement at the west end of Porlock Bay. It faces northeast towards the Bristol Channel with extensive views towards Bossington Hill and Hurlstone Point 4km distant to the east, and the Welsh coast, between 20-30km to the north. Immediately above Porlock Weir steeply wooded slopes, punctuated by narrow combes providing shelter from the south and west, plunge some 250m towards the sea from the high moors beyond, forming an impressive backdrop to the settlement. It benefits from an attractive tidal inlet, which is controlled by lock gates. Each side of the harbour is a narrow pebble beach which gently curves around the bay, separating the wide expanse of sea from the reclaimed open fields which run up to the edge of the woodland.

The much larger village of Porlock is situated on the A39, less than 3 km to the east and is linked to Porlock Weir by the B3225. The harbour marks the end of the road but an upper spur leads to the Worthy Toll Road, which provides an alternative less arduous route west than the 1:4 gradient at the notorious Porlock Hill. The toll road starts at Worthy, which is a discrete grouping of building around the manor house at the western end of the Conservation Area.

2.2 HISTORIC DEVELOPMENT AND ARCHAEOLOGY

2.2.1 Medieval Development

The history of Porlock Weir is closely allied with that of Porlock village. Porlock is recorded from the 10th century when it was known as Portloca - 'enclosure by the harbour.' It is probable that it was here in 1052 that Harold and his brother landed from Ireland with nine ships, sacked and set fire to the town.

The Domesday Book records that the manor was given to Baldwin of Exeter. The extent to which a formal harbour was established at this time is not known. The Rolls of the bailiff for the Manor of Brendon dated 1427 refer to 'making of the Weir of Porlock,' presumably for the purpose of catching fish. Fishing was an important industry at this time with fish caught in Porlock Bay being sent as far as Exeter. The remains of fish weirs, some with probable medieval origins, survive to the east of the harbour. Within the current settlement there is no above ground evidence of this medieval activity.

2.2.2 Post Medieval Development

In the late 17th century, Porlock Weir came into the possession of the Wynter-Blathwayt family. The list of harbour tolls payable in 1723 to William Blathwayt gives an insight into the activities of this period and includes trade, mainly with Wales, of cattle, sheep and poultry. The port was also used for the casting and recasting of the bells of Luccombe church, carried out in 1759 by William Evans of Chepstow. Foreign trade included wine, tobacco, raisins, sugar, and citrus fruit, and there is a suggestion of boat-building, with charges on every boat or barque 'built upon the lord's waste'.

The present harbour structure is thought to date from the early-mid 19th century and the settlement probably reached its peak of activity in this period, with a variety of materials and goods coming in and going out. Fishing remained important, and the harbour had a fish market notable for its herrings and oysters. The hinterland was also exploited with the woods of Embelle and Culbone providing timber for pit props exported to the South Wales coalfields and green oak, from which alcohol was distilled. The oak bark was utilised in the tannery at Porlock and transported via the harbour. There was also a brick and tile works south of the dock. Imports included coal and limestone from South Wales and the remains of a limekiln survives at the bottom of Worthy Combe.

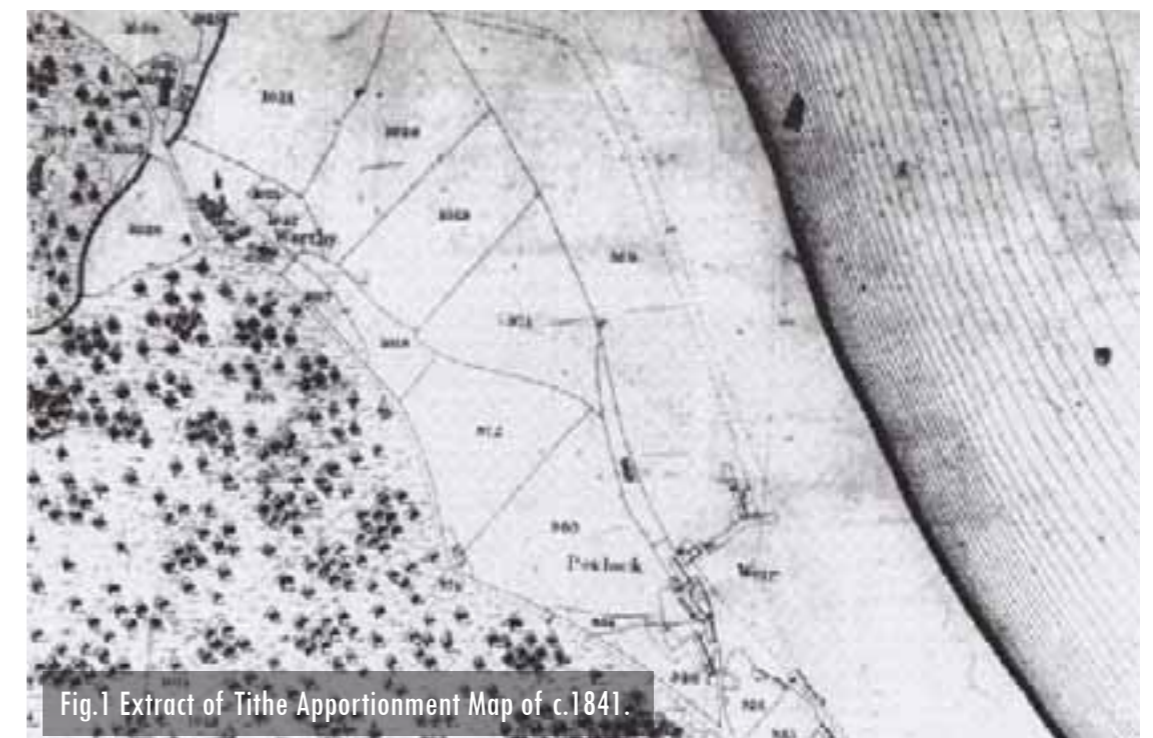


Fig.1 Extract of Tithe Apportionment Map of c.1841.

The pattern of settlement, with a cluster of buildings around the harbour and a discrete group at Worthy, as depicted on the Tithe Map of 1841 (Fig. 1), was well established by 19th century and has remained essentially unchanged. Development in the 20th century has mainly been to the east of the harbour along the B3225 to Porlock and on the parallel road above. This, however, has been fairly restrained and has not disrupted or dominated the existing settlement pattern.

2.3 ARCHAEOLOGY

Porlock Weir and its immediate environs have great archaeological potential. Outside of the Conservation Area there are a number of Prehistoric and Medieval sites recorded within the hinterland. Of more direct relevance to the development of the modern village, the sea to the east and west contains Medieval and later fish weirs. The Exmoor Historic Environment Record also contains a number of recorded sites within the Conservation Area. These are Post Medieval with the probable exception of the site of a former chapel at Chapel Knap. This was probably a Chapel of Ease, similar to those at Lynch and Tivington, and appears to have been demolished in the latter half of the 19th century, although portions are said to remain incorporated in the house that now occupies the site. It is believed it was dedicated to St. Olave and is mentioned in the rent roll of Cecily Bonville, Marchioness of Dorset, of c.1525, where an item refers to the 'wardens of St. Olave for the Chapel.' Its successor, a short distance to the north-west, is a good example of a 'tin tabernacle' dating to the late 19th century and little altered.

Physical evidence of the former industrial nature of the settlement is not obvious. There is, for example no longer evidence of lime production within the settlement, although there is a surviving kiln at Worthy - although this is outside of the Conservation Area. At times of low tide the remnants of fish traps can be seen-these are also outside the conservation area.

Further information about the archaeology of the area can be obtained from the Exmoor National Park Historic Environment Record based in the Park's Headquarters at Dulverton.

2.4 ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL PROFILE

Porlock Weir's importance as an port has undoubtedly declined since its 19th century heyday. However, because this activity was always on a relatively small scale, combined with the scenic qualities of the settlement and its position, the change from trade and industry to leisure and tourism has seemingly been fairly painless. Porlock Weir is still a busy place but with pleasure craft replacing fishing boats and retail units and domestic accommodation occupying former industrial premises. This change has inevitably led to a fundamental shift in the character of the settlement. It is unclear how many of the houses are occupied all year round, but there is still much activity around the harbour centred on the car park/Anchor Hotel/Ship Inn.



Fig.2 The dock, now predominantly houses leisure craft.

3. Spatial Analysis

3.1 SETTLEMENT PATTERN AND BUILDING DENSITY

The Conservation Area can be split into three broad parts: the harbour side village to the south-east; the small hamlet of Worthy in the northwest; and the open fields and beach in between - which are devoid of buildings.

3.1.1 The Village

On entering the village from the south at Porlockford, the road splits: the lower road following the coast and leading to the harbour; and the upper road running parallel before itself splits, offering the option of turning north downhill to the harbour (Fig. 3), or carrying on west eventually becoming the Worthy Toll Road.



Fig.3 Lane down to the harbour from upper road.

Along the lower road the houses, before reaching the harbour, are on the south side and set back facing the sea within generous rectangular plots. Three are detached and date to the later 20th century; the semi-detached pair is slightly earlier in date. Further in, the traditional cottages directly front the road, with Gibraltar Cottages sited on the north (sea) side of the road. Within the harbour area, the settlement pattern becomes irregular and the building density greater but the buildings are still, in the main, aligned with the coast. There is no evidence of formal planning within this earlier part settlement core with a cluster of domestic and commercial buildings seemingly growing organically.



Fig.4 Lower road into the village.

On the upper road, the houses on the west side are set back and above the road, while those on the east side are level with the road. With the exception of the terrace of six cottages known as Lane Head, the buildings are well spaced and low density.

3.1.2 Worthy

This was, and remains, a discrete hamlet centred on Worthy Manor. Unlike the buildings further east on the upper road, this earlier settlement is set lower to keep out of the weather and has a more enclosed private character.



Fig. 5 Worthy Combe - densely wooded area hiding a small hamlet.

3.2 PLAN FORM, HEIGHT AND MASSING

There is little uniformity evident in the buildings, which have evolved according to their particular purpose at a given time. This is encapsulated in the contrast between the long, low and thin form of the 17th century Ship Inn with the adjacent large 3-storey 19th century Anchor Hotel, which dwarfs its neighbour. The 3-storey harbour side building is likely to have evolved from a mixed use of the ground and upper floors resulting from activities relating to the port.



Fig. 6 The Anchor Hotel dominates the harbour.

The purely domestic buildings fall into established types. The 17th to 19th century vernacular buildings are 1 ½ or 2-storey with features typical of small dwellings of this period and are usually in cottage rows. Above the harbour the mid 20th century buildings are larger, some with Arts and Crafts style elements, espoused by architects such as Voysey, who is known to have undertaken work at Worthy Manor. The buildings along the lower road are also detached but slightly smaller and later in date.



Fig. 7 Lane Head Cottages - attractive row set above the harbour.

3.3 GREEN SPACE

Green space makes up a substantial proportion of the Conservation Area and its extent is indicated on Map 2 (Appendix E). At the south-east end, the open areas between the upper and lower roads provide a separation between the two routes and allow views: out towards the sea from the upper route (Fig. 9); and up towards Worthy Woods from the main road into the village. North-west of the harbour, there is a small creek surrounded by marshy ground between the shingle beach and the large open fields extending up to Worthy.



Fig 8 Porlock beach - mixture of boulders and sea grasses.



Fig.9 Open space between upper and lower roads.

The settlement insert maps to the Local Plan (2011-31) show those areas identified as important where development that would harm the public amenity value or character of the settlement will not be permitted.

3.4 VIEWS

Views constitute an important element of the character of the Conservation Area. There are extensive views of the natural landscape from several vantage points within the Conservation Area: notably north to South Wales Point (Fig. 10) and east across the dramatic cliffs towards Hurlstone Point (Fig. 11). There are also views towards Worthy Woods from the lower parts of the Conservation Area, particularly from the beach west of the village. The village itself forms a focal point for views, particularly the harbour area.



Fig.10 View north across the Bristol Channel to South Wales



Fig. 11 View east towards Hurlstone Point



Fig. 12 East towards the harbour.



Fig. 13 View west from Turkey Island.

4. Architectural Quality and Built Form

4.1 ARCHITECTURAL STYLE

In 1958 Pevsner wrote that 'Porlock Weir is famous for its whitewashed cottages by the little harbour'. Whilst the cottages are still extant, and contribute greatly to the Conservation Area's character and appearance, they do not dominate the streetscape. On closer examination there is a mix of architectural styles and building forms, ranging from the thatched cottages to larger 19th century buildings and a loose blend of 'Arts and Crafts' elements from the first half of the 20th century.

Within the Conservation Area there are only five listed buildings, all grade II: two of which Gibraltar Cottages and Beach Cottage, are in the village, the rest are at Worthy. The value of the buildings in Porlock Weir is therefore derived from their contribution as a group, rather than any particular building of outstanding architectural merit.

4.1.1 The Village

Approaching the village from Porlock, the late 20th century detached dwellings on the left are punctuated by **Mizpah** and **Oyster Perch** (Fig. 14) a mirrored pair of 2-storey cottages built of exposed rubblestone with brick quoins, Roman tiled roof with front-facing gables at each end. They probably date to the early 20th century and are the site a limekiln shown on the first edition OS map of c.1889.



Fig. 14 Mizpah and Oyster Perch - early 20th century houses of traditional construction.

To the west is **Beach Cottage** (Fig. 15). The cottage is of 17th century origin, although it is thought the walls were raised and the roof reconstructed a century later, and has a typical three-cell with cross-passage and rear outshut plan. The thatched roof is hipped and there is a large shouldered front lateral stack adjoining the entrance. The four-light ovolo-moulded mullioned window and heavy four-centred arch head and chamfered door-frame are almost certainly original. The cottage was rendered at the time of the last Appraisal (2004) but now has exposed random rubble walls.



Fig. 15 Beech Cottage, 17th century cross-passage house with lateral stack.

On the opposite side of the road and abutting the beach **Gibraltar Cottages** (Fig. 16) are also likely to date to the 17th century. Nos 1 and 2 are limewashed cob, the remaining three are rubble, limewashed to front (although at time of survey two have have the limewash removed) only with thatched roofs. The backs of the cottages have three large rear external stacks rising from the eaves. The cottages retain much of their character and make an important contribution to the Conservation Area.



Fig. 16 Gibraltar Cottages, 17th century row on beach.

Opposite the car park entrance is another cottage row (Fig. 17), probably of 18th century origin with later modifications much in evidence. The row is now two cottages, the eastern end, **The Old Reading Rooms**, is thatched with tall brick stack and formerly incorporated a Reading Room. The west end, known as **Seaview Cottage** is of two distinct builds of painted rubblestone under slate roofs and with large modern picture windows.



Fig. 17 Cottage row, much altered at west end.

At the centre of the village, the harbour is dominated by the imposing **Anchor Hotel** (Fig. 18). The central 2-storey section appears to be the earliest part, and may be 18th or early 19th century in origin, but this is dwarfed by later 3-storey wings with double pitched gabled roofs at each end of two different builds and styles. The north extension appears earlier but both appear to have been in existence by the end of the 19th century. To the rear of the hotel, and now linked by a first floor timber clad enclosed walkway, is a two storey exposed rubblestone building. This may have always been a service building for the hotel but could equally have been a separate cottage. The former stables to the north, now housing retail units, could also have served the hotel (Fig. 19).



Fig. 18 Anchor Hotel 18th/19th century core dominated by two large side extensions.



Fig. 19 Former stables for Anchor Hotel, now converted to retail units.

Andrews on the Weir (now **The Café**) (Fig. 20) is a more modest example of a 19th century hotel, although it may have originated as a house. The building is divided from the road by garden with the central (a possibly later) square bay in the middle of two canted 2-storey bays below canted hip and half-hipped profiled tile roofs.



Fig. 20 Andrews on the Weir, C19 building set back off road.

Between these two 19th century buildings is the **Ship Inn** (Fig. 21). This comprises two buildings; the front range is probably 17th century with a long low whitewashed stone frontage, and large shouldered front projecting stack and thatched roof; the rear building is probably later in date, although a plaque on the wall proclaims it was 'Altered in 1651 and 1920', it is roughcast with double-Roman tiled roof. Both have timber casement windows with rectangular-leaded panes. Immediately adjoining the latter, although probably serving Andrews on the Weir, is a group of mainly single-storey outbuildings, grouped around a part cobbled yard. Built of exposed stone with brick quoins and a double-Roman tiled roofs, they currently appear disused and are showing signs of dilapidation (Fig. 22).



Fig. 21 Ship Inn, the earliest surviving building on the quayside.



Fig. 22 Service buildings to rear of Ship Inn.

Another part of the quayside group is the three-storey stone rubble building next to the lock (Fig. 23). This is likely to date to the 19th century and occupies an important position and must have formerly been closely connected with the harbour, with possibly warehouses or storage on the ground floor and accommodation above. The current harbour office occupies one of the single-storey extensions to the rear. It has been much altered but despite this still retains some of its character and acts as an important visual stop to views from the east.



Fig. 23 Substantial harbour-side building, probably once with warehousing on ground floor.

On Turkey Island, on the north side of the lock, and facing towards the harbour, is a prominent group of **Cottages** built at the edge of the shingle. These probably date from the early-mid 18th century. Built of stone rubble, now colour-washed, all would have originally been thatched, and two have tall rear stacks. Only that on the right retains its thatch; the other two having double-Roman tiled roofs, probably dating from the early 20th century. Although some original detail has been lost and some outbuildings added, they provide a picturesque setting as a backdrop to the quayside and boat moorings.



Fig. 24 Cottage row on Turkey Island

Opposite the dock, **The Kiln** (Fig. 25) appears to be a mid 20th century conversion of a former industrial building. A brick and tile works is shown here on the 1st edition Ordnance Survey Map. The two segmental arched kiln openings, incorporated into the 3-storey house are the former brick kilns.



Fig. 25 The Kiln, formerly part of 19th century brick and tile works, now a dwelling.

The higher part of the village also contains buildings of interest. At the top of the hill alongside the Ship Inn, where the lanes converge, is a row of six cottages known as **Lane Head** (Fig. 26). Thatched at each end, they are stone-built, some whitewashed or rendered and picturesquely set above the carriageway and approached by steps. The series of front lateral stacks suggest a date, possibly as early as the late 17th century. Most retain timber casement windows and plank doors.



Fig. 26 Lane Head Cottages.

Beyond this group, and also in a raised position approached by slate-surfaced steps is **St Nicholas's Church** (Fig. 27), a typical "tin tabernacle" of the late 19th century. Most of these buildings arrived in pre-fabricated kit form and were shipped throughout the Empire - this example almost certainly came in by sea. It has a small gabled porch, tiny belfry and small-scale pointed arch windows.

To the east, and on the opposite side of the lane, is the site of an earlier chapel. No above ground evidence of the chapel is known to survive and the site is occupied by **Chapel Knap** (Fig. 28), a large late 19th century house and outbuildings, mainly stone-built with brick dressings, double-Roman tiled roof and casement windows, some with narrow glazing bars. The main frontage faces away from the highway, towards the sea with a former service wing, now holiday accommodation, grouped around a courtyard with stable-block paving to the west.



Fig. 27 Corrugated iron church of the late 19th century.



Fig. 28 Chapel Knap - on site of Medieval chapel.

Further east where the higher and lower road split is Mariners Combe an attractive pair of Local Authority houses built in the vernacular style in 1920. Although outside of the Conservation Area they do contribute positively to its setting.

4.1.2 WORTHY

Externally, the buildings at Worthy fall more within what may be described as late 19th--early 20th century estate architecture. **Worthy Manor House** (Fig.29) has 16th century origins but probably owes much of its current external appearance to the attentions of C F A Voysey, who is known to have worked in the area. The cambered head porch entrance, added catslide roof, casement windows and chimney stacks are all of this early 20th century period.



Fig. 29 Worthy Manor



Fig. 30 Former outbuildings to manor, now domestic accommodation.

Some 20 metres south-east of the Manor is a range of outbuildings, including a **barn, former stables with loft above and coach house** (Fig. 30). The barn was probably originally 17th century, with early 20th century extensions again by C F A Voysey. As Pevsner states they 'must have been altered by him, as his characteristic chimney stacks and metalwork details prove, especially in the stables and coach-house.' Lower down the combe towards the sea, are a pair of semi-detached stone estate cottages, probably 19th century, known as **Millbanke and Wentworth** (Fig. 31).



Fig. 31 Millbanke and Wentworth, semi-detached cottages close to beach.

The start of the toll road is marked by the **toll house and lodge** (Fig. 32) to (the now demolished) Ashley Combe. The building is a splendid exercise in the Arts and Crafts picturesque style and has been attributed to Lady Lovelace. It is built of the local red sandstone random rubble with brick dressings and a hipped thatched roof and has some fine detailing.



Fig. 32 Picturesque tollhouse and lodge to Ashley Combe

4.2 MATERIALS

4.2.1 Walls

The use of stone for building is widespread. The main stone type is the hard dark red-purple or grey-green Devonian sandstone. This is difficult to work, so is normally encountered as roughly coursed rubble, and in buildings from the mid 19th to early 20th century usually has red brick dressings. In current and former outbuildings the stone is usually left exposed. The houses are generally rendered or limewashed, at least on their front elevation, with a black tar-banded plinth. It is likely that some of this render conceals cob construction. Much of the building stone would have been obtained from local quarries. These have long since closed, although several former sites in the vicinity can still be traced, including a former quarry in Worthy Woods above Chapel Knap.



Fig. 33 Local stone usually left exposed on service buildings.

Bricks were also commonly used for chimney stacks but are less common for main walling, even at a comparatively late date. It is likely that many of the bricks were obtained from the brick and tile works at the dock.

4.2.2 Roofs

Despite its maritime location, the expense of transportation meant that up until the mid 19th century locally procured thatch would have been the only economically viable roofing material for all but the highest status buildings. Traditionally, thatch was combed wheat reed. In recent years, this tradition has been under threat from the non-indigenous water reed, much of which is now imported from Eastern Europe and beyond.



Fig. 34 Imported clay tiles appear from the mid 19th century

A coarse stone slate was produced relatively locally, for example at Treborough in the Brendon Hills but this does not seem to be prevalent as most that surviving slate is the much thinner gauge slate, either from Cornwall or South Wales, the former predominating and distinguished by its more opalescent and sometimes greenish appearance. From the latter part of the 19th century, much thatch was replaced by various forms of pantile or double Roman clay tiles, manufactured in the Bridgwater area. The larger late 19th century buildings, some probably purpose built as hotels or boarding houses, have plain clay tiles.

4.2.3 Windows and doors

The earliest historic windows in the conservation area are mainly a mixture of timber and metal casement, some with mullioned frames, with a notably early example at Beach Cottage. The several instances of much larger sash windows are confined to the late 19th century buildings with views out to sea.



Fig 35 Historic metal casement window.

Most surviving doors of traditional design provide relatively low headroom and are constructed in a plank and ledged form, some with fixed lights. A few of the late 19th-early 20th century buildings have examples of what may be termed rustic Arts & Crafts detail, using ornate fixings and ornamented boarding with ribs or studs. Few openings earlier than the 18th century survive. Where they do, for example at Beach Cottage (Fig. 36) and Worthy Manor, they typically have massive pointed arch oak frames, and are jointed with pegs and often chamfered with stops.



Fig. 36 17th century door with later repairs.

Fig. 37 Round-headed 19th century casement.



4.3 OTHER FEATURES OF INTEREST

The harbour structure and lock gates controlling the tidal inlet, are of great interest and a defining feature of the village. The present structures date to the mid 19th century but could well incorporate earlier fabric.



Fig. 38 Lock and harbour with Turkey Island beyond.

There are two Second World War 'Type 24' pillboxes on the beach immediately east of the quay. The southern pillbox (Fig. 39) is suffering from subsidence and has tipped down towards the sea.



Fig. 39 Part of Second World War defence line.

There is a lime kiln in woodland at the edge of the beach at the foot of Worthy Combe which is outside of the Conservation Area boundary.

5. Street Scene

5.1 BOUNDARIES

There are substantial stretches of boundary or retaining walls built of local sandstone rubble, usually roughly coursed. In some instances beach boulders have been used and no mortar is added (Fig. 40). Some freestanding walls are in a dilapidated condition, whereas others have been, or are being, painstakingly rebuilt. Sometimes, especially as a support to earth banks the locally distinctive dry-stone pattern known as 'dyking' is evident. This method places the bedding plane of the stone in a vertical or slanted "herring-bone" pattern and adds a pleasing contrast. When used as a retaining feature to hedgerow banks, it can become prone to deterioration as a result of root spread if not regularly maintained. These local types of walling make a valuable contribution to the character of the conservation area, as well as providing a strong sense of enclosure or privacy in several cases.



Fig. 40 Wall of beach boulders, vulnerable to collapse.

Along the beach and around the harbour, metal tubing and chainlink fencing, occasionally in combination, have been utilised which are an unwelcome intrusion.

5.2 GROUNDSCAPE

The Conservation Area encompasses a significant amount of the beach, which is made up of boulders. Of the man-made surfaces tarmac predominates, most notably in the harbour side car park. A number of locations in Porlock Weir have stone paved or cobbled surfaces as part of the street scene. The most prominent are around the quayside and as forecourt features to several outbuildings and workshops. The elevated cottage row beyond St. Nicholas' Church has access by steps of squared stone blocks. There are also several examples of patterned "stable-block" paving, some probably dating from the late 19th century.



Fig. 41 Anchor motif in paving at Anchor Hotel.

5.3 STREET FURNITURE

Historic street furniture identified by the appraisal includes:

- K6 telephone kiosk, south of Ship Inn.
- Cast iron Somerset County Council fingerpost, at Lane Head.
- Cast iron Somerset County Council fingerpost, at south approach to village.
- Ships anchor commemorating Battle of Trafalgar, near Anchor Hotel.
- Second World War mine acting as collection box for 'Shipwrecked Fishermen and Mariners Royal Benevolent Society', on harbour side (Fig. 42).



Fig. 34 Castle Hotel - replaced earlier inn.

5.4 TREES AND HEDGES

The backdrop of deciduous woodland on steep slopes or combes along the south-western boundary of the Conservation Area makes an important contribution to its setting. This woodland is classified in the Local Plan as 'Category 3 Woodland' as defined by Section 3 of the Wildlife and Countryside (Amendment) Act of 1985. It has a natural beauty '(that) is, in the opinion of the NPA, particularly important to conserve.' This woodland also falls within the 'County Wildlife Site' (CLN 11) category, which is considered to be 'of local nature conservation importance.'



Fig. 43 Coppiced trees in Worthy Wood.

Within the Conservation Area there are relatively few noteworthy specimen trees or tree groups. Several mature oaks (*quercus robur*), a stone pine (*pinus pinea*), Scots pine (*pinus sylvestris*), and a maidenhair (*glinko biloba*) were noted, and there is a good group of Douglas fir (*pseudotsuga menziesii*) adjoining the southern tip of the conservation area at Porlockford.

6. Condition Assessment

6.1 CURRENT CONDITION

Porlock Weir Conservation Area has few obvious detractors. The 2004 Appraisal noted that 'there is little overt commercialisation or street clutter'. Whilst this has not reached the endemic proportions of other seaside villages it should be noted that there seems to have been a proliferation of advertisements and other signage in the commercial area of the village: from the car park entrance to the Anchor stables. Although temporary in nature, this detracts from the character of the Conservation Area, in particular the banner signs and 'A' boards. Recent parking signs to the car park have detracted considerably.

As noted in 2004, the main public car park could benefit from further hard and soft landscaping and the entrance is currently unsatisfactory (Fig. 44). Other areas of the Conservation Area would benefit from resurfacing, using natural materials where possible. Some relatively minor evidence of salt water erosion could be rectified. Overhead wires are present but not overly intrusive.



Fig. 44 Entrance to car park - room for improvement.

Most historic buildings, both listed and unlisted, are well maintained, and appear to be sound in terms of their maintenance and structural condition. There are, however, some examples where cottages, listed and unlisted, have been over restored and have lost much of their historic patina. For the most part, PVCu replacement windows have made no significant inroads into the Conservation Area in part due to the use class of many of the building which would require planning permission for the change of windows. Lane Head Cottage are vulnerable and an Article 4 Direction should be considered. Some localised deterioration of stonework is noted, especially the condition and structural integrity of some boundary walls. The only buildings identified as underutilised and not well maintained are the outbuildings rear of the Ship Inn (Fig. 22).

Aside from the ever present threat of coastal erosion, there are two features that are currently directly affected, the southern pillbox (Fig. 39) and the timber groynes (Fig. 45) on the east side of Turkey Island. Given their position, it is unlikely that conservation measures alone would be able to preserve these features in situ. The predicted rise in sea levels due to the climate emergency will likely cause some significant damage in the coming decade.



Fig. 45 Timber sea defences on Turkey Island.

The table below contains a more detailed condition assessment. The headings are based on English Heritage’s Conservation Areas Condition Survey (2008).

1. Designated Conservation Area name:	Porlock Weir				
2. Locality	West Somerset				
3. Is the Conservation Area:	Predominantly urban	Predominantly suburban	Predominantly rural	Other (Please specify)	
4. Is the Conservation Area:	Predominantly residential	Predominantly industrial	Predominantly commercial	Wide mix of uses	Other (Please specify)
5. How large is the Conservation Area?	Less than 2 ha (approx 140m x140m)	2.1- 50 ha	More than 50 ha (½ sq km)	Don't know	
6. Approximately how many buildings are in the Conservation Area:	None	Up to 50	51 to 250	251+	Don't know
7. Approximately how many listed buildings are in the Conservation Area:	None	Up to 10	11 to 50	51+	Don't know
8. Approximately how many locally listed buildings are in the Conservation Area:	None				

9. Does the Conservation Area include one or more scheduled monuments?	Yes	No	Don't know		
10. Is all or part of the Conservation Area covered by another heritage designation?	None	Registered Park and Garden	World Heritage Site	Registered Battlefield	Other
11. Has an Article 4 Direction been implemented?	Yes	No			
12. Are you aware of any unauthorised works that have been carried out in the last 3 years which have harmed the special interest, significance and/or character of the Conservation Area?	Yes	No			
13. Has the Local Authority taken any enforcement action against such works in the past 3 years?	Yes	No	Don't know		
14. Does the Local Authority have a Conservation Area Advisory Panel/ Committee specific to this Conservation Area?	Yes	No			
15. Does the Conservation Area have any listed buildings or any other historic assets on either the English Heritage or a local <i>Heritage at Risk</i> Register?	Yes	No			
Please give your impression of whether the following issues affect the special interest, significance and/or character of the Conservation Area:					
16. Loss of historic detail or inappropriate change:	1. Not a problem at all	2. A minor problem	3. A noticeable problem	4. A significant problem	
• Doors and windows		X			
• Front elevation (e.g. painting, porches, rendering)		X			
• Decorative features/materials (e.g. stonework, rainwater goods)	X				
• Shopfronts	X				

	1. Not a problem at all	2. A minor problem	3. A noticeable problem	4. A significant problem
• Signs and advertisements		X		
• Roof coverings and chimneys (including rooflights)	X			
• Boundary walls/fences	X			
• Hardstandings	X			
• Satellite dishes (including CCTV and antennae)	X			
• Renewable energy devices	X			
• New extensions/ alterations	X			
• Development/ redevelopment (e.g subdivision, infill)	X			
• Other (specify)				
Neglect				
17. Vacancies within buildings:	1. Not a problem at all	2. A minor problem	3. A noticeable problem	4. A significant problem
18. Severe dereliction of buildings:	1. Not a problem at all	2. A minor problem	3. A noticeable problem	4. A significant problem
19. Signs of a lack of maintenance such as poorly maintained gutters or joinery:	1. Not a problem at all	2. A minor problem	3. A noticeable problem	4. A significant problem
20.The condition of the public realm:	1. Not a problem at all	2. A minor problem	3. A noticeable problem	4. A significant problem
21. Are there any other factors that are threatening the historic character of the Conservation Area?				
Based on your answers, the score would suggest the condition of the Conservation Area is: Very bad (1 or more questions answered 'A significant problem') Very bad (3 or more questions answered 'A noticeable problem') Poor (1 or 2 questions answered 'A noticeable problem') Fair (2 or more questions answered 'A minor problem') Optimal (One question answered 'A minor problem', or no problems selected)				

6.2 VULNERABILITY

The large majority of buildings at Porlock Weir, almost all of which make a valuable contribution to the historic built environment are unlisted, and are therefore more vulnerable to unsuitable replacement doors and windows and other less well regulated frontage alterations than their listed counterparts. Visitor numbers and the inevitable response of business to this, which is mainly manifested in the proliferation of signage, can also lead to degradation, albeit one which is reversible.



Fig. 46 Low-lying areas of Porlock Weir are vulnerable to flooding.

Porlock Weir has experienced severe flooding in the past, most recently in 1996, and longer term, the risk of inundation caused by coastal erosion and sea level changes is, due to climate change, likely to increase. This, and measures to mitigate it, are likely to significantly impact on the historic built environment and wider Conservation Area, particularly those parts closest to the sea and it is inevitable that some degree of adaptation will be required. There have been two recent reports which have specifically addressed this issue - see Appendix D.

RISK ASSESSMENT

22. Does the Conservation Area have a current, adopted Conservation Area Character Appraisal?	Yes	No
23. Does the Conservation Area have a current Management Plan (usually part of a Conservation Area Character Appraisal) or other formally adopted proposals to preserve or enhance its character?	Yes	No
24. Does the Local Authority have an adopted Local Development Framework Document that contains objectives and policies which would safeguard the historic character and appearance of Conservation Areas and their settings?	Yes	No or in part
25. Is there evidence of community support in the area, for example a residents' association or civic society?	Yes	No
26. Relative to the size of this Conservation Area, are there any major development proposals imminent which could threaten the historic interest of the area?	Yes	No

Based on the answers to question 4, 5 and 28-32, the score would suggest that the vulnerability of the Conservation Area is considered:

≥5: High

3-4: Medium

0-2: Low

INITIAL RISK ASSESSMENT

Based on the answers you have provided considering the condition and vulnerability of the Conservation Area, the initial risk to the Conservation Area is assessed as:

Not at risk:

- Condition optimal and any vulnerability
- Condition fair and any vulnerability
- Condition poor and vulnerability medium or low

At risk:

- Condition very bad and any vulnerability
- Condition poor and vulnerability high

TRAJECTORY/TREND

27. Over the past 3 years what would you say has happened to the appearance and vitality of the Conservation Area?	Improved significantly	Seen some improvement	Not changed significantly	Seen some deterioration	Deteriorated significantly	Don't know
28. What do you think is happening to the appearance and vitality of the Conservation Area now, and what do you expect to happen over the next 3 years?	Improving significantly	Seeing some improvement	No significant change	Seeing some deterioration	Deteriorating significantly	Don't know

FINAL RISK ASSESSMENT

The final level of risk is assessed by combining your assessment of the Conservation Area’s condition and vulnerability, and its expected trajectory/trend over the next three years. The final risk assessment for different combinations of condition, vulnerability and trajectory/trend is shown in bold on the right.

Initial risk assessment	Trajectory/trend	Final risk assessment
At Risk	deteriorating or deteriorating significantly	At Risk
At Risk	no significant change	At Risk
At Risk	improving	Not at Risk unless condition is very bad, then At Risk
At Risk	improving significantly	Not at Risk unless condition is very bad, then At Risk
Not at Risk	deteriorating significantly	At Risk
Not at Risk (medium)	seeing some deterioration	At Risk
Not at Risk	no significant change	Not at Risk
Not at Risk	improving or improving significantly	Not at Risk
Not at Risk (Low)	seeing some deterioration	Not at Risk (Medium)

7. Recommendations

7.1 BOUNDARY CHANGES

No boundary changes are proposed in this appraisal. It is recommended that consideration is given to create a new conservation area that would encompass the whole of Worthy and the site of the former house at Ashley Combe. This would reduce the size of the Porlock Weir Conservation area but would provide some recognition that Worthy and Ashley Combe are separate settlements to Porlock Weir. If ths takes place full public consultation will be required

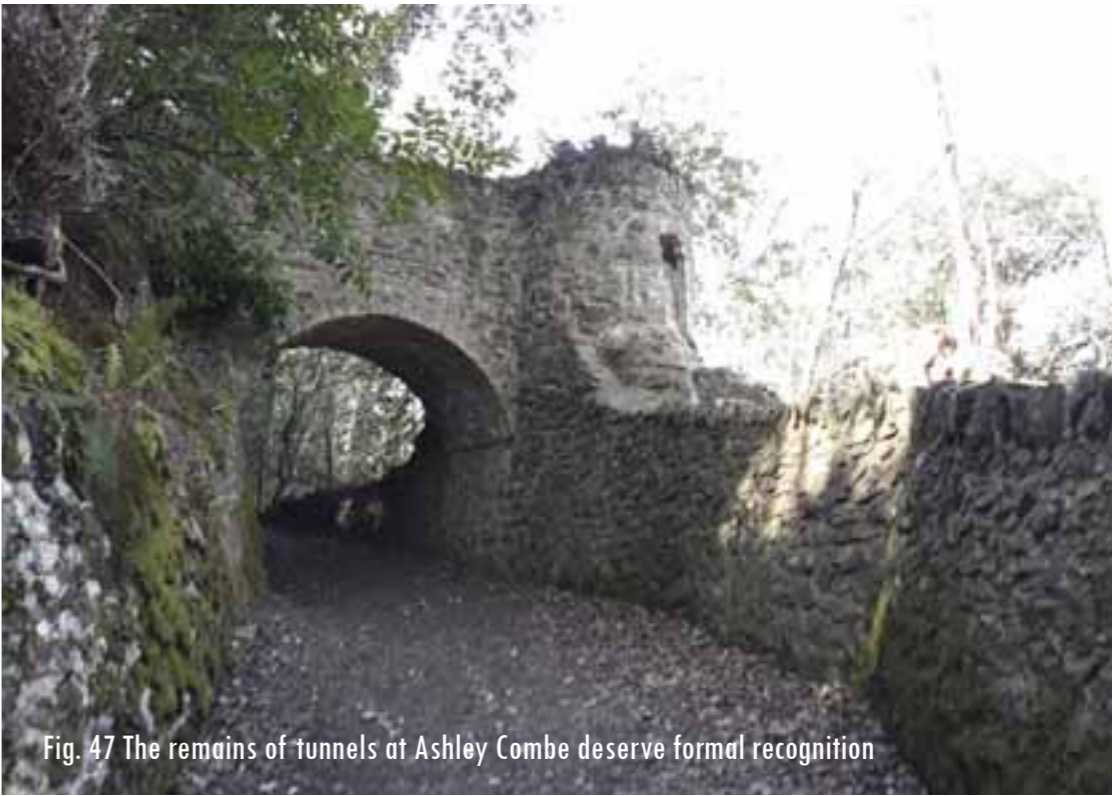


Fig. 47 The remains of tunnels at Ashley Combe deserve formal recognition

7.2 MANAGEMENT AND ENHANCEMENT

Many 19th century and earlier buildings in the conservation area have retained most of their original features and strongly represent either the local vernacular style, or examples of the largely universal late 19th century style of tall elevations and large sash windows. Relatively few are grade II listed, but even non-listed buildings often have considerable historic and architectural quality. For example, many buildings lining the approach to the quay are examples of late Victorian

architecture that typifies many coastal locations. Their scale, although quite out of proportion to earlier buildings, has become accepted and their authenticity should be preserved. Few buildings exhibit poor care and maintenance; apart from one or two cases where over restoration is noted.

Applying an Article 4(2) Direction to protect historic frontages and boundaries, especially of the more prominent unlisted buildings could be considered. As Porlock Weir appears to have a significant history, any information recording additional historic evidence of the early origins of buildings and previously unrecorded historic building features, especially of interiors, would be especially significant.

Porlock Weir experiences a considerable volume of visitors, especially during the main holiday season. This raises the potential for some enhancement, especially of ground surfaces where disrepair and badly worn or uneven surfaces are evident. It is important to maintain this aspect of character, and any potential for ground surfaces using local natural stone or paving materials to be restored or extended should be investigated.

There is also some scope for improved signage, as well as greater interpretation of the origins of the settlement and what remains of the historic built environment. More control on advertisements and superfluous signage would also improve the character and appearance of the Conservation Area.

The following are guidelines that the Exmoor National Park Plan endorses when considering any alterations, repair or restoration to buildings within the conservation area. The National Trust is at the forefront of reintroducing traditional building skills, especially the use of lime-wash, and uses other craft skills in maintaining its buildings. In the case of Porlock Weir, where the care and maintenance of the historic built and natural environment is generally to a good standard, not all the following will necessarily apply.

7.2.1 Buildings in the Conservation Area

- In considering proposals for any new development or redevelopment involving existing buildings or structures, it should be borne in mind that stricter safeguards against any form of demolition in conservation areas have recently been introduced. Historic signage should be maintained, as far as possible, in its original state. Any new or reinstated signs should respect the original forms including use of cast-iron lettering or traditional sign-writing.

- Existing features of quality that typify the historic built environment should be retained. Any new development within the conservation area is likely to be extremely limited but where it does occur, it should echo the existing in terms of scale, height, proportion and use of traditional methods of construction, including openings and any boundary features.
- Existing stone boundary and retaining walls, and existing banks, and footpath only access should be safeguarded, where possible, especially those that identify the historic street and plot layout pattern of earlier settlement.

7.2.2 Features

- The conservation, and where necessary, the repair of walls and/or historic railings, and timber fencing is considered important. Where appropriate consider using additional timber or ironwork that reflects the local craft traditions.
- Ensure the retention and enhancement of any historic street furniture, and replace unsympathetic road traffic and direction signs.
- Encourage retention of the character of existing entrances, including gate piers, and associated period timber or metal gates.
- Ensure necessary protection of all natural stone paving, cobbles, kerbs and gulleys, both as part of the highway and where in private ownership. Consider where such materials might be employed in any resurfacing or enhancement schemes. Materials from local sources should be used whenever possible.
- Seek to retain or reinstate all existing period windows, doors, and cast iron rainwater goods. This includes the typical 19th century decorative estate features, and any examples of an Arts and Crafts tradition, for example, decorative window glazing and forged metal window and door catches.
- It should be noted that the National Park Authority can consider introduction of an Article 4(2) Direction where boundary features, for example, stone or brick walls, and openings are under threat. This also has the potential to control the installation of UPVC windows and doors, inappropriate roof materials, external cladding, and use of exposed block-work.

7.2.3 Historic Setting and Landscape

- Before any change of use or alteration takes place, ensure that consideration is given to the historic importance of any existing building, including outbuildings and non-residential uses. This also includes the previous history and present significance of any small outbuildings located beyond the main street frontages.
- Although existing trees within the conservation area appear to be healthy, older specimens would benefit from periodic health checks. Where limited further life is detected, measures may need to be taken to plant young trees of a similar or suitable alternative species. These could be gradually introduced to replace older specimens. Some fast growing garden conifers, such as Lawson's Cypress, can strike a discordant note in a historic setting and should be avoided in an environmentally sensitive location.
- There is an important relationship between the setting of buildings in the conservation area and the associated topographic and landscape features, for example the steeply wooded slopes and combs that border much of the southern edge of the conservation area. Attention is drawn to the Local Plan Objectives for Woodland, one of which is 'to gain a deeper understanding of Exmoor's trees and woodlands through a comprehensive programme of research and survey work derived from the Exmoor Woodland Research Strategy.'

7.2.4 Use of Traditional Materials

- Encourage re-pointing of stonework using suitable mortar mixes, ideally with a lime base. Cement rich mortars and raised or "ribbon pointing should be avoided. This is especially the case for some of the softer types of sandstone.
- Where appropriate, steps should be taken to re-discover supplies of natural materials, preferably from their historic source or equivalent, and to encourage the development of skills in their use.
- More fully research the development of the early settlement, the sources of natural materials used in building construction, and whether former sources of stone or slate might become re-established.

APPENDIX A - CONSERVATION AREAS: GENERAL GUIDANCE

WHAT IS A CONSERVATION AREA?

A Conservation Area is defined by the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 as: 'an area of special architectural or historic interest, the character and appearance of which it is desirable to preserve or enhance'. Exmoor National Park has 16 Conservation Areas designated to cover the most historically and architecturally important and interesting parts of the Park's towns and villages.

Various factors contribute to the special character of a Conservation Area. These include: the quality of buildings; the historic layout of roads, paths and boundaries; boundary treatments and patterns of enclosure; characteristic building and paving materials; uses and associations; the quality of the public realm and contribution made by trees and green spaces. A strong 'sense of place' is often associated with Conservation Areas. It is the function of Conservation Area Appraisals to assess and evaluate 'character' as a means of assisting the planning process.

OWNING AND DEVELOPING LAND AND PROPERTY WITHIN A CONSERVATION AREA

In order to assist in the preservation and enhancement of Conservation Areas various additional planning controls exist within them. These are subject to change so it is advisable to check with Exmoor National Park before carrying out any works.

The substantial demolition of unlisted buildings and structures requires permission. Proposals will not normally be looked upon favourably where affected buildings or structures are deemed to make a positive contribution to the character and appearance of the area. An approved scheme for redevelopment will normally be required before permission to demolish will be granted. Exceptions to the rule include:

- Small buildings of less than 115 cubic metres;
- Walls, fences and railings less than one metre high abutting to highway (including footpaths and bridleways) or less than two metres elsewhere;
- Agricultural and forestry buildings erected since 1914;
- Certain buildings used for industry.

Where demolition is being considered early consultation with local Planning and Conservation Officers should be sought. It is a criminal offence to carry out unauthorised works.

Within a Conservation Area permitted development rights are subject to some restriction. Planning Permission may be required for:

- insertion of a dormer window or other alteration to the roof;
- a satellite dish or antennae in certain positions;
- application of stone, artificial stone, plastic or timber cladding;
- installation, alteration or replacement of a chimney, flue or soil and vent pipe, on certain elevations;
- certain development on land between a wall forming a side elevation of the dwellinghouse and the boundary of its curtilage;
- rear extensions of more than one storey and side extensions.

Further restrictions may be applied by the Local Authority or Secretary of State through discretionary use of 'Article 4' designations where a good case can be made (e.g. covering aspects such as change of windows).

High standards of design are expected for new development within Conservation Areas. Sensitive proposals which pay special regard to prevailing patterns of height, massing, articulation, use of materials and enclosure will be encouraged. Early consultation with local Development Control and Conservation Officers is recommended.

ADVERTISEMENTS

Various types of advertisement, including those illuminated, will require Advertisement Consent. Advertisements must be sympathetic to the character and appearance of the area.

TREES

Trees in Conservation Areas which are already protected by a Tree Preservation Order (TPO) are subject to the normal TPO controls but the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 also makes special provision for trees in Conservation Areas which are not the subject of a TPO.

Anyone proposing to cut down or carry out work on a tree in a Conservation Area within Exmoor National Park is required to give Exmoor National Park Authority six weeks prior notice. The purpose of this requirement is to give the LPA an opportunity to consider whether a TPO should be made in respect of the tree. Exceptions apply so if you are planning to carry out tree works contact the National Park's Tree Officer.

IMPLICATIONS FOR THE LOCAL AUTHORITY

The 1990 Act makes it a duty for Local Authorities to:

- In exercising their planning powers, pay special attention to the desirability of preserving or enhancing the character or appearance of a Conservation Area.
- Formulate and publish proposals for the preservation and enhancement of the Conservation Area.
- Review designations from time to time.

APPENDIX B - LISTED BUILDINGS

Below is a table of the Listed Buildings within the Conservation Area. For further details about these buildings see the Statutory List of Buildings of Special Architectural or Historic Interest, the Exmoor National Park website, or the online English Heritage National Heritage List for England.

The table does not include ancillary structures or those within the curtilage of named buildings: these may also be covered by the listing and confirmation as to their status should be sought from Exmoor National Park Authority. Names of properties given below are those recorded at the time of listing under which they are officially listed and it is possible that some names may have since changed: this does not affect the listed status.

Name	Grade	Date Listed	EH Ref
Ashley Combe Lodge	II	02/01/86	1058042
Beach Cottage	II	22/05/69	1058049
Worthy Manor	II	22/05/69	1173436
Gibraltar Cottages	II	15/07/86	1252283
Range of outbuildings about 20m south-east of Worthy Manor	II	02/01/86	1345382

APPENDIX C - UNDESIGNATED HERITAGE ASSETS

Below is a table of heritage assets within the Conservation Area that do not have formal individual protection through listing or scheduling. These are buildings or structures which, whilst perhaps not of special interest in the national context, are nevertheless of local significance by virtue of their date, design, materials, historical association, etc. Undesignated heritage assets are recognised in the National Planning Policy Framework and this status will be given consideration in any planning applications affecting them.

Name	Notes
Andrews on the Weir	C19 hotel.
Anchor Hotel	Late C19 hotel with early C19 origins.
r/o Anchor Hotel	C19 or earlier cottage/service buildings.
Anchor Stables	C19 former stables.
Ship Inn	C17 inn.
r/o Ship Inn	C19 stables/service buildings
Sea View Cottage/Old Reading Rooms	C18 cottages.
Mizpah/Oyster Perch	Early C20 cottages
Chapel Knap	C19 house, reputedly on site of chapel.
Lane Head Cottages	C17 and later row of cottages.
St Nicholas Church	C19 'tin tabernacle'.
Quayside Cottages, Turkey Island	C18 row of cottages.
Harbour House, South of Lock	C19 2-storey harbour buildings.
The Kiln	Formerly part of C19 brick and tile works.

APPENDIX D - BIBLIOGRAPHY

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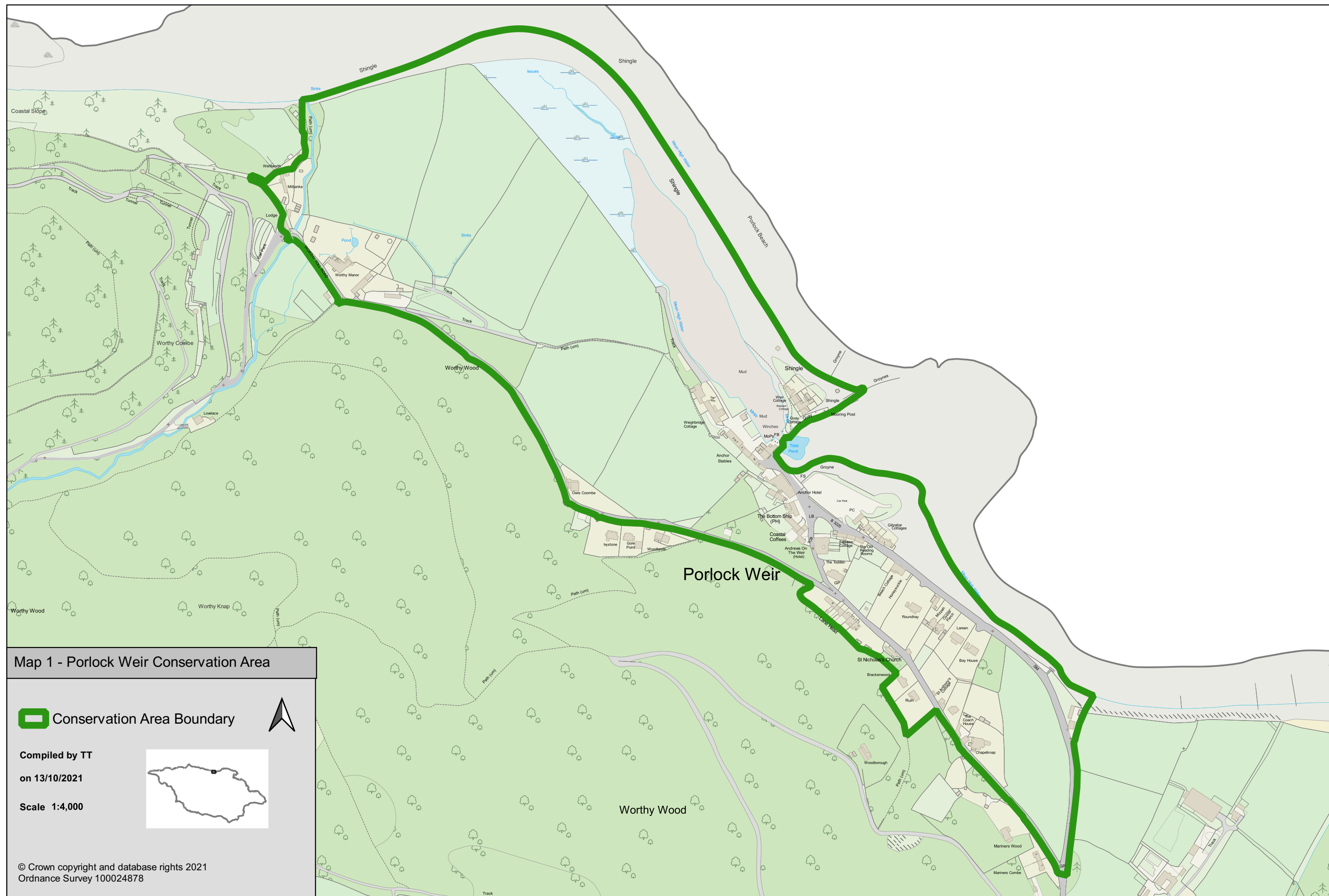
Legislation, Guidance and Policy

- The Town and Country Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990.
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SPAB (<http://www.spab.org.uk/>) and English Heritage (<http://www.english-heritage.org.uk/professional/>) have a variety of guidance documents on the care of the historic environment available through their websites.

Map 1 - Porlock Weir Conservation Area



Map 2 - Porlock Weir Character Appraisal

